

‘Reconnect with the world at your own pace’

Interview with Sandra Boden, counsellor at the Oak Tree Counselling Service



The Oak Tree Counselling Service (OTCS) was established in 2002, by Andy Nott and Sandra Boden, with the aim of offering affordable counselling for adults. The service, inspired by the pastoral counselling ministry of former pastor John Bedford, is an independent charity connected to King’s Community Church in Oldbury. It operates in accordance with the Association of Christian Counsellors guidelines and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework for The Counselling Profession.

Over the years trained volunteer counsellors (including Sandy Nott, wife of Andy Nott) have worked with a steady stream of clients. These have consisted of a combination of referrals, recommendations and people who have independently accessed the service. Sandra has been a senior psychotherapist/counsellor and supervisor from the start.

“We established ourselves fairly quickly,” explains Sandra. “At that time there weren’t many places that offered affordable counselling.

“We provide support for people with a wide range of difficulties including stress, anger, bereavement, abuse, amongst other spiritual/psychological issues. We work with couples, families and groups as well as individuals. The aim is to make counselling available to anyone, but we do ask all our clients for a

financial contribution – no matter how small – as this encourages personal investment in the counselling process”.

One way the service differs from others is that it offers open-ended counselling. Other services generally offer between 6 and 20 sessions. For some people, this may suffice; for others, particularly those with more complex difficulties, an open-ended contract is required.

Counselling often makes a difference. “I find it humbling when clients trust me enough to share details of their lives and experiences that they have never spoken about. To witness their transformation as they let go of outdated beliefs which have been self-limiting is rewarding. Some difficulties may not be resolved but encouraging clients to use coping strategies can enable them to live in a healthier way. Generally, the people who work with us finish with a renewed sense of understanding, hope and purpose”.

Sandra says that over the last year there has been a concentration of cases regarding bereavement. Social restrictions have made coping with the loss of a loved one even more difficult. Stress, depression and loneliness are recurring issues; as is anxiety, and fear of catching the virus.

“Living with the Covid-19 pandemic is disorientating,” Sandra explains. “For some it has intensified pre-existing issues as

well as bringing fresh challenges in its own right.”

She is expecting an increase in calls as the restrictions of the pandemic lift. “Kay Baker (OTCS counsellor) and I agree that there may be an increase in people wanting counselling as they adjust to life without loved ones; or the loss of jobs and the purpose and self-esteem that went with them; or changes in relationships that have occurred over the past year.”

With the end of lockdown in mind Sandra advises people to take things slowly – and be mindful that life will not go back to how it was.

“I would suggest reconnecting with the world at your own pace. Do what you feel comfortable with in terms of joining social groups, engaging with activities and connecting with friends and loved ones; and do it in your own time.

“Remember the world is forever changed, it won’t be how it was. Feel your way back into it. You don’t need to impose the way you do this on anyone or have others’ ideas imposed on you.”