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### *President's Message*

#### **The Acoustics of the Season**

It is late. In the stillness of the night, I pad down to the office where shimmering puddles of moonlight pool on the floor. One touch of the keyboard and the screen springs to life. Twelve new messages. My mind shifts time zones. It's tomorrow afternoon in Australia. The UK is starting its workday. Early risers in Happy Valley Goose Bay? Night owls in Vancouver? Someone sleepless in Steinbach?

Somewhere early in my term as President-Elect, CCPA became known as the national voice of counselling and psychotherapy in Canada. Members sought connections across six time zones. By the time I started my Presidency, it became clear that CCPA was on the fast-track to emerge onto the international counselling scene. Communication, particularly e-mail communication, suddenly made CCPA and the global counselling community closer partners. With 25 time zones in the world, my inbox is seldom empty, and the camaraderie of our colleagues spans multiple languages, cultures, and counselling traditions. There is something equally wonderful and surreal about conversing within 15 minutes with Singapore, Brisbane, Vancouver, and Rugby.

The nocturnal breeze wafts through the window, brushing my face as I start scrolling through the messages. My mind drifts on the autumn air – another season. The night air, like a bite of green apple, teases my senses; pricks me to alertness. Eric Sloane's description of autumn haunts my thoughts: "The acoustics of this season are different and all sounds, no matter how hushed, are as crisp as autumn air."

That's it precisely. In this nocturnal solitude, I sense the acoustics have changed for CCPA. No matter how hushed, because of our national voice and emergence on the international scene, our messages have become crisper, our work and our professional direction more focused, and like the autumn leaves, they rustle with each step our profession makes.

In this new season of counselling and psychotherapy, our activities on behalf of practitioners in Canada have been focused on ensuring the credibility of our members on the national and international stage. It is a goal of CCPA to advance the good works of our members, to increase the worldwide recognition of their knowledge, skills, and professional attributes. To this end, we have had multiple communiqués with governments, and regularly distribute press releases related to mental health initiatives that affect our Association, its individual members and the people they serve. We have regular bilateral consultations with like-minded associations, regulatory colleges, and organizations to keep our fingers on the pulse of the nation to detect changes in the professional landscape, and to alert our members of those changes and their potential impact on their important work.

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Our ongoing research into provincial regulatory processes and requirements and international standards for the profession of counselling and its supervision has led us to increase to 36 the number of continuing education credits required tri-annually for our members to maintain their CCC. We have simultaneously increased the number and variety of opportunities for professional learning for our members

The advent of autumn in Canada also heralds the beginning of a new academic year. This year we begin our first cohort for the Master’s level Supervision course that opens the door to members obtaining a recognized standard for supervision: Canadian Certified Counsellor Supervisor (CCC-S). The University of Ottawa is hosting this initial online course in 2012-2013. To support this course, CCPA recently published *The Supervision of Counselling and Psychotherapy Handbook: A Handbook for Canadian Certified Supervisors and Applicants*. This Handbook is designed to support supervisors and their supervisees as they develop a positive working relationship that is simultaneously collegial, informative, timely, helpful, and developmental. A textbook focused on the supervision of counselling and psychotherapy is also under development, with an expected publication date of 2014.

Simultaneous to our work on resources related to appropriate supervision is our attention to updating CCPA’s professional ethics casebook. Used in counsellor education courses across the country and beyond our borders, the upcoming 2013 edition of the ethics casebook maintains the same structure as the former version with the addition of chapters focusing on specific contexts, such as rural settings, e-counselling and more.

With a single click, the screen’s luminescence fades to black and I’m returned to my own time zone and a silent office. The wind picks up outside and begins to bluster. Do I detect the rustle of autumn leaves on the path? In my mind, they swirl and eddy to become part of the path of our profession in the twenty first century. It is a noble profession you have chosen and its value is becoming more and more recognized worldwide. I turn from the window, glad to be a part of the journey.

