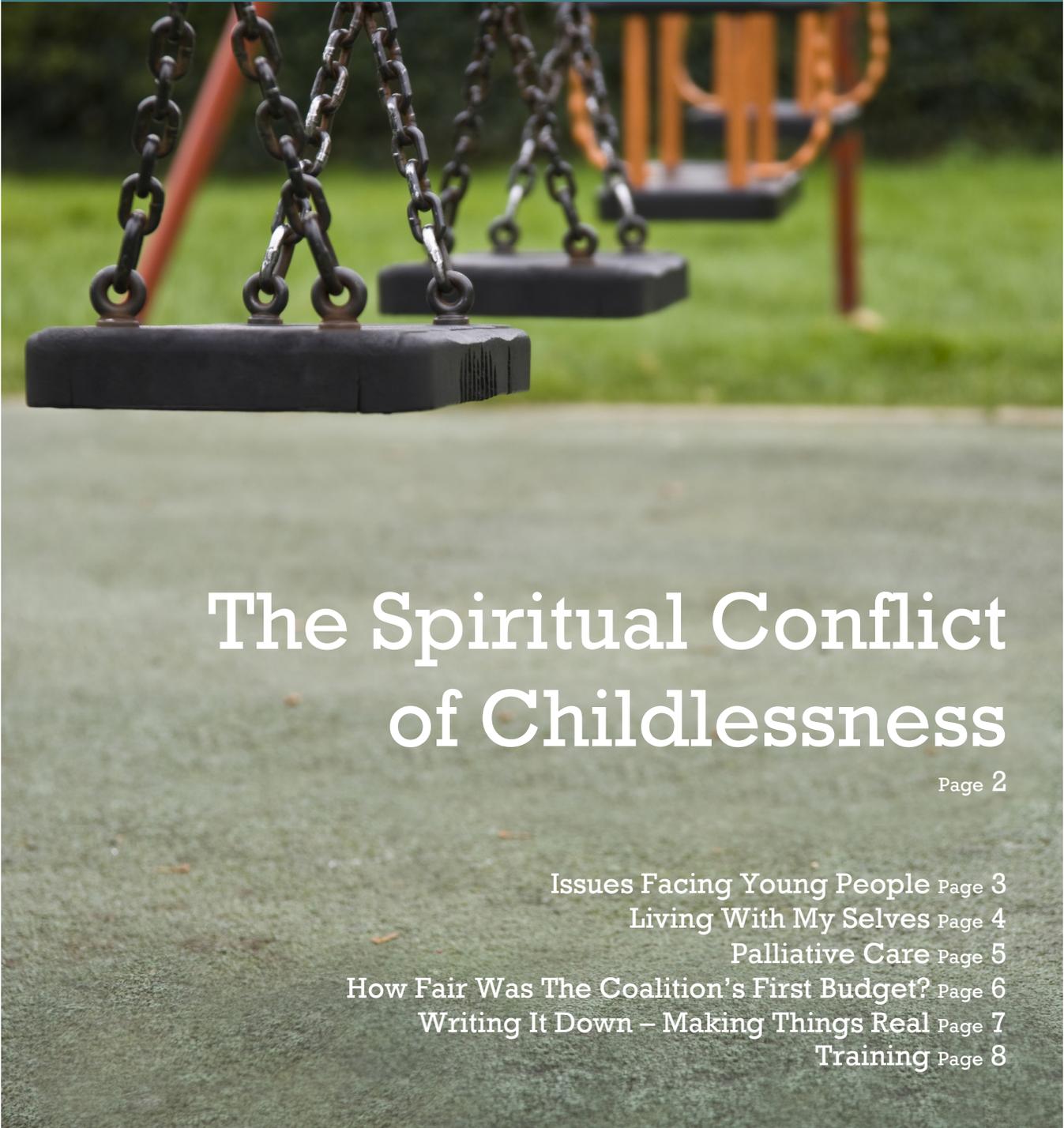


# Pastoral Care News



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# The Spiritual Conflict of Childlessness

By Chris Wheeler

**Willows counsellor Chris Wheeler recalls a difficult time in her life where her Christian beliefs were called into question and necessitated seeking an alternative perspective on God's love and care.**

