The GCS Story

This formed part of a workshop held at GCS in June 2017 to mark almost 40 years’ service in the community.
Introduction

Sometimes it’s helpful to take a look at our roots, as with any individual, family, tribe or organisation. When Emma and I started thinking about my writing up the story of GCS I wasn’t quite sure where it would take me, but I did know it was something that was important to draw together because many of those involved earlier have either died or moved away. If I didn’t write about it now the story would get lost. There were amazing people involved, drawn together at a particular time with a common purpose, and this is as much a dedication to all their endeavours and hard work, as it is an extraordinary tribute to GCS and where we are today.

We are living in disturbing and precarious times. None of us can be immune to the pressures around us, the tendency to split and blame others, the extent of the hardship and despair of so many, and the devastating fatal catastrophes close to home. There’s an increasing culture of fear and this permeates into us all, into the consulting room and into the service. Sometimes the skin of the service can feel strong enough, at others too thin.

GCS is changing too and that can feel disturbing and sometimes a lot to cope with. Maybe timely to be reminded that ‘Those that cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it’. George Santayana

I recently attended a seminar on ‘Mindlessness’ – a psychological look at what’s happening around us in the world and in politics and the need ‘to go back, in order to go forward’. Some things at GCS have got lost or been discarded. We need to recognise losses and grieve them, if need be, or feel glad to see other things go. We may then be in a position to more healthily find new ways to move forward and adapt – and that is the key point. So, with some trepidation, I share the following with you in the hope that we can tease out important threads to take forward, that feel essential to GCS and its well being, and are worth fighting for. I offer no magical thinking about the way ahead, there will be struggles for sure. Incidentally, I live in the present and am not prone to be nostalgic about the past, we can’t go back there, but we can learn from it.

What was happening out there – social background

40 years ago, in the late1970’s, our society was still experiencing a cultural revolution following World War 2, both at home and abroad. There was a feeling that we could change things for the better.

Old and young protested about nuclear disarmament, social division and civil rights. Women suffered hard conditions to protest at Greenham Common. We experienced angry and painful struggles within the Feminist Movement and long overdue changes in law decriminalising against homosexuality (1967), followed later by the devastating effects of HIV Aids.

Those defining moments when the Berlin Wall (1989) came down and when Nelson Mandela was released in South Africa (1990), both events etched into our collective psyches. They symbolised changing boundaries and divisions.
As a young social worker I felt outraged about unfairness, caught up in protests on various counts, the Women’s Movement was a core concern, and changing attitudes to sexual expression. I spent time in South Africa, which was tough and challenging and gave me first-hand experience of Apartheid. Like most young people I felt angry and wanted so much to change.

In literature and the theatre there was more realism - plays by Pinter, Stoppard and Beckett. In the art world - Magritte, Rothko, Chagall, Bacon and Lucian Freud, surrealists portrayed disturbing images from their inner worlds and from their dream life. This was the stuff of the imagination. In the world of music, Madonna challenged the archetypal and traditional role of women in society, mother, madonna and whore.

Dire Straits protested against war and Queen altered forever prescribed views about sexuality and gender. It was challenging and exciting.

Psychoanalysis became more accessible and underwent its own revolution: concepts were widely discussed, as they were in the arts.

The ‘psyche’ had entered the arena and terms like manic, depression, personality disorder, psychosis, narcissism were banded about, perhaps a little superficially. Radical thinkers like R.D. Laing challenged theories about schizophrenia and its treatment. He engaged with patients in new and creative ways. Freud, Jung and Klein’s far reaching contributions, and that of their contemporaries and followers, provided a rich backdrop of theoretical thinking in which to explore depth psychology and mental illness. The devastating effect of post traumatic stress after war experiences was recognised and became less shameful for those who suffered with it.

The pioneering work of clinicians like Bowlby, the Robertson’s and Winnicott engaged in a deeply humane reparative way with ordinary kids and families who had experienced difficulties with separation, trauma and neglect, and affected care in the newly established NHS and in the Child Guidance Service.

The developmental model later became the centre of our training course. Winnicott wrote both academic papers but also accessible paperbacks ‘The Child, the Family and the Outside World’. ‘Families and how to survive them’ by Skyner & Cleese touched everyone. There was rising awareness of the need to reach out and make therapeutic interventions more accessible to those who were not just the privileged few who could afford psychoanalysis. But how could this happen?