Lorna Martin  
President, CCPA

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*President-elect’s Message*

**Thinking of Joining the CCPA Board of Directors?**

*Too many times we stand aside  
and let the water slip away.  
To what we put off ‘til tomorrow  
has now become today.  
So don’t you sit upon the shore  
and say you’re satisfied.  
Choose to chance the rapids and  
dare to dance the tides.*

-Garth Brooks

I have had many roles in CCPA since 2002 including four years as a board member, four years as an Executive Committee member, and four years as Chair of the Certification Committee. In addition, I have held numerous other positions within the Association. Becoming a Board/Executive Committee member of CCPA has been a meaningful way to explore how my experience and expertise can be applied in the not-for-profit sector at the governance level, and ultimately, how my experience and expertise can help to advance the goal of CCPA to establish itself as the national association for counselling and psychotherapy in Canada. It has also been a rewarding, high impact way to serve the counselling community while learning new skills that can transfer to other aspects of my life. I believe the single most important element in being a successful board member and helping to make a board much more effective is your own interest and passion in the work of that group. On a board, and a not-for-profit board in particular, you are meant to be an ambassador. If you, as an ambassador, don’t feel passionate about the work of this organization, who will?

Understanding the type of governing board that CCPA has is essential in order for you to do your best work. I was a member of the CCPA Board during the transition from a working board to a policy board. Changing models is rather like changing lifestyles. I had to abandon well-established patterns of behaviour (e.g., my learning style is hands-on and experiential – give me a task and I will do it!). For example, in my early days on the board, a board member was in charge of producing Cognica. This person was responsible for the editing, layout, and production. Now this is completely handled by National Office.

It was a challenge to replace my old way of working with new ideas, roles, and activities – such as assuming the role of governance. By governance I mean the way in which the board exercises its

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authority, control, and direction over the organization. The board carries out its governance role by developing and monitoring policies, and it organizes its work through committees. The board must ensure that the policies, procedures, initiatives, and advocacy work of CCPA are aligned with the best interests of our members and the public. For example, as Chair of the Risk Management Committee, I consider whether the procedures for identifying risks are adequate; whether our policies are a reasonable balance between cost and risk; and whether the Association will be adequately protected if the worst happens.

So what is the difference between an administrative board and a policy board? In general, a successful administrative board can exist when the not-for-profit organization is new, small, largely made up of volunteers, and whose services are not numerous or complex. Board members attend to the top level strategic matters and at the same time attend to some of the day-to-day matters of the organization. For boards with highly dispersed memberships and members who have only limited time to devote to board activities, the administrative board model may exacerbate communication and decision-making problems.

Prior to 2008, when the Governance Handbook was officially adopted, CCPA’s Board had been a hybrid of the two types of boards. Structurally, there were several standing committees, and decision-making often extended to fine details about programs and services. While this model works well for all-volunteer organizations, it is less suited to organizations that already have professional management (a CEO) and full-time employees. As CCPA has grown (from 3000 members in 2007 to over 4,500 in 2012), we have hired more staff and become more complex in terms of services offered. Therefore, we needed to change our approach to governance to reflect these differences in size, purpose, and stage of growth.

A policy board sets policy and has a CEO to implement the policy. The CEO is responsible for carrying out the day-to-day work of the organization, with the assistance of paid staff. The CEO is directly accountable to the board, and is responsible for hiring, supervising, and releasing paid staff. Even if board members wanted to handle the endless, ongoing tasks of running the organization, how could a group of part-time volunteers squeeze these duties into their schedules? Managing a not-for-profit organization is a full-time job and not something that can be accomplished in the spare time of volunteer board members. Thus, instead of doing the “managing” itself, the board is responsible for ensuring excellent management of the organization. A policy board is designed to ensure that board members always operate in a fashion that maintains strong, strategic focus for the organization. Board members focus on policies that determine the ‘ends’ for the organization to achieve and leaves the ‘means’ up to the CEO/staff to decide with set limits within which the CEO operates. Therefore, boards operating under the policy board model are characterized by a high level of confidence in the CEO. Board development is a high priority in order to ensure that new members are able to function effectively, and recruitment is an ongoing process.

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One of the draws for me was the opportunity to work with thirteen elected Directors who represent all provinces/territories of Canada and to learn about the state of the profession through different regional lenses. Working on the Executive, comprised of the President, President-Elect, Past President, Treasurer and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), was a way for me to understand the inner workings of the Association –how the National Office functioned, the intricacies of the budget, and potential risks faced by the Association.