Infertility is still a taboo subject in some areas. Although the last thirty years has seen advancement in medical science which has itself created medical and ethical conflicts, being childless is still seen as something a couple should apologise about. "When are you going to have children?" was a mantra that still haunts me, usually said by kindly people surprised that a Christian couple did not have children. On occasion this has changed to "why did you not have children?" and my answers have varied from "not being blessed" to the stark "I am barren." I make no apologies for sounding prickly here. Anyone who has undergone infertility treatment of any kind will understand the loss of privacy and the feeling of intrusion that this sadly engenders. To be asked questions on such a personal level opens up those wounds created by intrusion, feeling powerless and being denied what is the fundamental right and instinct of every human being. In short it is actually nobody's business why I am childless.

This article is about the conflict of being childless in a Christian rather than secular setting so I confine myself to my own personal Christian viewpoint and experience. Some people choose to be childless for a variety of reasons ranging from economic to not wishing to bring a child into a hostile world. They may be carrying genes which a child might inherit or indeed they may feel unable to raise children in a kind and loving atmosphere. Here, Christian teaching enters, we are taught that sex before marriage is wrong, to have a child outside of a heterosexual marriage is wrong, and dare I say, not having children if married is wrong. This teaching creates an exclusion zone for single, lesbian and homosexual people who might make excellent parents. The conflicts begin!

Many of you reading this have experienced the world as a grey area with very few black and white issues. Creating human life outside natural conception has caused great debate and there is always someone who will produce unpalatable circumstances that stretch our tolerance. The press love these people, but I would ask you to stop and consider what drives them. For some, it is the instinctive desire to be able to hold the miracle that they have created. Normally this miracle is created in private but the parental drive can be so great that couples will subject themselves to any amount of poking and prying; spending vast amounts of money to create that miracle, they may even buy it from another person or another country. Safety, logic, love and understanding fly out of the window when that gut instinct kicks in. I do not condemn them, I chose to live with my childlessness because I had a husband who did not want children. Had he wanted children our route would have been different as his instincts would have told him different things. Helping people in this vast grey area is as varied and as gut-wrenching as you can imagine. I learnt at the age of 25 that given a certain scenario and circumstances we are capable of anything - good or bad.

I would not like anyone to read this and think I calmly chose my route and stuck to it. My husband and I, who had only been married 6 months, made a decision that was right for us. Nonetheless, I believed that God did not want me to have children and secretly believed I was being punished.

This affected my relationship with God and this situation would have remained but for Spiritual Direction. As a spiritual exercise, I began reading Landmarks by Margaret Silf. At the end of the first chapter the reader is encouraged to read and reflect on Luke 1: 26-38 - the Visitation of the Angel to Mary. I decided to honestly tackle this passage as part of my spiritual direction. Pent up anger, frustration, sorrow and pain flowed in that session together with many tears. I still believed that God was angry with me, punishing me and I was angry with him. For me the passage was about the miracle of bringing life into the world and how blessed these

women were. When my fellow traveller gently suggested that Mary was obedient to God and so was I and that I was blessed by my actions, I was stunned. Obedience is not a virtue either I or others would associate with me... or was it? Some of the conflict was disappearing and a raft of concepts and ideas had taken the place of raw emotions.

I would end by saying that this is my story, the views for others will be different. If you are called to sit with anyone exploring and bearing infertility be prepared for the heightened depths of emotion; be gentle with the instincts this throws up.

Hold the person carefully and give them the two elastic bands of hope and reconciliation. Hope will enable them to bear the journey and reconciliation is their escape route when their journey becomes too much to bear.

Reconciliation is necessary when their journey becomes overwhelming. Whether temporary or permanent, it allows them to feel that they have not failed but made appropriate choices. Help them to be realistic in their journey, give them space to grieve and hopefully rejoice with them when they either reach their final decision or they achieve their miracle. There is no right or wrong only what is best for them.

**Book Reference - Landmarks by Margaret Silf, ISBN 10:0232522545**





## Issues facing Young People

by Carole Coupe

Trained school counsellor and teacher Carole Coupe highlights some of the issues facing young people today and how counselling can help.