**How WPF evolved.**

It was a time of cross-fertilisation of ideas. The Analytical Psychology Club in London, established in the early part of the 20th Century, is one example of how the Jungian group organised regular seminars which sought to bring together professionals from all walks of life. They opened their doors to anyone interested in understanding more about Jungian psychology and the life of the imagination. Professionals created bridges and brought skills from other areas into the field of depth psychology.
This cross-fertilisation provided a platform for lively and challenging dialogue between those working in law, medicine, the church, theatre, the arts and literature, education and psychiatry.

Thanks to the initiatives of the Methodists, WPF –‘Westminster Pastoral Foundation’ – was launched offering ‘counselling’ at the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, in 1969. The aim was to transform pastoral care within communities and provide high quality therapy at affordable rates. The role of those within church movements was changing.

It’s hard to imagine today how exciting this period was in the history of our profession, a new creed and philosophy was evolving. Counselling was a new concept, although known previously in a more advisory way.

There was lively discussion about our relationship to fees and use of money. Should the word ‘pastoral’ be retained, as in ‘pastoral counsellor’, did this title contain deeper concerns about meaning and purpose? We still retain this today with our ‘Pastoral Tutors’. What do we mean by ‘agape’, compassion, what were the differences between psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and counselling – whether pastoral, humanistic or psychodynamic – the talking therapies were beginning to define themselves. How could our training encompass spiritual depth where those of any faith, or none at all, could deepen their spiritual awareness? The training had to be rigorous in terms of theoretical understanding of depth psychology, psychopathology and psychiatry, if it was to be accepted. It took time to carve out and evolve our ‘psychodynamic’ model.

WPF’s move to the Maria Assumpta buildings in Kensington Square, a hub for ecumenical dialogue and home of the Heythrop Centre provided the setting to establish their counselling service and training. When I trained (late 80’s) they were attracting people from all walks of professional life and cultural background. WPF was liberal in attitude and opened their doors to gay trainees. This was still a difficult area in the main psychoanalytic trainings where there were disagreements about the suitability of gay men and women undertaking training. We had a rich group of diverse people as our peers which always made it lively and informative.

It was a long while before individuals would be accepted entirely on their own merit, whatever their sexual orientation.

It is only ten years ago that the Anna Freud Centre recognised homosexual/lesbian therapists on their training course! That feels quite oppressive. GCS opened their doors from the beginning! Equal Opportunities and Diversity policies had yet to be properly engaged with and the work of the Commission for Racial Equality was critical here.

**Building blocks for The Stroud Area Counselling Service – how it all got started**

Michael Carey (my husband), and I both attended the Analytical Psychology Club and enjoyed events there, even after our move from London to Gloucestershire in 1974. Through this contact, and the beginning of our own personal therapy journey, we also heard about the development of the WPF vision. Not only were we encouraged to train but also to consider setting up a centre in Gloucestershire.
Gloucestershire was a psychological desert in those days, no counselling here, a few brave souls worked in the analytic field and an art therapist at Coney Hill Hospital.

This was also a period when WPF wanted to spread the word, to see Affiliates spring up around the country. We therefore had the support and backing of WPF, who were busy establishing tried and tested methods in their training programme, along with a lively group of interested Jungian analysts, plus a liberal amount of goodwill and energy from others in the field.

One of the first steps was to find others living here who might be interested in sharing the vision of making available high quality, affordable counselling available to anyone, with the intention that the most experienced therapists could be available to those with less means in society.

It is not my intention at this point to give a comprehensive list of all those involved, enough that we started off as a group of 10-12 individuals with backgrounds in community living (including two members from a conscientious objector community and from the Camphill Movement), ecumenicalism, medicine, law, clinical theology, teaching and from various psychoanalytic and analytical trainings.

*Diana Russell-Carey and Ann Dickinson*
We met weekly, to discuss papers, share ideas, thrash out fundamentals about what constituted our group and gave shape to plans. This was either at our home in Nailsworth or at the Taena Community.

Very soon, a Consultant Psychiatrist from Coney Hill Mental Hospital, Dr Jeff Marks, who had benefitted from psychoanalysis, supported and educated us in an understanding of psychopathology and psychiatry.

