

# Make time for marketing

*Proactively promoting the work we do as counsellors is rarely our first concern, but always advantageous. **Ruth Clowes** offers a guide to marketing our school or private practice*

**E**nhancing your marketing and promotional skills can vastly improve your confidence, job security and professional standing. Marketing is all about letting people know what you do and what makes your work valuable, and this has huge benefits whether you're working as an in-house counsellor in a school or in private practice. Many counsellors are uncomfortable with the idea of self-promotion, but a little time and effort invested in this area can reap huge rewards.

This article suggests many ways to promote your work in an effective, practical and time-efficient way. What follows is a communications toolkit packed with tips from fellow professionals, practical guidance, and examples of good practice that will help you seamlessly integrate promotion into your everyday activities. None of it is about 'trawling for clients' in the way the world often seems to do. It's about making known the benefits of counselling to prospective clients in your sphere of work so that they can readily access help.

The information is split into two parts – one section for those of you working as in-house counsellors in schools, and the other for those in private practice. Don't feel as if you need to implement all these tips at once – dip in and start with whatever is most comfortable for you and find a marketing strategy compatible with how you work.

## *Promoting your work within your school*

With school counselling universal in Wales and Northern Ireland, pupils increasingly consider counselling to be an integral support service. Unfortunately, the attitude of some senior staff and governors is less enlightened, and some in-school counsellors feel that their work is not valued at a senior

level. In a climate of financial stress, a disinterested or negative attitude on the part of senior staff members is dangerous, particularly in the countries where access to counselling in schools is not a statutory requirement. As such, it is extremely important for services to successfully promote the many benefits of in-house counselling within their school.

Promoting the value of the service you provide isn't as intimidating as it might sound, and doesn't have to be time consuming or hard work. What follows are some tried and tested techniques to improve the profile of your service.

**Arm yourself with the facts.** There is considerable evidence to demonstrate that having a counselling service in a school is beneficial, not just to the wellbeing of individual clients but also to academic outcomes. Absorb this information and use it to demonstrate the value of your work when talking to senior staff members. Karen Cromarty, BACP's Senior Lead Advisor Children and Young People, says: 'Make sure that you measure the outcomes of your clients' therapy. Join the free BACP Children and Young People Practitioner Research Network (CYP PRN)<sup>1</sup> and learn more about outcome measurement in the downloadable toolkit. Also, when writing reports for senior staff and governors, try to include data from the Counselling MindEd scoping reports<sup>2</sup> – they can help you with information about the bigger picture.'

**Build awareness.** An awareness day, week or month, such as Mental Health Awareness Week,<sup>3</sup> provides an excellent opportunity to encourage a dialogue about important issues both within the school and among the wider community. Equally, it offers you the chance to highlight the place of counselling in supporting children and young people who may be affected.

**Recruit ambassadors.** Meet with key staff members to explain what you do and the difference you make. Recruit some ambassadors from among the senior staff who have an interest in mental health and can act as champions for you and your work. Put effort into maintaining these contacts, provide them with a cheat

sheet of key statistics and make sure they know that their effort and time are valued. 'When you talk with staff about what you do, use normal language, not therapeutic jargon, so you don't set yourself aside from the staff team,' advises school counsellor Debbie Lee.

**Get involved.** Use your inherent people skills to enhance your everyday working relationships with school colleagues. By becoming the accessible face for your service you can effectively embed yourself in the warp and weft of school life, securing your position and raising the profile of the work you do. 'Learn the name of every member of staff, teachers and non-teachers alike,' says Nick Luxmoore, an Academy counsellor. 'Get a copy of their school photo if that helps to remember who's who. Then say hello to each person by name every time you pass them by and enjoy the subtle results.'

**Talk the talk.** Offer to attend your school's next governors' meeting and give a short talk about what you do at the school and how it benefits the children and young people you work with. Depending on the size of your school, there may be other special interest groups you can interact with in this way – do your research and target those you feel will be most receptive. Mandy Adamson, manager of a school counselling service, adds: 'School governors are instrumental in securing counselling services in school. They can read about the operational aspects of a project, but anonymised case studies presented at a meeting are well received and bring the work to life.'

**Collaborate.** Get in touch with other school counsellors in your area to swap ideas and successful strategies. Consider working together on a project to raise awareness of mental health and the benefits of counselling in your local area. This will raise not only your own profile, but that of your peers and of counselling for children and young people generally.

**Harness the power of the web.** Secure a presence for your service on your school's intranet site, internet site and social media feeds. These outlets are valuable sources of information for pupils, staff and parents, and a great place to point people to in order for them to find out more about your work. Consider linking to advice on common problems such as bullying, and supplement this guidance with information about your counselling service and how it can help those affected. Debbie Lee says: 'Our school internet site is a good way of giving our service a visual face, inviting parents, students and staff to contact us, and giving us more opportunities to explain how counselling can help, while linking up with the school's pastoral support systems.'

