

From the President

Professor Lynne Gabriel OBE, President of BACP

‘We humans are capable of love, of joy, of immense compassion’

With mental health services approaching crisis point, and the impact of climate and environmental changes being felt globally, in the context of the inhumane and horrific wars taking place in parts of the world, many of us wonder whether humanity is on a critical cusp. While campaigning groups from the counselling professions, representing a range of social, cultural, political and environmental matters, are increasing, raising their profiles, building capacity and presence, and becoming increasingly active, there is much work to be done in relation to co-ordination of actions and impact. The UK and international professional bodies do campaign to support social justice work. For example, the BACP Policy Team proactively lobbies politicians on key human mental health and environmental matters, and provides briefings on the value of psychological therapies for human wellness. However, there is always more to be done.

While the news and social media might conjure up a dystopian world, hope does exist. We humans are capable of love, of joy, of immense compassion. We matter to each other, as evidenced in the multiple ways that we care, collaborate, interact, support, rescue, redeem, provide, nurture and engage in life, living, working, relating, loving and being. Most people live humane and non-toxic lives and can reflexively mitigate their aggressive, manipulative or oppressive propensities. What can we, as counselling and mental health practitioners, do to support action that goes beyond ‘othering’ and intentionally land in a context characterised by anti-oppressive environments and people? How can we, at scale, engender ways of being and relating that afford respect, care, compassion, while enabling vigilant and humane containment of hate and violence?

We can of course lobby our local politicians. We can also work with our professional bodies to campaign. And who knows, members might consider standing for parliament, or for being politically and socially active at local and national levels.

A global counselling professions council, with pragmatic and pluralistic mindsets that can inform thinking and actions aimed at reconciliation of deadly conflicts and support managed states of non-violence, is sorely needed. Current UN and WHO efforts, in the face of ongoing conflicts or environmental challenges, are never enough. As a human race we have the potential to pause, suspend or even eradicate inhuman toxic behaviour, war crimes and the absence of civic responsibility at a global level. Respectful relationships across social, cultural and political divides require consistent effort. Recognition of the potential for implosion, and commitment to - at the very least - tolerating states of uneasy equilibrium, require constant collaboration to avoid destruction. It goes well beyond shocking to fully contemplate humanity’s

current capacity and inclination to prevent what could be a slide to extinction.

However, there is much to elicit hope, and to fuel that incredible ability of compassion and love to ripple out and influence in good ways. Think of those precious moments when we know that our collaborative work with a client has truly changed their life. Recall times when you’ve read key authors or theorists or engaged with a compelling piece from a key writer in the counselling professions (there are so many, and far too many to list here), remember the impact of engaging, reflecting and thinking about what this means to you, for your work, for you in life. These precious moments stack up and do influence us and, inevitably, the people we work or spend our lives with.

There are some incredible people working in the counselling professions. Whether through a range of practice roles, and those committed to supporting ongoing development in the field as represented by BACP and other professional bodies, we can lean in or step up to make a difference. This could be on a local practice-based scale, through our work with clients, supervisees or trainees, or on a macro scale through engaging in social action groups such as the Therapy and Social Change Network (www.therapyandsocialchange.net). Whatever we do, we have reached a point where we can no longer be bystanders or silent witnesses to local, national or global injustices.

We are approaching the darkest point of the year. A time for reflection, for remembering, for precious moments and memory making with loved ones, for warm, hunkering-down time, for playtime and time for simply being. Whatever this time of year represents or means for you, please remember how your work and way of being are changing lives for the better. ■

