

# Counselling in Scotland

AUTUMN/WINTER 2025

**An Intersectional Guide for Male Survivors  
of Sexual Abuse and their Allies**

**Changing the Face of Community Health  
in Scotland**

**Who's Holding My Coat?**

**COSCA Spotlight On...**

**Creating Space**



**COSCA**

Counselling & Psychotherapy  
in Scotland

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John Dodds

# Editorial

Lately, I have been thinking about political backdrops in relation to counselling and other types of talk therapy. For instance, we know there has been a rise in racism and other forms of discrimination linked to Brexit, and the need for therapy for those who have been affected, and studies have shown rises in mental health disorders and heightened fear and anxiety.

Without getting into politics specifically, one of the questions this raises is about clients asking therapists about their political affiliations, as an added form of reassurance.

Of course, therapists are trained to keep personal information like this to themselves, but I have read that in so doing that can cause some concerns for clients and raises questions for the profession.

One American organisation said something on its website: “Political concerns are a growing source of stress and anxiety in America today. Whether clients bring in existential concerns, such as worries about the long-term impact of laws and policies, or very personal worries, like the loss of the right to bodily autonomy, it shouldn’t surprise anyone that politics are coming up in therapy. While it is clear that clients are bringing up their beliefs in session, should we expect therapists to do the same?”

While this may not be relevant in this country at the moment, it is something worth thinking about. I feel this links, too, to cultural dynamics, such as how some cultures would not allow a woman to see a male counsellor, or how some Christian clients elect to talk to specifically Christian counsellors, and so on.

For future issues, I would be interested in articles on these topics (some have been touched on previously, though).

And thinking of culture and other forms of diversity, diversity is always important to consider and work with in counselling. I was interested, therefore, to read Raj Sandhu Chima’s article about Scotland’s First South Asian Therapist Networking Event hosted by Scottish Asian Counselling Services (SACS). As Raj says, “it wasn’t just about networking. It was about recognition. To walk into a room where your name, your story, and your journey didn’t need translating or defending was transformative. It reminded us that professional validation isn’t only earned through degrees, but also through being seen, heard, and understood.”

And in terms of “bringing together,” you can read about the Scottish Action for Mental Health project, The Nook, Scotland’s first ever network of mental health support hubs, in a piece written by Alex Cumming, Executive Director of Delivery and Service Development at SAMH.

And in the first of a series of articles, our own Jenna Fraser, COSCA’s Recognition Scheme Development Officer, offers a piece about Recognition Scheme Assessors and Verifiers. Future articles, headed, “Spotlight On...” will be about aspects of COSCA you may not know much about.

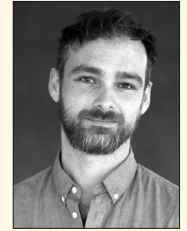
Finally, we have a piece by journal regular, Mike Moss, reprinted from the Spring 2025 issue of Person-centred Quarterly, “Who’s Holding My Coat?” about working with a tearful client and how he felt similar to how Dr. Carl Rogers did with a client and said: “It seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other”.

I was experiencing a small challenge in my life recently, and the person I was speaking to mentioned the Chinese curse, “May you live in interesting times.” But I decided to change that around, and offer the same to you: “May your lives, and times you live in, be very interesting (and engaging).”

**John Dodds**, Editor

# An Intersectional Guide for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse and their Allies:

## Masculinity Reconnected



by Jeremy Sachs

Jeremy Sachs

### Author's introduction

There are few books on the subject of male sexual abuse, though this doesn't mean there aren't some valuable ones. Mike Lew's *Victims No Longer: Men Recovering from Incest and Other Sexual Child Abuse* has been for many years a consistent and essential text, and Richard B. Gartner's *Beyond Betrayal: Taking Charge of Your Life After Boyhood Sexual Abuse* is an excellent contemporary example.

While I hold these titles and others in high regard, there are three areas of men's experiences of sexual abuse that, over the years, I've become particularly interested in but find are rarely addressed in great detail in books of this nature. These are:

**The impact of abuse at different developmental stages:** childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (many books tend to focus solely on childhood abuse or abuse in adulthood, rarely reflecting all three important life stages).

**Intersectionality:** how men's identities – such as race, sexuality, disability, and class – intersect with their experience of abuse and how it affects their recovery.

**Transformative justice:** how statutory services, such as healthcare and the criminal justice system, often fail male survivors and, in some cases, re-traumatise them. Exploring alternative forms of justice, like transformative justice, can help some men find closure in a safer way.

This is one of the reasons I decided to write my book – to contribute a piece of work that embeds these areas throughout its exploration of the subject.

Throughout the book, there are examples of where prejudice or oppression may also play a role in a survivor's journey because for many men, sexual abuse rarely happens in a vacuum. Men's ability to recover from abuse is often influenced not only by the severity of the abuse but also by the support or oppression they've encountered both before and after the abuse. Understanding identity, societal stigma, and discrimination is essential for those who wish to work with male survivors – and it's equally important for male survivors to see this acknowledged in a book about their experiences.