Life for a twenty-first century teenager is complex to say the least. They have problems to face that I did not even know about when I was that age. The problem pages in 'Jackie' magazine pale into insignificance when reading some published today. However, I am continually amazed and humbled by the resilience, emotional intelligence and loving acceptance some young people show in circumstances that would severely challenge many adults.

When young people talk about their lives, their preoccupation is to do with friendship. The need to belong to a group, to fit in and have a place to be with others. Nothing really different from other generations you might think but the difference is perhaps the sheer intensity and rigid conformity imposed from external sources. You probably need to belong to 'Facebook' or another social network, then you have to continually update your profile, (making sure you have the right image) which is rather tricky considering the lack of control you might have over photos uploaded by others onto their page. Then there is the number of 'friends' you have. Too few and you might be seen as a 'loser'. The potential for bullying on line is mind boggling but so is the ability to chat to friends for hours and play games on line with others from different time zones. The World Wide Web is a mixed blessing and young people not only need to be able to handle the technology but also the consequences of other people's mishandling of it.

We all want to belong and feel part of a community.

Teenagers are no exception but they have the added stress of trying to become independent, building their own identity and finding out who they really are.

Whilst family members can play an important part in this development, for some young people these family members are a real hindrance. Perhaps you know what it is like to live with a parent who has a problem with alcohol, their mental health or is totally focused on themselves? Some families have totally unrealistic expectations about their offspring's academic abilities

seeing these as either too low or too high. It is difficult to estimate how many young people use food, alcohol, drugs, sport or overwork to either escape from their problems for a little while or in the hope of having some semblance of control over their lives. It has long been accepted that young women are pressured to conform to the celebrity obsessed media images of the ideal woman. Unfortunately this pressure is now intensifying for young men as well.

Despite all of the pressures they face what can young people do about it? Thankfully many care for and listen to each other. Hence the success of Peer Counselling and Anti-Bullying schemes, based in schools or accessible via the Internet. There are some incredibly selfless and mature young people who truly listen, do not offer advice and know when to encourage their friend to seek professional help. Some young people just need a good listening to.

For many young people experienced professional counselling is available through their GP or school. It is important that these counsellors are trained in dealing with the particular needs and issues of young people.

Counselling is more than a cosy chat over a cup of coffee, it has the potential to really help young people understand themselves and to explore different ways of viewing the world. It is an empowering therapy.

'Sex, drugs and rock and roll' (and more!) are still issues of contention between the generations but today counselling can now be added as an additional tool for young people to use in their onward journey to adulthood.



# Living With My Selves

by Betty Hughes

In this article Betty offers a glimpse into a lifelong journey in dealing with dissociation and how her book might offer insight to others.

On my 90th birthday I published my memoirs entitled, "Talking to My Selves – a Journey into Awareness".

We are all made up of different characters. In his book entitled "Discover Your Subpersonalities" John Rowan calls these characters, 'the people inside us'. However, those who have suffered severe trauma at a very early age, before their personality has fully developed, may suffer 'splitting off' from the memories associated with these profoundly damaging formative experiences. This is known as dissociation. Sufferers can discover very separate selves, each self living its own life within its own compartment.

My book started out as a therapeutic exercise in order to help me keep pace with my personal journey. But I kept on getting stuck. When this happened the manuscript was flung aside with all meaning, purpose and relevance disappearing, as if for ever. Yet, there was always a very stubborn, relentless and tenacious child self around who refused to be put down or defeated. My book is her story revealing that this character trait has not changed right up to the present.

I embarked upon my voyage of discovery at the age of 47 and have spent a small fortune on multifarious forms of therapy, including conventional psychotherapy, growth groups and years of primal integration involving attempts to gain control of, and consciously manage my various 'selves'. Much of this work was with the late Dr Frank Lake and the late Dr William Swartley. At the advanced age of 87 a very astute psychologist perceived that I needed specialised treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Dissociation. This was in connection with two experiences of early sexual abuse,

reinforced by further incidents in therapy.

I received tremendous benefit and enlightenment during twenty months of counselling. The knowledge that my 'self' had undergone a splitting into various other 'selves' had dawned upon me early on in therapy but working with Sarah, my therapist, made me feel that at long last my scrambled brain had an ally – someone who knew and understood that I was dealing with a natural mechanism, in this case my brain, which had been overloaded and had crashed.

