Spotlight: #TherapistsConnect
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Sally Brown talks to BACP member Peter Blundell about his Twitter campaign to bring therapists together

Dr Peter Blundell

www.therapists-connect.com <http://www.therapists-connect.com>
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When Peter Blundell sent out a tweet with the hashtag #TherapistsConnect in January this year, inviting practitioners on Twitter to introduce themselves and connect with each other, he had no idea that, within a few months, connecting virtually would take on a whole new significance. 'I was interested in a way of connecting therapists with each other and creating a closer-knit community online,' he says. 'I sent out a tweet asking other therapists to

comment with who they were, where they were from and their specialist interests. The idea was to encourage therapists to follow each other on Twitter. I was expecting a handful of responses but the response was overwhelming, with 60,000 people reached by the original tweet. The hashtag has evolved to be an all-encompassing way of highlighting debates and interests related to counselling and psychotherapy.'

Many therapists who responded talked about feeling isolated, either geographically or isolated from others of the same modality or those interested in similar specialisms. They saw the potential in social media for making connections but were also wary of abuse, as many had felt ill-treated by other therapists while debating and discussing therapy online. What seems to differentiate the #TherapistsConnect conversations so far has been an ethos of respect and mutual support. 'I thoroughly encourage the active engagement of therapists in all debates around therapy and the profession,' says Peter. 'But I hope we can always be respectful of others with different views.'

This year has been an eventful one for Peter, having recently collected the **CPCAB Research Award** <https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/advancing-the-profession/research/awards/cpcab-counselling-research-award/> for his PhD research, 'Responding to boundary issues: a qualitative study', carried out at Manchester Metropolitan University. He originally trained as a counsellor to improve his interpersonal skills as an undergraduate psychology student. 'I signed up to an introductory course in personcentred counselling,' he says. 'I loved it so much and saw the benefits of this philosophy reaching far beyond the therapeutic relationship. I decided to continue my training and become a qualified person-centred therapist.'

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Peter's varied career path since then has included qualifying as a social worker in 2013 and working for a local authority team focusing on children with disabilities. He still sits as an independent social worker on a local authority fostering panel and has also held a number of roles in the third sector. 'Due to the path of my own career, I am very interested in talking to other people who work in multiple professions simultaneously and may consider themselves to have several professional identities,' he says.

He now combines a private practice in Liverpool with teaching part-time on the MA in Counselling and Psychotherapy Practice at Liverpool John Moores University. 'Fundamentally, I consider myself a person-centred practitioner because I have found the core principles and ideas

of Carl Rogers have underpinned every role I have ever undertaken,' he says. 'My teaching role combines both of my passions – person-centred therapy and research. I thoroughly enjoy seeing students develop their counselling skills and their identity as therapists over the three-year course.'

Trainee therapists are a group that seems to have particularly benefited from the #TherapistsConnect initiative. Recently, with Caz Binstead, a member of the BACP Private Practice executive, Peter started a new weekly Twitter discussion, called #TraineeTalk, aimed at students of counselling and psychotherapy. 'This has already become very popular,' he says. 'We are encouraging other therapists with speciality interest areas to be guest facilitators over the coming weeks.'

During the coronavirus lockdown, #TherapistsConnect has also been used to share training and resources, to help therapists adapt to the challenges that Covid-19 has brought, says Peter. 'For example, free online training and resources have been offered to help therapists move their therapy practice online. At a time when we are all feeling disconnected from others due to the need for social distancing and isolation, any opportunity for us to feel more connected is welcome. Despite the long-term impact of Covid-19 on society being uncertain, my sense is that there will be an even greater need for therapists and the work that we do. In my view, collaboration and connectivity between therapists are going to be a key aspect of our work going forward.'

Listen to Sally Brown's interview with Peter Blundell on the *Therapy Today* podcast
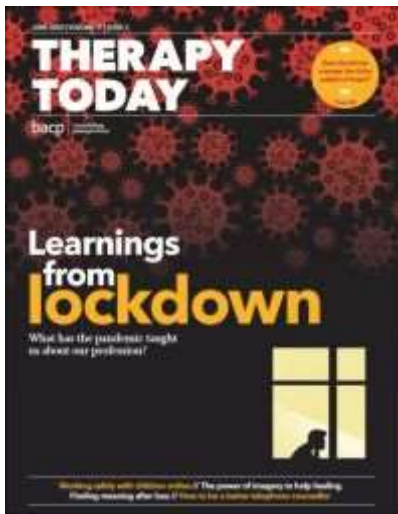
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