I’m fully committed to CCPA because I am committed to what the organization stands for. My motivations for being a member of CCPA have strengthened. I guess the idea of being on the CCPA Board is that I really feel good that I can affect the direction of the organization, have an impact on how things should be done. I’m able to see some further areas where I can contribute; areas that I wasn’t aware of when I first joined. To some degree they’re areas that weren’t identified then. It wasn’t just that I didn’t know about them, they’ve emerged over time.

Because of the roles that I’ve had, I have been able to travel to many provinces, and I have talked to a wide variety of people in our profession. For me, it has been a very powerful experience and it has changed from being an intellectual exercise to one that comes from the heart. It’s a wonderful way to learn while at the same time giving something back. Most of the time, you’re forced into one or the other of those roles. It’s not very often in life that you get the opportunity to do both.

*Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.*

- Albert Schweitzer

Blythe Shepard  
President-elect, CCPA

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### Prevention and Tolerance: A Counsellor's Guide to Bullying

*By Lina Parker*

As long as there have been young people, there have been bullies. However, in the past decade the rise of the Internet and video channels such as Youtube have brought a new immediacy to the issue of bullying, which unfortunately affects so many children and young adults in this country. Images of young people being victimized by violence—and stories of the often tragic result of this harassment—have captured the public's attention. The media campaign known as "It Gets Better" and the forthcoming release of the film *Bully* have kept the issue in the national conversation.

Bullying is many things to many people. The generally agreed upon definition, as formulated by Dan Olweus, a pioneering researcher on the subject of bullying, is aggressive or threatening behavior that **a) is intended to cause harm, b) occurs over an extended period of time, and c) reflects an imbalance of power between the involved parties**. Bullying can take many forms; it can also affect all types of people, from the stereotypical "geek" to the most popular kid on campus. There are steps that schools, communities, and individuals can take to combat bullying, one of which is simply addressing the problem. As more research emerges, it's becoming clear that anti-bullying measures can work. And in many cases, these measures might make a real difference in the life of a child.

Most of us have seen the shocking images: children beaten up while bystanders do nothing to intervene, instead filming the whole scene on a cell phone camera. Other news stories show young adults who have changed schools or, in the most extreme cases, taken their own lives because of persistent harassment from their schoolmates. Almost everyone has experienced bullying at one time or another, if not as a participant then as an observer, or a victim. The videos that have made the rounds on the internet and the nightly news cast have caused both young people and adults to take notice.

#### **Bullying Facts and Figures**

The facts about bullying are stark: a 2009 survey of high school students showed that 20% of high school students reported being bullied on school property in the twelve months preceding the survey. Schools themselves also reported widespread bullying: 25% of them dealt with bullying on a weekly or daily basis in the 2007-2008 school year, with middle schools reporting the most. Boys are slightly more likely to be victimized by bullying than girls, and more likely to suffer from physical bullying than girls. So-called cyber bullying was reported by about 4% of students in 2007, yet most reports show that the vast majority of bullying still occurs on school grounds. Students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) seem to be at particular risk. One study of 7,261 students in 2009 found that nearly 85% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 40% reported being

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physically harassed, and 19% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.

When we think of bullying, we often think of lunch money thieves and schoolyard brawls, but in fact the most commonly reported form of bullying is more subtle but mistakenly benign — that is, teasing, name-calling, and insulting words. In other cases, bullies might spread false rumors about their victims, exclude them from activities, destroy or damage their property, or make threats against them. Rising in stride with the emergence of social technologies, cyber-bullying – the newest form of bullying – includes spreading internet rumors, sending threatening or negative text messages, and making unwanted contact on social media sites.

### **Bullies and Victims**

All bullies and victims are unique individuals, but there are some personality traits and life circumstances that members of each group tend to possess and place them at heightened risk to offend or become a victim. For example, children who are bullied are more likely to be perceived as being different from their peers. This can mean anything from one’s socioeconomic background, to wearing unfashionable clothing, to identifying as LGBT. Those victimized are also often depressed, isolated, and less ‘popular’ than others. Occasionally, they are seen as provoking, annoying, or anti-social. Unfortunately, the bullying can exacerbate these qualities as the victims internalize the negative messages of/from their tormentors.