Additionally, the topics covered in this book weren't chosen by me alone; rather, I have structured it to reflect the themes selected by the hundreds of men who have attended my recovery groups over a decade of working in the field. Remarkably, the same topics have consistently emerged across the majority of groups I've worked with. To further highlight male survivors' voices, each chapter is introduced with a testimony from a male survivor, each from various different background or identity. These testimonies bring the topics to life, allowing readers to connect with the experiences of those willing to tell their stories.

Lastly, the book provides signposts to further resources, including charities, websites, and books, so readers can explore each chapter topic in greater depth should they wish. This is because often for male survivors, there is a drive to consume as much information about their experience as possible – plus for us therapists, having resources to draw on, be it charities, further theory or films is always a welcome. Additionally, throughout the book there are worksheets featuring coping strategies and

activities to help survivors process both the chapter and their own experiences. These worksheets draw on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Narrative Exposure Therapy, and activities I've developed throughout my career working with survivors. They are designed to be used as a solo exercise for survivors or work for therapists who wish to incorporate them into their practice with survivors who may benefit from a worksheet providing additional structure to difficult conversations.

I am proud to have written a book that – I hope – embodies so much of my personal beliefs about the power of therapy, connection and inclusion. It is my hope that this book gently and compassionately invites men from all backgrounds, as well as therapists from various disciplines, to deeply engage with this complex and often stigmatised topic. I aim for the book to reflect the diversity of our communities and bring together those whose lives have been impacted by the corrosive effects of sexual abuse. Ultimately, it strives to illustrate that recovery is not a solo journey and that connection – whether through therapy, groups, hobbies, or self-reflection – can serve as a powerful antidote to the shame and silence that often surrounds the experience of sexual abuse.

## Biography

Jeremy Sachs is an integrative and Narrative Exposure psychotherapist and lecturer from London, now based in Glasgow. He has worked across adolescent HIV care, homelessness, long-term health conditions, and with survivors of sexual abuse. He lectures at the NAOS Institute on the COSRT-accredited Advanced Diploma in Psychosexual and Relationship Psychotherapy, has served on the BACP Research Committee, and is a trustee at Wellbeing Scotland.

*The book was published in July 2025 and available from all bookstores and from: [jeremysachs.com](http://jeremysachs.com)*

# Changing the Face of Community Mental Health in Scotland

## One Nook at a Time

by Alex Cumming



Alex Cumming

Our mental health system is in serious need of change. Two and a half times as many people said they have a mental health condition in the most recent census as did in the one before. That's reflected in waiting times for support across the country.

As Scotland's national mental health charity, we've been campaigning for many years for better and broader access to support, and for complex and confusing pathways to support to be streamlined. With no sign of government putting in place what's needed, we're taking action ourselves to create that change.

Our promise is to transform the availability and accessibility of community mental health provision. Current mental health routes are linear and inflexible, but we all know that recovery and people's lives are not.

That's why we've announced The Nook – Scotland's first ever network of mental health support hubs. I want to take this opportunity to tell you about our plans and how we might work together.

The Nook will provide drop-in mental health and wellbeing support that offers choice and flexibility in a safe, stigma-free and non-clinical environment – without the need for an appointment, seven days a week.

Walk-in support hubs where anyone can visit to talk about their mental health, The Nooks will provide visitors with access to support for themselves, or those they care about. We will offer flexibility to support access to group work, peer support, 1-to-1 intensive interventions, and a range of other options, to provide truly person-centred support.

Our first Nook opens in Glasgow in October this year, and will be followed by Nooks in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Lanarkshire, and Inverclyde. All built with a bespoke design focused on the locale it serves, and each accompanied by a wider outreach offering to support more people.

With an opportunity to change the face of community mental health provision across Scotland, how these spaces look and feel for visitors is fundamentally important.

### **Design that reflects our principles**

Everything from the name of The Nook to the psychologically informed design and messaging has been about being person-centred and making sure this space is as easy and comfortable for people to access as possible.

We're currently transforming our Glasgow headquarters in the Merchant City into our first Nook, turning the bottom two floors into safe and welcoming spaces for people to visit.

We know from our experience, from people we support and public feedback, that room layout and the wider hub environment can have a detrimental impact on the therapeutic experience, creating unnecessary barriers, limiting communication and engagement. Therefore, our approach has been to ensure our physical spaces uniquely address those challenges to ensure our hubs are a safe, non-clinical, welcoming and inclusive environment.

