

How I became a therapist:

Episode 1

Jenna:

What leads someone to join the psychotherapeutic profession? individual stories do vary, but there is a clear underlying similarity: they were all drawn to helping people. In this podcast we speak to some of our members to uncover their stories and to find out what led them down the path to becoming a psychotherapist. Here, UKCP member Dr Divine Charura discusses how a job working in an asylum, before their closures, led him to seek a role that allowed him to listen.

Divine Charura:

I managed to get to work in the old asylums in Leeds, North of England, in the early 2000s, back end of the 90s, early 2000s, just before the closed, which were old psychiatric hospitals, in-patient hospitals. The nature of practice and how we used to treat those who were psychologically distressed or mentally ill greatly disturbed me. So, an example is I worked on a ward that was a dormitory, you may have had 25 men who were deeply psychological distress, or 25 women, and if they were in a florid state of being distressed, they'd have to be injected, and they'd they have to be put in a seclusion room, a rubber room, and so on, and so on, and so on. And I remember attending a talk, I was in my early 20s at the time, I remember attending a talk that was being given by a psychotherapist. And what struck me was, I did not have the time in the work I was doing at the time, to speak to the patients as much as I'd have loved. I was giving out medication, coming on at night, and so on. So, I decided that it was important that I had the time to listen, to sit with, to explore the experiences that these people - these human beings, these fellow human beings I was working with - had experienced that had contributed to psychological distress. So, fundamentally, that's why I became a psychotherapist. But I also wanted to make a difference. But then later, I understood that really, my interests and attraction was deeply to understand myself, my own history, my own experiences, my own heritage, my own culture, and everything that had formed me, and how I was in the world I was living, in terms of Leeds, and so on and so on. The diversity of it, the struggles, and all of that. And so the combination of the two things helped. But I've always had an interest in the human psyche, the human mind, and human relationships. So as a profession that can make a difference, both to myself, to others, to work with those who have experienced distress and life struggles, as well as marry that with my own interest in the human psyche, human relationships, human psychology, and so on. It was the perfect fit for me, and I've never looked back. I love it.

Jenna:

Seeking therapy herself, UKCP psychotherapist Kelly Hearn became inspired to retrain as a psychotherapist.

Kelly Hearn:

I actually started my journey to becoming a psychotherapist as a client. So, I was in psychotherapy myself for roughly seven years, which was an extremely life changing process around some pretty important transitions in my life. And I found it so supportive, helpful, that I wanted to retrain and support other people in similar transitions. I also think there's something incredibly interesting about being in the business of being human, which is what psychotherapists do on a daily basis. Getting really curious about what makes us tick, what's important to us and how we negotiate our way in the world.

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Jenna:

Seeking meaning, UKCP psychotherapist Gary Bloom sought therapy, and later psychotherapeutic training, to find himself.

Gary Bloom:

I became a psychotherapist because I had gone into therapy because my life didn't make sense anymore. Somebody once asked me, you know, why do people come to therapy, maybe that's the pre-question to your question. It's because there's nowhere else left to go. And if you feel that there is somewhere where you can bring insight and understanding and healing to that process, I think it's really a great path to go down. My supervisor came up with a great one recently: psychotherapy is about rupture and repair. Are you prepared or bold enough to go into a psychotherapeutic relationship? And are you prepared for the rupture, with the understanding that repair will happen because of that? The hardest thing I do in my sports clubs, where I work, is to have toe to toes with people who will disagree with me, and I'm absolutely comfortable with that. But I needed the training, which incidentally, was UKCP-orientated, to allow my personality to grow that I would not shy away from what the word is in a different set of circumstances, radical candor. I offer radical candor to my clients; I hope they feel that I can put up a mirror to them and show them what's going on in the psychotherapeutic relationship. That might cause a rupture, but I think there's repair out the other side.

Jenna:

Inspired by a film from her youth, UKCP member Melissa Cliffe, sought to start a career in psychotherapy from a young age.

Melissa Cliffe:

I think I'm probably quite unusual because I have a diary that I wrote when I was 16 and in that, I found an entry that says, 'I want to be a psychoanalyst'. And I don't know how many people who go on to work in this profession wanted to do that from such a young age, but I did. I think as soon as I got a whiff of what it was, I wanted to do it. I do remember watching the film Equus when I was quite young, with Richard Burton. I don't know if you've watched it or not. And it was the first film that depicted a psychiatrist working with an extremely troubled boy and he does some terrible barbaric things. And there's a whole story of how he works with him and this boy is quite cut off, but he manages to get through to him, and the boy challenges him as well. And there's this really amazing process they go through where this boy who does these really terrible things, they get to a point where they find real understanding of what he's going through. And he finds catharsis and gets to a point where he can really start to heal from a lot of old wounds and traumas. I really liked the idea that somebody could be so troubled, and yet they could find a place where they could be understood. I like the idea that we are all understandable. And I like the idea that in therapy, we can be who we are, that it's a space where we're not judged. You know, I am actually quite an idealist in many ways. And I really like to think that if we can help people to heal from their traumas, and to be their authentic selves, then the world has got to be at a better place. And I feel like, I don't know why, but I seem to be able to be there with people and show up with them and I have a real interest in being with them along their journeys. I'm much happier in sessions talking to people about what really matters, and I feel really lucky that I get to work in a profession where we talk about what really matters to people.

Jenna:

Growing up, UKCP psychotherapist Suzanne Worrica was a natural listener and mediator in her family, which drew her to a career in supporting others.

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Suzanne Worrica:

In my own family of origin, I became a natural listener and a mediator because of the role that I played in my own family. And I think that's stood me in really good stead for the work that I do now. And I have felt for such a long time that this is my purpose, if you like, I feel very drawn to people and supporting them to understand themselves better in a way that I value, understanding myself better. And I really enjoy the variety of people that I work with. The more that I work in psychotherapy, the more interested and curious I become about people and what they bring as individuals, what their own experience of life is and how they view it. So, I intend to stay in this profession for a long time, as long as I can.

Jenna:

That was some of our members sharing their stories. If you're interested in reading more about our members, and their route into the profession, then visit our website psychotherapy.org.uk and go to the What is Psychotherapy tab, there you’ll find the How I Became Therapist series.

*Post-recording change*

You can now find the How I Became a Therapist blog series by visiting psychotherapy.org.uk, and opening our drop down menu.

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