On the other hand, those doing the bullying tend to fall into two categories. Some are deemed ‘popular’ by the social standards that abound and, as popularity suggests, they appear to have many friends. In these situations, the perpetrator uses bullying as a way to preserve his or her social stature. In contrast, some bullies are socially isolated, withdrawn, exhibit aggressive tendencies and are less involved in school. Bullies in either category often have problems at home or may not experience the benefits of constant and positive parental involvement; they may have had previous instances of aggressive or violent behavior; they may have friends who also participate in bullying behavior.

### **Bullying Prevention**

Many anti-bullying programs are at least partially based on the work of the aforementioned Dr. Olweus, whose research-based program has been reported to reduce bullying by half. The Olweus program, and others like it, encourages school- and community-wide involvement, regular self-assessment by schools and school districts, open communication between students and authority figures, and support for bullies and victims.

One of the most important steps in the Olweus program is laying a foundation for positive behavior, tolerance, and mutual respect. This can be achieved in part by developing a code of conduct with input from students, teachers, and the administration, then being consistent with consequences for bullying

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behavior. Values such as fairness, personal responsibility, kindness, and empathy should be taught and explored through the classroom curriculum as well as through school-wide activities and assemblies.

Another critical component of the program is early intervention. Staff should be trained to be vigilant and recognize signs of bullying or aggressive behavior. They should intervene immediately when an incidence of bullying or violence occurs. Bullies and victims, once identified, should be given support from school staff, especially counsellors and teachers, so that the behavior is addressed and not repeated. To drive this point home, family counselling may be in order as well.

There are no easy answers to the bullying problem that our schools are currently facing, and, sadly, it is too little too late for many who have already been made victims by bullies at school or online. Moving forward, however, it is becoming clear that increased awareness of the problem and increased media exposure detailing the full extent of the problem can help catalyze schools to take steps in a positive direction. As psychologist Richard L. Gross has written, “We are all either bullies, bullied, or bystanders.” In other words, each of us has a role to play in bullying prevention. From a counsellors’ perspective that includes making it known to students who, when they see bullying occurring, must notify the proper school authorities. Otherwise, it’s likely that the cycle of violence will continue unabated, and more children will fall victim to the senseless cruelty of this national epidemic.

*This article is published at the following link:  
<http://www.onlinecounselingdegrees.net/>*

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**Memorial University staff presents at international conference on  
neuropsychology**

*Original shorter article was written by Geoff Ash and published in the Memorial University Gazette February 1, 2012.*

You might not expect a Memorial University engineering alumna to present a poster at an international neuropsychology conference. For Sherrie Myers, Engineering Coordinator with the Division of Co-operative Education at Memorial, it was a perfectly natural link. Ms. Myers’ poster presentation was based on results from her master’s thesis in Counselling Psychology, which she completed through the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, supervised by Dr. Anita Hubley, a Professor in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, and an internationally respected expert in psychological assessment and measurement in adults.

“The research helps to provide validation evidence for future use of the Hubley Depression Scale for Older Adults (HDS-OA), a relatively new and short screening tool for depression in older adults that is consistent with DSM-IV-TR criteria”, explains Ms. Myers, who hopes that this presentation will help to disseminate the findings of the research to a larger audience. The research study involved a group of already diagnosed depressed older adults and a group of non-depressed older adults from the community. Results for the two groups were compared to demonstrate that the HDS-OA is able to accurately identify depression. Overall, the measure performed as well as, or better than, a commonly used, but longer, depression screen for older adults, the Geriatric Depression Scale. “Helping to validate a measure that could be used in the future to easily screen for depression so that older adults can receive treatment more quickly is very fulfilling”, noted Ms. Myers.

Now working to match students in the Faculty of Engineering with career-building work term placements, Ms. Myers career seems to have come full-circle. However, it was other interests that led her down the path of counselling and the related area of psychological measurement. “I realized after my undergrad that I had a huge interest in psychology, and the engineering side of me loved numbers and the idea of measurement in psychology, so it became a perfect marriage of both fields.”

The conference, which is the 40th Annual Meeting of the International Neuropsychological Society, took place in Montreal from February 15-18, 2012.