We were still in the dark ages about treatment, drugs were less sophisticated, often over-prescribed, and ECT was in regular use. Venereal disease leading to insanity (general paralysis of the insane) still constituted a proportion of patients in mental hospitals.

One of our pioneers, Dr Peter Tatham, who had trained at the C.G. Jung Institute, had been a local GP in Painswick. He set up a regular group for interested GP’s to study the psychosomatic nature of symptoms patients brought to their surgeries, often hidden under the presentation of some minor physical ailment.

This was quite new.
Committed psychotherapists and supervisors travelled from Oxford, Bath and Bristol to provide us with regular supervision and this led to our first Sensitivity Group. We were establishing ourselves and began to see clients under supervision. We had created a workable container with good foundations and attracted a goldmine of interest from far flung therapists in the field. Undoubtedly, part of this must reflect what a lonely profession this was outside of the major cities, with few local initiatives. Some of us went to train in London. We initially named the service – ‘The Stroud Area Counselling Service’ - and our logo contained symbols of the quaternity with the words – physical, emotional, spiritual and mental. This logo was part of our bedrock and we kept it close to our hearts.

Of course there were all sorts of struggles and clashes of viewpoint, little income, uncertainty about how this new enterprise/this baby could be nurtured and taken care of. Would it survive and how could we enable clients, who could only pay modestly, to come to the service? How were we to cope when frustrations and emotions erupted? The fortnightly Sensitivity Meeting with an external facilitator became central to the group, the group was us, either we would take things forward or it would collapse and break down. We kept dialogue alive throughout.

We all had other responsibilities and livelihoods to maintain. We were passionate about our intentions and beliefs and determined. George Ineson had a loathing for bureaucracy, unnecessary paperwork and administration: this of course we needed, but it made us think twice about what was essential. Although tiresome at times, it was good practice to question and not just accept the proliferation of paperwork. We had a reputation for questioning and challenging, especially directives from WPF and elsewhere, and wanted to make up our own minds and reflect upon the implications. Michael’s commercial and entrepreneurial background gave him the courage to take risks which were hard for some members. He didn’t give up easily and it was his determination and collaboration with WPF that established the first training course here early 1980’s, when there felt to be enough groundswell of interest from the Foundation Year being run at Gloucester FE College.

**Client work**

When I look back to beginning seeing clients, a year or two along the way, it was such a different picture to our work today. I remember one farmer’s wife who had been in Coney Hill for months who sat with me in a state of fugue and silence most of the time. Indeed lost for words. This didn’t shift and I felt very firmly shut out but in the silence learnt to listen to my counter-transference.

I would put out the occasional prompt, and eventually we established a level of trust. This client held secrets in her family and survived abuse in silence. This presented me with a huge challenge and I was so uncertain what I could do for her. I was young and inexperienced, needed accessible supervision, and did not understand the implications of her treatment in mental hospital. People from the local farming community and villages were often isolated and depressed, suicidal, unable to find words for their feelings.
Eventually, and extraordinarily, she brought vivid and powerful dreams, sometimes did drawings, and this became the medium through which we worked. She came regularly for 3 years, always on time, brought by her husband. When she left, she was no longer on any medication. I learnt the importance of being with another in the same space and the sense of another presence.

Ability to articulate feelings was less common, and many were pray to intense emotional outbursts and disturbance that they could not fathom, as if it was sent from outer space and visited upon them.

The impact of World War 2 was still with us, I remember a woman whose Jewish mother was hidden from the German army in Holland, who subsequently came to England.

She killed herself when my client was a young girl, although in a safer setting, because she was unable to bear the pain of her fears and trauma alone. Her daughter carried the pain and grief of this event which was the core of our work together.

Another man remembered his father’s night terrors and screaming. His father mostly sat silent in his chair in the day and never spoke about his war experiences. This son did not understand what was happening but lived with heavy depression himself and panic attacks before he came for counselling.

Acute rural and city poverty and deprivation were playing havoc down the generations and there was little room for sharing feelings. ‘Pull yourself together and get on with it’ was a favourite saying.

No wonder talking about feelings was viewed as self-indulgent and wouldn’t get you anywhere.

Few people understood what it was all about, maybe resistant to the positive changes counselling made in client’s lives. One of my clients commented that her family called me ‘the white witch’.

