

The Hampstead Psychotherapy Club: developing community-based resources for practitioners

Josefine Speyer and Claudia Nielsen explain how they successfully started a club for practising psychotherapists in their local community

After attending a couple of psychotherapy club meetings held by Martin Pollecoff in Notting Hill, I [Josefine] was inspired to start a club in my local area of Hampstead. Since its inception in February 2015, the Hampstead Psychotherapy Club has rapidly established itself as a popular resource for the many psychotherapists who live and practise in this part of London and further afield.

Networking

I originally set up the club with the aim of giving local therapists the opportunity to socialise and network and to discuss topics of interest. The first meetings were held in the upstairs room at Café Rouge on Hampstead High Street. UKCP advertised the club on its website and emailed an invitation to members in the London area. In no time I had a mailing list of over 100 people. The private room had space for 30 people and, right from the start, meetings were packed. Sitting around small tables, we discussed suggested topics such as transgenerational trauma from a personal and professional point of view, ending the evening with a group discussion sitting in a large circle. We may well have continued along these lines but for a sudden forced change of venue: the new manager of Café Rouge decided that the premises were no longer available for our



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use. Fortunately, a colleague, Claudia Nielsen, stepped in and offered to hold the meetings at her house.

Regular talks

Claudia's house, which is a beautiful converted Methodist chapel, is an ideal venue for larger gatherings, accommodating up to 60 people; therefore Claudia and I took this opportunity to develop a programme of regular talks on topics of interest to psychotherapists. We have been very heartened by the quality of the presentations delivered by experts in the field, which we have organised, and by the enthusiastic response from the members of the club.

In November 2015, Dr Val Thomas gave a presentation on her

recently published book, *Using Mental Imagery in Counselling and Psychotherapy: Developing More Inclusive Theory and Practice*.

The audience appreciated the opportunity to participate in an experiential exercise as part of the presentation. In February 2016, Professor Brett Kahr presented a paper on 'Committing crimes without breaking the law: unconscious sadism in the "non-forensic" patient'. It was again a full house and an exciting evening on a thought-provoking paper. In May, Dr Marie Adams gave a talk based on her book, *The Myth of the Untroubled Therapist*, which led to stimulating discussions about the challenges of being a psychotherapist. And, at the end of July, our speaker was Dr Anne Power, who addressed the

subject of 'Closing a practice: retirement, relocation, transition – the decision to retire and the process of closing a private practice', based on her book, *Forced Endings in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis Attachment and Loss in Retirement*. At our next meeting on 17 October, psychiatrist and psychotherapist Dr Tim Read will consider the topic 'Archetype and psyche in crisis and growth'.

Overwhelming response

From the start when UKCP advertised the club to its membership in London, the response was overwhelming. We now have around 250 members on our mailing list. However, we can only comfortably accommodate 50 people for the meeting, so

we have to limit the bookings to this number. We are open to include people not only from the Hampstead area but from anywhere and everywhere. Our plan is to have four meetings a year on a Monday. We start at 7pm (doors open at 6:30pm) and we divide the evening into three sections: 45 minutes for the presentation, 45 minutes for questions and comments, and the rest of the evening, up to 9:30pm, for socialising and networking. We offer CPDs of 2.5 hours at our events.

The advantages of belonging to the club is eloquently summed up by one of our members:

I found the Hampstead Psychotherapy Club to be wonderful and an invaluable resource. Claudia, Josefine and Val have organised it in a way that is very conducive to sharing, learning, exchanging ideas, inspiring and stimulating further thought and reflection, making friendships and links with colleagues, and overall enhancing the work we do in our practices. This is achieved through the beautiful environment and atmosphere that is created in Claudia's home, and through the sourcing of interesting and engaging speakers, as well as the opportunity to socialise with others present. It helps us to connect within a profession where there is so much solitude and isolation in our individual working lives. I am very grateful for it, and find it of enormous benefit.

A Wheeler, member

The Hampstead Psychotherapy Club is an evolving project. To judge by the response, it does seem to be meeting a need for community-based resources for practitioners, and we would certainly encourage others to consider starting similar clubs in their localities. For more information or if you wish to join our circulation list, please contact us:

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If you're interested in setting up your own psychotherapy club,
email communications@ukcp.org.uk