### *Promoting your private practice locally*

If you work in private practice counselling children and young people, and you would like to attract more clients, it can be difficult to know where to start. Indeed, the very idea of promotion may seem at odds with the work you do, with its focus very firmly on

confidentiality and discretion. It's best to approach things from the point of view of promoting counselling as a whole and the positive impact it can have on the lives of young people. This way, you are acting as a champion for your profession, and the inevitable increase in your own client numbers will be an incidental, but very welcome, extra.

Marketing your private practice doesn't need to be an overwhelming task. Implement a handful of the tips below to help generate a better understanding of counselling in your local community and more focused requests coming to you as a CYP specialist.

**Prepare some marketing collateral.** Professional-looking flyers and business cards are a wise investment and offer a great opportunity to spread the word about what you do. There are many online tools to help you design your own documents,<sup>4</sup> and a little research and negotiation should get you a good price with a local printer. Pauline Culliney, Deputy Director of CCHP16, says: 'Make sure other local services know about you and have your business cards – for example, GPs, schools, youth clubs, other local counselling services and individual counsellors too, so you can refer to each other if need be. Keep reminding them of your service.'

**Capitalise on existing contacts.** Word of mouth is the most powerful marketing tool there is. Think of the friends and family you have locally and work out how they can spread the word about your work to a wider audience. If a dozen people put one of your flyers on their work noticeboard, how many potential clients might you reach?

**Get local.** To keep things manageable, set a radius around the location of your practice and focus your marketing activity within this area. Get in touch with schools, community groups and social clubs in your area and offer to visit or give a talk about what you do. Distribute your flyers in coffee shops, leisure centres and libraries (always ask permission first).

**Build your online reputation.** Your website and any social media channels you use should create a consistent and cohesive impression of your work. Make sure that you advertise the full range of services you're able to provide and present them in a clear, accessible way. 'I found Moonfruit<sup>5</sup> ideal for my needs for two matching websites,' says Eleanor Patrick, who specialises in CYP work, 'and the blog I ran on the free version of Wordpress<sup>6</sup> for five years was consistently focused on CYP mental health with no family ramblings.' If you lack technical skills, BACP's IT Team can set up and maintain your website for you.<sup>7</sup>

**Safety in numbers.** Get together with a handful of local counsellors and organise a charity event or open day, perhaps to coincide with an awareness day like World Mental Health Day.<sup>8</sup> You'll benefit from the synergy of a group of like-minded professionals by drawing a bigger crowd, cross-promoting and perhaps getting local media coverage. Operating as a team will also make the event easier to organise by spreading the workload.

**Be social.** Get in touch with local bloggers and those who run websites and social media pages with an audience of young people. Offer to write a short article about an issue relevant to the audience, such as bullying. You don't have to be an accomplished writer to do this – take a common-sense approach and draw on your own experience. It will give you a good opportunity to let young people themselves know about your service in a way they find accessible.

**Become a spokesperson.** Going one step further than this, consider contacting local newspapers and radio stations and offering your services as a spokesperson on the subject of children's and young people's wellbeing. Media outlets generally have a network of spokespeople with different areas of expertise who they contact on an ad-hoc basis to comment on breaking news. By responding quickly and appropriately to requests, you'll soon become a valuable contact to a busy journalist. The Media Team<sup>9</sup> at BACP can support you in this type of work. Eleanor

Patrick says: 'My experience is that the local radio station doesn't give you enough notice to get seriously anxious, so I simply jot down a couple of important points and then I'm on air. I usually imagine I'm speaking to a parent, which is what we all do well.'

### *Seize the moment*

If the idea of promoting your service still feels daunting, you'll be glad to know that you don't have to go it alone. BACP's CPD courses and professional development days offer frequent opportunities to learn new marketing skills. There are lots of reputable online resources available too, many of which offer free guides and advice.<sup>10</sup>

There has never been a better time to begin your own marketing campaign to promote the value of the work you do. Start small, think local and be patient, and you'll soon start seeing the benefits of effective promotion.

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### **References**

**1** <http://www.bacp.co.uk/schools> (accessed 6 January 2015).

**2** <http://www.counsellingminded.com/scoping> (accessed 6 January 2015).

**3** Mental Health Awareness Week 2015 will take place from 11–17 May. <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/mentalhealthawarenessweek/> (accessed 6 January 2015).

**4** <http://www.canva.com> (accessed 6 January 2015).

**5** <http://www.moonfruit.com/> (accessed 6 January 2015).

**6** <http://www.wordpress.com/> (accessed 6 January 2015).

**7** [http://www.bacp.co.uk/ict/Therapy\\_Websites/](http://www.bacp.co.uk/ict/Therapy_Websites/) (accessed 6 January 2015).

**8** World Mental Health Day will take place on 10 October 2015.

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/world-mental-health-day/> (accessed 6 January 2015).

**9** <http://www.bacp.co.uk/media/> (accessed 6 January 2015).

**10** <http://www.BusinessZone.co.uk> (accessed 6 January 2015).