The Training

That we established a training course with a growing pool of experienced therapists in the area was and is a huge achievement.

It enabled the continuation of therapy based on our charitable model and this has been of huge benefit to the wider community and fundamental to our service philosophy.
Celebrating the completion of the first training course at the Old Monastery, Prinknash. From the left - John Whitwell, Peter Tatham and Lena Pehrsson-Tatham

I sincerely believe we should take some credit for making this locality such a good and often caring place for people to live – be it from behind the scenes!

The first Diploma in Counselling course took place in the old monastery at Prinknash. Anyone who was around then will remember what an ordeal trainees and staff suffered. The extreme cold in winter was hard for the fittest, the monks had moved out, and our survival was in question. It was at this time we were considering enlarging the original group and the obvious source was our home grown graduates. These became Associates and then Full Members of the core group.

Our model of being inclusive to those who had completed training, as appropriate, was not necessarily followed by other Affiliates but we had a real desire to bring others on and to encourage them to take up responsibilities. Others went off elsewhere to do further trainings and came back later with new wisdom.

This cycle was enriching as otherwise much would have been lost. Members concerned themselves deliberating on the optimum size of a working group – how big was a tribe, a community? Small is beautiful was part of the narrative. We thought about 30, in order to function well and stay connected in our common purpose. Was there enough glue to bind us together?
Communication and sharing our concerns and fears as a group was felt to be essential. There was no internet, email or mobile phones at this time but that wouldn’t have been the answer to these questions.

Could we avoid a heavy management structure and maintain consensus on major decisions? Up to a point we did, after which we tried a Triumverate directorship for a period and later a single director and Heads of Departments. This structure included Michael Carey, myself, Ann Dickinson and Chris Westbrook.

An away-day at Hawkwood College, Stroud for the training staff: Includes (from the left) Ann Dickinson, Lucille Wareing, Michael Carey, Chris Westbrook, Wendy Robinson, Pierette Housden, Jenny Parker, Carol Blackburn, Fiona Palmer- Barnes, Ann Stanley, Jay Coombs, Marion Westbrook, Jo Limbrick, Diana Russell-Carey

A Home

By now we had charitable status and lively trustees. We were at a point when we needed to consider a proper home, or ‘brick mother’ for the service, which became The Gloucestershire Counselling Service.

We cogitated long and hard about a home but with nothing much in the bank and concerns as to whether we would be forced to relinquish our independence, we wondered how to go about it? We had witnessed what other Affiliates were doing and did not want either to align ourselves alongside any particular faith or within someone’s patronage, which some were doing.
This was a point when we could not reach a decision, so we resorted to the I Ching. In its mysterious way, the omens looked favourable and we set about approaching various local charities. We were prepared to take risks.

In 1990 Barnwood House Trust agreed to purchase a building for a 10 year period, for which we would pay rent, at the end they would sell at a profit. The deal was a good one, we found **50 Lansdown, Stroud**, and now could see clients from there, house our administration and run training courses. Father Tom blessed every room in the house. We also rented premises around Gloucestershire, either through medical practices, NHS premises, the Quakers, libraries and schools but **Lansdown** was our home base.
Our first ‘home’ at 50, Lansdown. Michael Carey and Chris Westbrook on the left and those on the stairs include: Joy Coombes, Ann Stanley, Pat Joice, Angelina Gibbs and Diana Russell-Carey

There was a strong non-conformist core to the group, which questioned and challenged authority. The struggle was between wanting to retain our independence but also be credible and have enough clout to stand behind what we were doing.
So registration of individual counsellors and service recognition became vital. WPF wanted us to belong too, and were interested in our organisational model. Financial independence meant we were never paid enough but we did manage for many years to support the counselling deficit from surplus funds through our training programme. Again this business model was very much of our own making and not shared by other agencies. We wanted to pay our counsellors and stay true to our core mission statement of provision of high quality affordable counselling. The Summerfield Trust locally and the Artemis Trust gave us financial support to further develop the training and counselling service but we did not want to be dependent on external funding, nor did we want to lose our identity.

We set about establishing the Forum Workshops, partly to encourage other professionals to join in and partly to earn more income. We also learnt from the WPF Counselling in Companies project and adapted our own EWS scheme for employees – again to bring income into the service.