*Sherrie Myers is a Canadian Certified Counsellor.*

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### **Certification Based Upon Work Experience**

*By Monika Gal*

*Registrar, CCPA*

The summer months tend to be a time for travelling, family and time spent relaxing at a cottage. This usually means that the number of applications for certification diminish over the summer months as practitioners would rather enjoy the sunshine than complete applications for certification and track down the required documentation. This summer, however, has been an exception; it seems that the increase in applications is due to a greater number of experienced practitioners applying for certification.

Not all members are aware that they can apply for certification based upon their work experience. This is the alternative option #2 on CCPA’s website and called the “Challenge of Competency”. CCPA is looking into clarifying this application procedure, but until then I’d like to offer a bit of guidance for experienced practitioners looking to apply for certification.

In order to qualify for the Challenge of Competency option, applicants must have graduated prior to the 2002/2003 academic year and hold a minimum of three years of full-time counselling work experience within the past ten years. Their work experience will be evaluated in lieu of the practicum requirement as evidence of their direct client counselling skills and experience. Applicants will also be required to provide two additional references, with one being from a qualified clinical supervisor. Please see below for a list of the documentation required in a Challenge of Competency (work experience) certification application:

- Application form, located on our website under the Membership tab, and Forms section
- Official transcript, sent directly to CCPA from the University
- Course descriptions, which must be from an official source (course syllabi or program calendar are generally submitted). For practitioners who completed their training some time ago, these can be difficult to locate, but the archives department of your university can usually provide copies. The program’s course codes and titles may have changed since the time of your studies so please ensure that those on your course descriptions match those on your transcript.

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- Documentation of work experience, in the form of letters from employers. Please provide one letter per employer/position. The letter must attest to a total of three-years of full-time practice within the past ten years, which is the equivalent to 4,500 hours of practice.

- Four Professional Reference Forms, completed by graduate-level counsellors, counsellor-educators, or clinical supervisors. At least one of these Reference Forms must be completed by a clinical supervisor who has engaged in formal supervisory activities according to CCC criteria and can speak to the applicant’s skills.

- Criminal Record Check with Vulnerable Sector / Abuse Registry Screening, completed within the past 12 months.

Applicants who have less than the 4,500 hours of practice required can obtain a qualified supervisor and begin obtaining formal supervised practice from the time of the application. The number of hours of supervision required is based on the number of hours of work experience that the applicant holds; please see CCPA’s website for a table of the required hours of supervision based upon the years of attested experience. Applicants must submit a proposed schedule for completing these hours.

Do you have any lingering questions about applying for certification through the Challenge of Competency option? Send me your thoughts and questions by email at [registrar@ccpa-accp.ca](mailto:registrar@ccpa-accp.ca).

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### **Leave for Change**

*By Shivon Raghunandan*

I was privileged to have participated in Leave for Change© in July of 2011, a volunteer program offered by Uniterra. Uniterra is a major Canadian voluntary cooperation and international development program jointly established by World University Services of Canada (WUSC) and Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI). Leave for Change is a corporate volunteering initiative that enables employees from participating organizations, including Humber College, to contribute part of their vacation towards a volunteer assignment in a developing country.

I volunteered at Stepping Stones International (SSI) founded by Lisa Jamu, located in Mochudi, one of the largest villages in Botswana, situated 37 km northeast of Gaborone (the country's capital and largest city). SSI is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that provides an afterschool program for youth ages 12 - 18+. SSI works with local school counsellors to identify vulnerable youth, defined as, but not limited to: youth who have poor academic performance; have lost one or both parents; have experienced abuse at home; are caring for a family member; and/or whose basic needs are unmet. SSI's primary mission is to facilitate healing from childhood atrocities and foster the growth of their youth into self-sufficient young adults. It uses a holistic model and offers a range of programs in the areas of life skills training, leadership, academic advancement, and psychosocial support. SSI also engages community members such as the Aunties & Uncle's Program, where aunties and uncles of participating youth educate and advocate on issues of child abuse & neglect, trans-generational dating, safe sex, and incest. SSI also provides each youth with a meal each day, often times the only meal of the day for these at risk youth.

