

Coaching for social impact: creating a coaching community for change, inclusion and social justice

BACP Coaching executive member **Val Watson** introduces our new series dedicated to coaching for social change, and extends an invitation to join our special interest group.

A continuing theme in our journal over the past year has been the increasingly important role that the use of coaching and coaching approaches is playing in communities and their development. This is hardly a surprise, given the focus on community welfare, collaboration and change in recent months. As a result of the pandemic, we have learned what can be achieved when people in communities work together in a crisis. We have also had to confront the damaging and painful consequences of ignoring and denying community problems, as we have seen an increase in social inequalities resulting from deepening oppressive practices. Particularly in a westernised economy, the impact of the pandemic on employment, especially for young people, will require a change in the way we think about communities and how best to use our coaching approaches with relevance and respect.

By and through their actions, practitioners who are involved in coaching for social impact are making a clear statement about the need, in their view, for societal change, campaigning and activism of some kind. This stance is not unproblematic; it is political (with a small or big 'p') and is open to criticism about the role and motives of the practitioner. This is despite a counterclaim that offering a coaching approach in a community or social context is an attempt to override the deficit model sometimes associated with counselling or helping disadvantaged groups, one which implies that coaching and counselling are only available to a fortunate few. It has also been suggested that coaching carries less of a stigma than counselling. Further, the more people who have experience of, and learn about, coaching, the more its potential to have a positive influence on communities and the way individuals think about themselves and others is demonstrated.



For so long, those of us who are coaches, counsellors and dual-trained practitioners, have found that there are links with what we offer and other forms of helping relationships and support. Attempts to define and label ways of helping are important, but sometimes the labels are elusive and don't quite capture what it is we are all doing, trying to do or be in those relationships. What we can usually say about our efforts to help is that they are connected with change – helping to effect change of some kind; to make a difference. Recognition that we can or feel compelled to help to make a change has been the driver for many of us. That stimulus for change has inspired us and brought us into the world of coaching, counselling and psychotherapy. Often, our own desire for change from within has arisen from personal or family crises, witnessing or experiencing injustice, loss, or trying to meet an observed need or gap in provision.

Who has not learned as much, if not more, about themselves and the world they inhabit from their practice as a coach, counsellor or therapist?

As so many have emphasised in the pages of this journal (see our archive, below), this is not about perpetuating a deficit model. On the contrary, it is about advancing a mutual learning and enrichment model. It is about partnership.

Are you working as a coach-counsellor in this area of work for all or part of your practice?

Does your work as a coach-counsellor involve working with community groups?

Do you want to contribute to debates and discussions around the use of a coaching approach in this area of work?

Who are we?

In January and February of this year, BACP Coaching's Chair, Carolyn Mumby, convened a meeting with a small number of practitioners who expressed an active interest in work centred on coaching for social change/social justice. We met online and began to explore the possibilities of forming a special interest group. In our

discussions so far, we have learned a little about the wide range of group members' current and particular focus/passions, which include: using a coaching approach with people from socially deprived and vulnerable minority groups; working with ex-service personnel; working with social workers; working with unpaid carers; working with business leaders who want to be accountable to their employees and community.

Please note: We are in the very early stages of forming this group: we currently meet monthly online, but aspects of membership, frequency of meetings and roles within the group, are yet to be finalised.

Where are we, so far?

We have identified some potential aims and activities for the group and we are confident that we are not alone in terms of our thinking and practice. We want to work with other members who share our interests, and we aim to feature regular contributions from our members in the pages of this journal through this dedicated series.

What we are working towards?

So far, the coaching for social impact group has agreed that:

- We exist to provide a space to share ideas with other practitioners working in this way.
- We want to learn from each other as practitioners; to learn from and reflect on client feedback.
- Ideally, we seek to pool our resources, to raise the profile of the work being done, highlighting the impact of completed and existing projects.
- We aim to keep in our awareness the 'shadow' side of using the coaching approach in this context.
- We are interested in revisiting the language around and perception of what coaching is, and inviting discussion about who it is for.
- As members of the coaching for social impact special interest group, we want to play our part in influencing future and further practice in this work, engaging in relevant debate, critique and research, broadening the use of coaching approaches, and making it more inclusive.

Working together

In your work as a coach or dual-trained coach-counsellor, have you encountered and/or contributed to different ways of thinking about and working with organisations, or community support systems?

Have you been involved in work with marginalised or hard-to-reach groups, helping them to advocate for themselves?

Have you been called upon to help a leadership group make changes that have benefitted their community?

Are you interested in, or do you have experience of, knowing what, for instance, supervision for social impact coach-counselling practitioners does or could look like?

Maybe you would like to let us know what projects you are working on or involved with? Or perhaps you have some practical experience, completed or ongoing research to share with us?

We are keen to hear from those who are interested in coaching for social justice. If you would like to join the discussion, please contact me at the address below. ■

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FROM THE COACHING TODAY ARCHIVE:



Collins K. The ABCD of working with diversity: a new model. *Coaching Today* 2018; April: 6–11.

Macadam C. Port in the storm: coaching unpaid carers. *Coaching Today* 2018; October: 6–11.

Mumby C. One step at a time: coaching for social change. *Coaching Today* 2020; October: 8–13.

Mumby C, Weaver D. From the inside out: how coaching changes lives. *Coaching Today* 2021; January: 14–17.

Stephenson R. A wealth of experience: making the invisible visible. *Coaching Today* 2021; January: 10–13.