Our connection as a WPF Affiliate was useful because we could share ideas about development but also witness some of the difficulties centres experienced. The period up to 2000 was a growth period, after which many centres floundered. Reasons included:

- Change of pioneering key personnel
- Selling out their training to local colleges
- Loss of original ethos
- Loss of counsellors
- Individuals taking the service in very different directions
- Loss of income and over-dependency on grants from public or charitable bodies: this often skewed the established culture within the service and could dry up.

At that time I was chair of the Appraisal and Monitoring Committee at WPF which meant I visited centres, often at times of difficulty, and learnt about some of the pitfalls.

We established teams around each key department of the service which provided a vital safeguard. There was a strong feeling of ‘guardianship’ throughout, which helped to steady the service, especially when working in other settings where trainees would need support. However, GCS certainly did lurch badly during changes in key personnel. In 2000 our tenancy arrangement with the Barnwood House Trust ended and we moved to our current premises at Alma House. This was a huge undertaking and the building was a substantial commitment, to rent in the private sector with no buffer of a Trust supporting us.

We have managed to maintain this but it required a change in gear about our resources, income and expenditure and our management structure, to a more conventional one. There were many times when we questioned the decision about the building. But we were growing and careful thought was given to appropriate developments and the impact of these on the service. One was setting up the Child and Family Service which has grown
and is now undertaking training programmes here. Couples and time-limited therapy and training also developed.

This was the period when GCS built a closer connection with UWE who were offering a financial advantage and university accreditation, which resulted in significant changes to our training, and many were deeply concerned about this. Some of these changes sharpened our course structure but a major concern was that our training was never intended to be heavily biased towards those with high academic ability. We had witnessed too many trainees from all walks of life becoming excellent counsellors, some with strong academic leanings and others who had not studied since school. That is not to undervalue the importance of struggling with theory, essays and all the other work involved in attaining qualifications, but recognition of other important components in an individual’s capacity to become a mature counsellor.

The involvement with UWE ended after a relatively short period when funding was withdrawn. We maintained an ethos of welcoming academic and non-academic students onto the training courses. We did manage to hold on to essential ingredients in our training – for instance the high level of good supervision and the ontology seminar, which is close to my heart, and where I believe a number of issues in this paper can be addressed.

The last 15 years has seen a downturn in the number of WPF Network agencies, increased competition in the market place, with a variety of training courses at most colleges. GCS has met increased legislation, national registration and CPD requirements. We are a profession with clearer boundaries. Spiritual beliefs – are they less in evidence? What GCS offers as a charitable foundation is unique, our mission statement still stands, and we have a good reputation in the community. I like the fact that we sometimes have clients coming to us whose mother or father had help years ago! I regret that we have never been able to make any significant contribution to the black and minority ethnic community and there are many reasons for this. We do need to make more effort here with looking at the differing and developing needs of other groups in society.

Sometimes GCS has thought about itself in developmental terms, from infancy to latency, and into the adolescent phase and the struggles to become an adult mature organisation.

Perhaps for some of us, the most disturbing times have been when the organisation seemed in danger of splitting and fragmenting, distress was being felt and no-one seemed to be listening or willing to gather it up. GCS has been likened to the human body, as if there was a split between head, heart and soul. Counsellors could feel disembodied, disempowered, an unheard part of the organism, separated from management. Dialogue and communication are always important even if it’s a situation that can’t be changed, GCS would be nothing without its counsellors.

Economic governance and growth do not always sit comfortably within the counselling profession which still has a strong vocational element to it and this needs respecting and valuing. Indeed it seems unlikely that anyone is in the profession purely for the financial rewards, mostly for a multitude of complex ontological, personal and societal reasons.
There needs to be ongoing dialogue to understand what the compromises are, the sacrifices and the struggles involved at any given time. Sometimes it can feel as if too much is being asked of us.

Perhaps we don’t give enough thought to the affect on an organisation like GCS working with madness and ‘the shadow’ outside and within us too!

Anxiety and distress move around and can be located in different areas of the organisation. It isn’t surprising that staff, counsellors, supervisors and management sometimes carry a high level of disturbance. We are carrying a great deal for others. These feelings can ricochet round the container which tries to remain secure, safe and strong enough. We also know that the rewards of our labours can be enormous when we witness how lives turn round, shift and move forward in healthier ways.

