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Meet the member



Catherine Mulcaster

is a BACP accredited therapist, holds a master's degree in coaching and is a qualified supervisor. In October 2019, she co-founded Living Your Life (Bedfordshire) CIC, a not-for-profit company supporting victims of crime, the majority of whom are survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence (DASV).

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How would you describe your journey from therapist to coach (or coach to therapist)?

My entry to the world of coaching and counselling, like many others, was unconventional, meandering, and arguably accidental. I worked in marketing and was introduced to coaching as part of my leadership development. I enjoyed my experience of being coached and found it offered some rich insights, but still felt inadequate at the end of the training. When my local college promoted its Introduction to Counselling course as one that could help people 'ask powerful questions, listen more effectively and improve communication skills', I signed up. As many readers of this journal will no doubt be aware, once drawn into the counselling sphere, it's difficult to extract yourself. But as the main breadwinner in my family, I had to pause after level 3 as I was unable to make the significant commitment needed. When my circumstances changed, I signed up for level 4 and haven't looked back since. I trained and became accredited as a person-centred counsellor, and offered coaching in my private practice. However, I resisted integrating the two approaches. The counselling accreditation process left me confident that I understood how and why I worked therapeutically, but highlighted that I didn't feel the same as a coach. This was my main motivation for signing up for an MA in coaching, which ultimately led to me identifying as a coach-therapist.

Do you have a coaching niche?

I currently work mainly as a trauma coach-therapist, integrating and crossing the bridge between coaching and therapy. While I have a small private practice, most of my work is with Living Your Life, the not-for-profit company I co-founded in 2019. Our clients have experienced traumatic events and are typically victims of crime, including stalking, violence and burglary, though the majority of our work is with victim-survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence (DASV).

Unsurprisingly, while most of my supervisees work for different agencies in private practice, they also mainly work with trauma. I especially enjoy supporting supervisees who are developing their dual practice and considering integrating.

I really enjoy supporting trainee coaches and counsellors and witnessing their development from zero practice hours through to qualification. I always marvel at the extent of personal and professional growth that can be achieved whether through coaching or counselling practice in parallel with their personal coaching and personal therapy.

Like many practitioners, life before COVID-19 involved meeting clients and supervisees in person. Now, most of my work is carried out remotely, which means that I'm now working with people across the country, even internationally when supervisees decide to locate overseas for periods of time.

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How has becoming a coach changed you as a person?

The whole coach-therapist journey has been significant for me – not just because of the complete change in the direction of my career. Until my training, I had been very results focused and my working life was deadline driven. This attitude was noted in my supervision early on in my training, as I gradually learned to trust my clients, their resources and the therapeutic process in general.

My level of self-awareness has increased and continues to develop through my own supervision and professional development, which stimulates self-reflection. It feels like a never-ending story and I'm happy to embrace that, even though it can be difficult at times.

I feel that as I've come to know and understand myself, it's given me more confidence to be assertive, to set my personal boundaries. Of course, there are times when I still fall into old patterns, but at least I notice them now.

Ethical self-care has also had an impact on me personally and professionally. As a working mother, I'd not always prioritised my own needs, and I've learned the hard way the importance of self-care. It's something that I encourage with

all my supervisees as well – especially with the potential impact of secondary or vicarious trauma in our work. Since discovering them during lockdown, I regularly reflect on the professional quality of life scale questionnaire¹ and Skovholt's self-care inventory² as tools to maintain my level of awareness of self-care.

How would you describe your particular approach to coaching/therapy?

Having trained as a person-centred practitioner, the person-centred approach remains at the heart of my way of working – whether coaching or counselling. My initial coach training had been in the popular GROW model.³ During my MA coach training, I was struck to find that coaches were using more psychological models, eg person-centred coaching, Gestalt coaching, cognitive behavioural coaching, etc, so, rather unexpectedly, I learned more about other therapeutic approaches through my coaching training. I also found that, as psychotherapy was becoming more short-term and outcome-focused, that coaching was moving 'beyond goals'.⁴

Coaching Today has exposed me to models of integrative practice, which has led me to feel more comfortable as a person-centred coach-therapist supporting the client through their process, and being able to meet and work with them where they are.

My work is also informed by trauma research and best practice, particularly Herman's three-phased approach⁵, Porges' polyvagal theory⁶ and Siegel's window of tolerance.⁷ Joseph⁸ has articulated the person-centred process and working with trauma far better than I can and I heartily recommend his paper.

For supervisees who are purely coaches, however, I recommend Vaughan Smith's approach to trauma coaching.⁹

What's your biggest challenge currently?

Without doubt, this is generating income for Living Your Life. I never expected to become a fundraiser involved in writing bids and tenders. While we have confirmed grant income until March 2025, as anyone working for a charity or not-for-profit will recognise, there is always far more demand than funding can support. This remains a steep learning curve for me and an ongoing challenge.

What do you feel most proud of having achieved?

I'm not sure I can claim credit for my family's successes, but I can acknowledge pride in my MA, as I've not followed a typical academic path. My O levels were a disaster and I was in my 30s

before I graduated with my BA. As Living Your Life has not only survived COVID-19, but grown, I feel proud to have co-founded that and to have supported our clients.

How do you resource yourself? What do you enjoy in your spare time?

I love to spend time with my family and have tremendous fun being a granny to my two-year-old grandson. I have a preference for introversion on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) scale¹⁰ and I tend to recharge my internal batteries by reading, pottering in the garden, walking the dog and, especially since COVID-19, cooking. When restaurants closed in 2020, I ordered some new cookery books and, much to my husband's delight, continue to cook my way through them. Since theatres re-opened, you can usually find us at a performance somewhere at least once a month. We're lucky to live within reach of several theatres. About 18 months ago, I bought an acupressure mat and find that combines beautifully with some mindful practice. I've found

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it invaluable to help relax and destress my body and notice when I've skipped it. To tap into and develop my creative side, I recently decided to buy myself a sewing machine. It's been a long time since design technology at school and I've been surprised how much I've remembered. I'm a long way from appearing on *The Great British Sewing Bee* though!

What advice would you give therapists interested in coaching?

The therapist skillset is completely transferable to coaching and it's probably easier and quicker to make the transition from therapist to coach than the other way around. As a therapist, you already have the skills to develop therapeutic/coaching relationships, have good listening skills, and

depending on your modality, good questioning and goal setting skills, and understand how to get the most from supervision. If this is the work you'd like to do, then there are some excellent coach training courses out there as well as integrative training.

What does being a member of the BACP Coaching division give you?

I joined the Coaching division when it was established and still have my copy of the first issue of *Coaching Today*. I found the journal stimulated my thinking about coaching, different coaching models and how coaching and therapy could be integrated. It had a significant influence on my decision to study the MA in coaching at The University of Warwick. I'm also a member of the BACP coaching supervision special interest group which meets online every couple of months. It's a space where we're able to explore what it means to supervise practitioners who are on their own journey to integration or dual practice. ■

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