The focus of my volunteer assignment was to increase the capacity of the psycho-social department at SSI. As part of my mandate, I researched, developed and delivered training modules in the areas of Suicide Intervention & Assessment; Rebuilding Self-Esteem after Trauma; Working with Victims of Sexual Abuse; and Women Abuse & Gender Equality. I put to test my newly developed "managerial and human resources skills" to develop a Policy & Procedure Manual for the psycho-social department which turned into a rewarding challenge! I also networked with community organizations and was particularly fortunate to find a rare resource, Tsedisa, an organization in Gaborone that focuses on the well-being of mental health professionals. I am happy to report that connection has resulted in Tsedisa agreeing to support the counsellors at SSI by providing weekly clinical supervision through a local psychologist for FREE! A service I am sure we've all daydreamed of when we've felt challenged and overwhelmed in our practice. Additional highlights of my mandate included accompanying Mosa, a counsellor, on several home visits, providing support and supervision to the counsellors and staff on various client and personal issues, and meeting with some of the youth and their families.

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This assignment was a great opportunity to both challenge myself and grow professionally. My ability as a counsellor to provide culturally appropriate therapy was challenged, transformed, and enhanced. Based on my previous education and work experience, I felt fairly comfortable working within my clients' cultural framework. My education in the areas of women's studies and counselling provided me with an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between culture and gender, and how it shapes cultural traditions,

customs and practices. However, my brief immersion in the Swetswana culture crystallized many of these theories and ideologies. I was no longer "working from a dominant culture providing adjustments to accommodate the less dominant culture" but rather engrossed in the daily realities of the "less dominant culture". For instance, in Canada, we aim to work within our client's cultural framework, in the example of a client whose parents prohibit her from dating or socializing outside of school as sustained by her cultural views or religious beliefs. When working with this client, we may strive to provide culturally appropriate therapy, but regardless, we are prohibited from fully shedding the lens of the dominant culture as our practice is still governed by the law set forth by the dominant culture (which takes precedence over our client's own religious or cultural laws).

In contrast, I participated in a case consultation involving a minor who was repeatedly raped by her father over several years. Her mom disclosed that the "social workers and community members tried to make him stop" (Note: her translation from Swetswana to English may have played a role in the nonchalant tone of the previous statement). At the time of our discussion, the father was not charged and continued to live in the community; while the mother and her children were condemned by the community for taking the matter to the justice system rather than to tribal court. An additional example, during my workshop on Suicide Intervention & Assessment, I was informed that if a person attempts suicide and is admitted to the hospital, the police are notified and the person is charged as they have attempted to commit a crime (suicide is deemed a criminal offense in Botswana). Should a suicide attempt be completed, the law requires that the police handcuff the deceased.

As a counsellor trained in Canada, my training in cross cultural counselling is more tailored and easily adapted to the Canadian social service system and hence my own ease in adapting my counselling approach and techniques to a culturally diverse Canadian population. However, working outside of the dominant cultural framework in which I was trained involved a deeper self reflection and re-examination of my values and beliefs, both personally and professionally. I had to redefine my competencies, accept my deficits, respectfully question and challenge the practices of the Swetswana culture, and work collaboratively and at many times in a position of "not knowing", with the counsellors at SSI.

My experience at Stepping Stones International in Botswana crystallized my theoretical conception of being a global citizen. My fears and self-doubt surfaced numerous times throughout this experience.

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However, I came to deeply value the bi-directional sharing of skills and knowledge between cultures, particularly those among my counsellor colleagues working and belonging to cultures different from my own.

*A heartfelt & sincere thank you to all my colleagues at Humber College, my colleagues at Stepping Stones International, the staff at WUSC, CECI & Leave for Change in both Canada & Botswana, and everyone (family and friends both in Canada & Botswana) who have contributed to making this a rewarding and life changing experience. If you would like more information, please contact me at [shivon.raghunandan@humber.ca](mailto:shivon.raghunandan@humber.ca)*

*If you would like to contribute to Stepping Stones International, please visit their website:*

*<http://www.steppingstonesintl.org/newsite/>*

*If you are interested in converting your vacation time into a Leave for mandate in one of 13 countries of intervention, please visit the Leave for Change website at [www.leaveforchange.ca](http://www.leaveforchange.ca) for additional information.*

*For more information and if you're interested in participating, please contact Carrie McElroy – the Leave for Change Senior Program Officer at [carriem@ceci.ca](mailto:carriem@ceci.ca)*

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### **Feedback Informed Treatment**

*By Carys Cragg*

I'll never understand this 17-year-old boy, I worry. You've done a bad job with the session, my mind continues. As my new client\* completes the feedback scale I've introduced into my sessions with him – witnessing a lower mark he's given me in the relationship section of the tool – my thoughts begin to catastrophize...