We also know how much valuable support we offer each other and how important that is.

Alma House. A shared time to reflect on Lucile Wareing’s contribution at a leaving event.
However, sometimes things become messy, there is pain and confusion, and it is uncomfortable. If we don’t stop and take stock, spend time together and communicate our concerns, it can be difficult to commit, find the enthusiasm to grow, and find again the good organisation that is there. Organisations, like individuals and families, can split, dissociate, breakdown. They need to be taken care of and reflected upon, especially when things go wrong.

When GCS started society was different. People came with little emotional literacy and maybe had never considered how their history impacted on them.

We provided a sanctuary in which to explore troublesome areas often hidden from the outside world. Today, we provide this and more.
Counselling is now available everywhere and is an accepted part of our culture, whether you are at college or school, struggling in the workplace, or coming to terms with a painful loss. People talk about ‘my therapist’.

Life today often moves so fast and is so stressful, I get the feeling that the therapy room is the one place in the week where someone stops, is still, reflective, and where time has a different shape to it. Of course, we sometimes have to assist the process by addressing the need to switch off the Smart phone for 50 minutes and work with the importance of not always being on tap to others! Burn out, brain fog, CFS, and high stress levels are common place. It is a different world out there. There are very real concerns about family life, how we live, the threats to communities, reassessing our values.

**How do we keep the Service healthy today and move forward?**

In drawing to a close, I wonder what feels relevant to you today? What do we want to carry forward and continue to struggle with? For we never sort everything out!

There will always be struggles – we never live in the ‘depressive’ position for long!

Some of the issues are perennial concerns, others feel new. They need time to engage with and might include:

- What is our current ethos, what are our core values and philosophy
- Re-forming Spiritual, Social, Physical and Mental
- Growing culture of fear
- Power and control – outside/inside
- How does the predominance of women in GCS affect dynamics
- Accessibility for minority groups
- How do we build a sense of a community of practitioners and encourage dialogue
- How do we engage with current issues about migration
- What do we say YES to, and what do we say NO to, both within the organisation and outside it
- How do we find our voice
• Reflection and listening to one another. How do we take care of the health of the organisation

• Acknowledge our own shadow, envy, competitiveness, capacity to divide, split and make mistakes.

We all want to move forward confidently and with inspiration. To stand behind the work done in GCS’s name, to feel we provide a safe place within the community that can be trusted. We are needed more than ever in today’s world but we also have limitations and cannot do it all.

**To finish with**

When our Sensitivity Group facilitator, Herbert Hahn, left for a while to return to South Africa where his father had recently died, he gave us this poem by Sheenagh Pugh (b.1950) because he thought we had something unique and special. Let’s retain that!

‘Sometimes things don’t go, after all,

*From bad to worse. Some years, Muscadel*

*Faces dawn frost; grass thrives; the crops don’t fail*

*Sometimes a man aims high and all goes well.*

*A people sometimes will step back from war;*

*Elect an honest man; decide they care*

*Enough, that they can’t leave some stranger poor.*

*Some men become what they were born for.*

*Sometimes our best efforts do not go*

*Amiss; sometimes we do as we meant to.*
The sun will sometimes melt a field of sorrow

That seemed hard progress: may it happen for you.’

Founders Members involved in the early years:

Michael Carey
Hazel Casserley
Rev Tom Curtis-Hayward
Ann Dickinson
George Ineson
Dr Jeff Marks
Diana Russell-Carey
Dr Peter Tatham
Chris Williams

Professionals who supported the Training, Supervision and Trusteeship:

Martin Davies
Eva Gell
Pat Gosling
Jane Gracie
Herbert Hahn
David Holt
Janet Lake
Lena Pehrsson-Tatham
David Porter
Wendy Robinson
Dr Dave Watkins
Judy Watkins
John Whitwell

Graduates who trained at GCS in the early days and contributed greatly:

Sue Atkins
Carol Blackburn
Joy Coombes
Chris Davies
Angelina Gibbs
Sally Jewell
Pat Joice
Margaret Landray
Jo Limbrick
Gill Maslen
Jenny Parker
Liz Rolls
Lindsay Swift
Ulla Talbot
Lucille Wareing
Chris Westbrook
Marion Westbrook