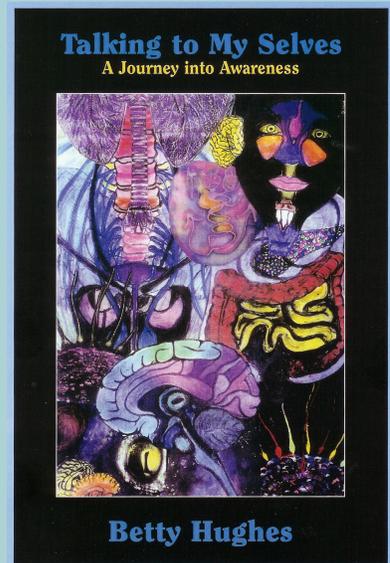
As I write in my book, "As you go through life you filter information via the splitting – good and bad are kept separately, there is a gulf between. Because the traumatic experience exists in a constant present the healing aspect of time cannot operate on it. Feelings cannot fade when they exist in a constant present. In normal life emotions never stay the same. They never stay at the same pitch – they shift, they vary; one mood changes to another mood. Being frozen in a split second of time creates a different situation which is never ameliorated – it exists – it is 'now' – it cannot be reversed. All senses flip back to this split second. Emotional responses, when triggered by trauma, create a situation in which an alarm is set too sensitively – the original extreme emotional reaction is triggered by a very low level of stimuli – it takes very little to set it off."

**"Until processing of the trauma occurs - i.e. is integrated on a cognitive level – verbally on the time line – the unprocessed unintegrated material will emerge repeatedly"**

One thing which I find fascinating is that although I have largely processed my trauma, my selves are still very individual and separate characters yet

closely integrated into an internal family system. This may be because I started out on my journey into personal growth so late in life. The crucial change is that I no longer live constantly poised on red alert, frozen in fight/flight mode which deadens life and casts an unending vista of meaninglessness into the future.

An outstanding feature of the book is that the entire journey is told in pictures as well as in words. There are approximately ninety-five fascinating illustrations divided into five sections. These range from charming black and white 'snaps' from my early years to exotic photographs of wildlife in East Africa, from intriguing studies of sand play to artwork in acrylic, collage and primitive sketches.



## Book references

**Talking to My Selves** by Betty Hughes, ISBN 978-0-9563386-0-0, can be ordered by credit card or Paypal, <http://www.primallaugh.co.uk>. A leaflet offering a reduction for those on low income is available from Willows.

I also referred to; **Discover Your Subpersonalities** by John Rowan, ISBN 0-415-07366-9

# Palliative Care

by Liz Day

**Trained nurse and Willows Counsellor Liz Day offers her thoughts surrounding care for those faced with what is arguably the most difficult part of their lives.**



Palliative care is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as “the active, total care of patients whose disease no longer responds to curative treatment. Control of pain, of other symptoms, and of psychological, social and spiritual problems is paramount. The goal of palliative care is achievement of the best quality of life for patients and their families.”

Palliative care:

- Affirms life and regards dying as a normal process
- Neither hastens nor postpones death
- Provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms
- Integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care
- Offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death
- Offers a support system to help the family of the dying cope during the patient’s illness and during bereavement following the patient’s death

‘Palliative’ is derived from the Latin word ‘pallium’ meaning a cloak or cover. The Oxford English dictionary defines ‘palliative’ as ‘to relieve without curing’.

The modern day palliative care movement was born out of the work by Dame Cicely Saunders who, in 1967, opened St Christopher’s Hospice in London. She was firstly a nurse who, following a back injury, retrained as a social worker. The vision for her pioneering work grew out of discussions about dying and death with a patient, David Tamsa. He left her a legacy for a ‘window in your home’. After medical training, Dame Cicely worked tirelessly and, nineteen years after David’s death, opened St Christopher’s. Combining the best of clinical care, research and teaching, it led the way in establishing both palliative care and the hospice movement as we know it today.