Feedback on the therapeutic relationship effects client outcomes. The therapeutic relationship, or alliance as it is also called, is the number one predictor of positive outcomes for clients. This is what the research (and long term practitioner knowledge) tells us. What are we supposed to do with this information? How can we integrate brief yet effective tools into our diverse pantheoretical counselling practices?

It's good news – I guess – while I read that bad news is good news, or so the pioneers of Feedback Informed Treatment (FIT) tell me. Put in other words, client feedback – “well, you kind of ignored something I said ½ way through the session” or “we didn't get to speak about something I really wanted to talk about” or “when you raised your voice a little, I didn't like it” – is helpful, however, is sometimes difficult to hear. I mean, how else can we integrate this highly subjective, individualized experience of the counselling service we provide our clients? Of course, we always individualize our approach to our clients – we tailor our techniques, our worldviews, our voice, and so on – depending on who presents to us. There is no one-size-fits-all method, despite the proliferation of manuals and standardized practice. We do what the client needs in that moment, in that session, in that treatment plan. But what if there was another way to tailor our approach, via our knowledge of the therapeutic relationship that has a direct and positive impact on client outcomes? Well, that's what the creators of FIT, previously referred to as Client Directed Outcome Informed treatment, claim.

At the FIT training, I am instructed to use the Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) at the beginning of the session and the Session Rating Scale (SRS) at the end. Brief, accurate, and reliable predictors of client outcomes, these measures (found in the Performance Metrics section of [www.scottdmiller.com](http://www.scottdmiller.com)) are easily understood and incorporated into a range of behavioural health interventions and settings. With the ORS, given at the beginning of the session, like a mental health thermometer, I get an accurate, subjective experience of client distress and functioning, tracked over time. Far from a checklist of objective symptoms of pathology, the ORS measures Individual, Interpersonal, Social, and Overall functioning in a (brief) holistic manner. Coupled with the SRS, which measures the Relationship, Goals & Topics, Approach or Method, and Overall experience of the client's experience of the therapeutic relationship in that session, I have a great deal of information to assess both client outcomes and the

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therapeutic relationship I am constructing with my client, over time. With time, a direction of poor to good outcomes should mirror a poor to good therapeutic relationship; when the therapeutic relationship isn't improving, then something (approach, counsellor, or treatment) needs to change.

Consulting with a clinician regarding integrating FIT tools into her therapeutic work, she tells me a story about how a teenager she was counselling completed the ORS but was stuck on one of the sections. "Can I make two different marks – one for how I'm doing with my mom and one for how I'm doing with my dad?" her client inquires. The clinician inquires further as to what she means. "I'd give a high mark for my mom but I'm having a hard time with my dad," she informs. Of course, this began a conversation about struggles in her family relationships, which may not have begun if the ORS hadn't been used, or used in a creative, generative manner.

... Back to my first session with my 17 year old male client. I am worried that I have done something to make him feel unheard. I ask him if there was something I overlooked, something I may have minimized that he told me in the session that is about to end. He shakes his head and is silent. "Perhaps you could tell me about a time when you felt understood, maybe you had a past teacher or counsellor or family member who really got you and maybe I could learn from your experience," I gently push. "Um..." he says. "Yes..." I invite. He prepares to say something. "No, that's not it. See, I don't even understand myself, so how could you understand me?" he announces. "Oh, I see," I reflect for a moment; the self-conscious thoughts go away. "What if we could spend some time finding out who you are and what that means?" I propose. He agrees and we now have a little direction in our treatment plan, far from some of the ideas I assumed he needed.

And with that, I confirmed my commitment to using these tools. How could I not if they were providing such unique opportunities for the conversations I was engaging in with my clients? Soon after, I oddly liked the experience of receiving feedback – the more critique the better. How else was I supposed to improve my connection? How else was I to incorporate such highly contextualized client information into the way I connected with them? The courage to seek and integrate feedback has payoffs, not only in client outcomes, but also for us as practitioners. How else will we improve?

End note:

\* Identifying information altered to maintain confidentiality.

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