Palliative care is holistic in its approach. Cicely Saunders used the term ‘total pain’ to describe the physical, emotional, societal, psychological and spiritual elements which cause people distress as they contemplate their illness, mortality and approaching death. To be able to help alleviate this distress is a privilege. Palliative care is very much about listening not only to what someone says about their illness and their symptoms, but also listening to the unspoken and inexplicable. It’s about meeting people where they are, accepting them as they are, with their questions, anger, pain, hopes, or fears. Sometimes the interventions will be clinical, with medication, surgery, radiotherapy or chemotherapy. At other times it will be with words, silence, or one’s own presence in the face of life and death.

**Dying is the loneliest journey we undertake and everyone needs fellow travellers to accompany us as far as possible.**

However, my abiding memory of the many patients I helped care for is the laughter, humour and even joy that we shared. Most people who are dying have a heightened awareness of the preciousness of life and, within their limitations, live that life in the fullest way possible.

Palliative care is also about the family and friends who are significant to the patient. John Donne said ‘no man is an island’. Support for those who are watching the illness and death of their loved ones is vital. Sometimes this may involve healing and resolution of fractured and difficult relationships.

All people, whether of a particular faith or of none, try to find some meaning in their life and in their death. Sharing the anguish is part of the caring. To finish I want to quote what, for me, encompasses the palliative care journey:

**‘The presence of another human being, by intent, and as an act of mercy, is healing’**



# How 'Fair' was the Coalition's First Budget?

By The Rev'd Dr. Simon Topping

As Social Responsibility Officer for Swindon and North Wiltshire, Simon contrasts the principles behind the coalition's first budget with some of those described in the Bible where the former would appear to be found wanting.

Was the Coalition's first "emergency" budget progressive or regressive? Did it share out the burden of reducing the nation's deficit in a way that is "fair", as the Chancellor claims? George Osborne argues that the budget is evidence that the coalition government are standing by their affirmation that "we are all in this together". However, a diverse range of commentators, including the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS), Oxfam, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and Church Action on Poverty claim that it was regressive - in other words, that some of us are "in it" more than others.

On the progressive side state pensions will now be linked to earnings, the income tax threshold will be raised to £10,000 and the banks will have a two billion pound levy imposed upon them. On the regressive side 80% of the deficit reduction is expected to come from spending cuts and 20% from tax increases. The increase in VAT, which will raise £13 billion, does not distinguish ability to pay, and the two billion pound levy on the banks was expected to be at least twice as high. The Robin Hood Tax campaign which is calling for a 0.05 % tax on financial transactions argues that such a levy could raise £20 billion. ([www.robinhoodtax.org.uk](http://www.robinhoodtax.org.uk)).

Mr Osborne's claim that the decisions he has taken were "unavoidable" has also been challenged by Robert Chote of the IFS: "When Mr Osborne said that the years of debt and spending made the £13 billion increase in VAT unavoidable, you might just as well say it was his desire to cut other taxes that made it so." The IFS go on to argue that when the budget proposals are taken as a whole it will lead to the ten percent of the population on lowest income being hit disproportionately hard.

Jesus' story of the widow's mite is an early example of how the

"we are all in this together" approach can mask an unfair burden falling upon the shoulders of the poorest. All devout Jews were expected to pay the temple tax. The rich could pay without serious impact upon their lifestyles. But the widow contributes "all she had to live on". Jesus unmask this unfairness and predicts the demise of the temple.

If the budget had been truly progressive, not only would it have reflected people's proportionate ability to pay tax and afford cuts but it would also have recognised past benefits from the pre-crisis financial boom and thus direct appropriate responsibility for the creation of the current financial crisis. The Church Action on Poverty "Fairness Test" ([www.church-poverty.org.uk](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk)) is one we may wish to apply to the coalition's first budget and any subsequent budgetary decisions arising from it:

- Are the people affected by cuts the ones who benefited from the boom?
- Can the people affected afford the cuts?
- Are the people contributing tax the (same) people who benefited? (from the boom)
- Are people contributing tax proportionate to their ability to pay?

The Biblical understanding of fairness, or justice, is weighted in favour of the poor. For example, in the Jubilee laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the "right" to personal wealth accumulation is subordinate to divine legislation that seeks the common good.

**In my view, the budget proposals are shaped by an understanding of fairness in which the quest for the common good (and defence of the poor) is subordinate to the "right" to personal wealth accumulation.**

## Panic

It comes, seemingly, from nowhere.  
Not gently but with brutal paralysis,  
taking my breath away  
and leaving me spent and dumb.

Gut-churning, stomach-wrenching panic,  
striking without warning,  
bringing fear  
that stops me dead in my tracks.

And I am a child again,  
faced with an insurmountable problem,  
caught in an impossible situation,  
with no escape, no-one to help,  
no-one to hear my cries of pain.

So I retreat into myself  
hastily adding another tier of bricks  
to the wall that I hope will hide  
and protect me from what is happening.

The wall is so high,  
and I am so small,  
so that, even if I wanted to,  
I can't climb over it,  
and I'm trapped.

I'd like to run away  
and find a safe place to hide.  
but I'm stuck.

Help!

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## The Helpers

Thank you, God, for the helpers you have given me.  
Women and men who have committed  
themselves to accompanying me as  
I make my journey.

It's been a long, hard road so far  
and I can't see what's round the corner,  
nor do I want to.  
I'm weary and footsore, and fast running  
out of energy and impetus.  
But I'm spurred on by the faith of my friends  
who believe in me when I cannot believe in myself.

Please give them the grace they need to stick with me,  
and the patience they need to keep going.  
It's a selfish prayer, I know,  
for I cannot make it without them.  
Make up to them all the time and love they have given me  
and bless them  
as You have blessed me through them.

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## Writing it down - making things real!

For some people on a healing journey articulating what they feel is incredibly difficult. My experience some years ago was that I had a few words which just stuck in my head for days. In the end I sat down and wrote those words onto paper and, to my surprise, a whole piece of prose flowed out of my subconscious. I found that I was able to express things that I didn't know I was feeling until I wrote them down. I was able to use metaphor and symbol to convey to myself and my counsellor the depth of pain I had gone through and was still experiencing. Over a period of some years this was the prime way that I was able to access thoughts, feelings, anger and other emotions which had been buried deep during and since the years when I was abused.

Now that I am a counsellor I have seen how writing poetry, prose, or a journal, can be helpful for some clients. For instance, one client had found it impossible to speak out the things that were troubling her, because of an irrational fear of retribution. However, she was able to write things down between sessions and the first thing I did each week was to read her journal. Once I had read it and spoken it out to her, it somehow gave her permission to talk.

There are as many ways of writing things down as there are different people. Some will write beautifully crafted poetry which has rhythm and flow. Others will need to be very stark in language or imagery to express their pain and anger about what has happened to them.

Recently Willows compiled a small book of poetry from different people who have found writing helpful, in the hope that it might help some of our clients. Therapeutic writing will not be for everyone but it can be a very useful and creative tool in the counselling process.





### Congratulations!

The two year Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling finished in July. As part of the Diploma, students sit a Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body (CPCAB) external examination. I am thrilled to be able to report that all fourteen students passed the exam. This is a fantastic achievement and credit goes to all the students for

their hard work and also to the trainers, especially Grace and Marilyn, for their high level of teaching and their support to the students.

**Well done to you all!**  
**Avril Fray - Training Manager**

### We look forward to holding the following courses in the coming year 2010/2011

- Level 2 Introduction to Pastoral Counselling – Spring 2011
- Level 3 Certificate in Integrative Counselling – September 2011
- Myers Briggs Type Indicator Topic Workshop – Saturday 21st May 2011

The following Saturday Training Days will take place at The Harnhill Centre, Cirencester:

- 13th November – “Creative approaches in Therapy” Dr Elspeth Schwenk
- 12th February – “When Good Therapy Goes Wrong” Anne Kearns
- 12th March – “Gaining CBT Clinical skills in Treating Panic Attacks and Panic Disorders” Paul Hebblethwaite
- 7th May – “Life at the Edge – an exploration of Borderline Personality Disorder” Anita Stokes

For more information on any of the above courses, please contact: Avril Fray, Training Manager at Willows.  
 E-mail: [training@willowscounselling.org.uk](mailto:training@willowscounselling.org.uk)

#### How to Contact us

You can telephone us on 01793 426650, Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4.30pm. At other times you can leave a message on our answerphone.

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Or email us at [willows@willowscounselling.org.uk](mailto:willows@willowscounselling.org.uk)

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