Our physical environment is a key component of enhancing our offer and worked closely with people we support, our partners and service delivery staff to create designs and make decisions that inform the layout and features within The Nook incorporating key design elements developed through our expertise and working with our partners and people we support. These principles are:

- Reducing Stigma
- Safety and Privacy
- Therapeutic Environment
- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Integrated Technology
- Healing and Recovery
- Community Engagement
- Sustainability

To bring this to life we have worked in partnership with the well-known interior designer Anna Campbell-Jones, who many of you will know from BBC's Scotland's Home of the Year, and Finni Porter-Jones, who is a participatory design specialist.

They helped frame all the work informed by our lived experience voices, our staff, and the wider public into a 5Cs concept design – connection, contemplation, consultation, community and collaboration – and designing a space that will be welcoming, comfortable, non-clinical, and safe.

Connection was a core focus, creating areas that facilitate conversation, alongside offering choice to accommodate the differing levels of privacy and intimacy required through intentional layout, furnishing choice, and interior design. By deploying creative solutions that remove barriers to engagement and communication, they have enhanced our service delivery model. We have included quiet, contemplative areas providing a peaceful retreat for those who need a moment to pause, recharge, or process their thoughts. This is also coupled with private and welcoming rooms for one-on-one conversations, ensuring individuals have a safe space to seek advice, guidance, or support in a confidential and compassionate setting.

While the final Cs of community and collaboration have also been carefully considered, the space is designed to bring people together. Inclusive and adaptable, The Nook will foster shared learning, peer support and, where appropriate, teamwork. Our psychologically-informed spaces consider the psychological makeup – the thinking, emotions, personalities and past experience – of its participants in the way that it operates.

To demonstrate this approach, the very first thing they did when developing their plans was change the language of each room. Initially, these spaces had highly functional names which explained what types of activities would take place in each room. They instead changed that to reflect the names of different spaces in a home, which signals the nature of The Nook: familiar, safe, and comfortable. A place where you can be yourself.

Consultation rooms are called “snugs”, booths for less private chats are “sheds” and distinguished by the colour of their fabric rather than a more formal numbering convention. We also have a living room, studio, and library. Plans for a reception area were replaced with an open area that has a bespoke and beautifully crafted circular kitchen table. We all know that the kitchen table is where important conversations and connections take place, and that's why the kitchen table is such a focal point in The Nook. There's also no anxiety about who's head of the table – there can't be, as it's round.

Our friendly and welcoming staff and volunteers will be on hand to guide people and support them to make them feel comfortable when they arrive and throughout their visit.

This is the level of thought and detail that has gone into the design of The Nook – considering how spaces, furniture and names all inform what a place is all about.

## Therapeutic environment

A non-clinical, holistic approach where we don't just treat symptoms is vital to the ethos of The Nook.

The look and feel of the space is important but it's so much more than just designing a welcoming building and offer. It's about making people feel at ease and making it as straightforward as possible for them to cross the threshold and feel comfortable when they're inside The Nook: a therapeutic environment that's calm, promoting trust and reflection.

We've worked with a lighting specialist who recommended voltage and level of brightness to create a calming mood, with a mixture of pendant-diffused illumination coupled with spotlighting to create a well-lit but not harsh or intense environment.

We have a consistent two-tone paint scheme throughout The Nook with the bottom half a sandy colour and a sky blue colour for the top half, creating a horizon in the middle that the eye can follow around the room. We call it The Spirit Level.

Alongside this calming and creative decor is our custom-designed Wellbeing Wallpaper, created through workshops with people we support, our SAMH Youth Activists, and our wider staff. Famous landmarks and cultural touchpoints make the design unmistakably Glasgow. There's the Duke of Wellington, and a fish, a bird and a bell to represent the Glasgow Coat of Arms. Snaking throughout the design are plants and calming colours, creating something serene that is also mesmerising, and serves as another potential talking point for when words are hard to come by.

One of the main walls is decorated with reclaimed flooring from Castlemilk High School which helps to evoke a feeling of nostalgia, safety, familiarity, and shared experience. Signs on doors have a hand-written informal style, and biophilic design – incorporating plants and nature – features throughout, creating beautiful and tranquil green spaces.

The rooms themselves have been designed to facilitate the relaxing and creative activities that will take place within them. Whether it's a group workshop, a yoga class, or a session held by one of our partner organisations, each room has been created with flexibility and functionality in mind.

We have also worked with partners to ensure the space is inclusive and sensory affirming, considering the needs of individuals with neurodivergent conditions. This even extends to co-producing the sounds that visitors want to experience in the Nook to help transition from a busy city centre into a positive and more regulatory space.

## Safe and secure

Throughout the design of The Nook, we have had to navigate an understandable tension between security and privacy. We want people to feel they can speak freely, within private and safe spaces, but within the context of our staff being able to see and access all areas. To achieve this, the layout has been adapted to make sure everything is visible and there are no hidden corners or blocked off spaces.

In the rooms reserved for the most private conversations, we wanted to create a sense of privacy without reducing safety. To achieve this, these doors are made of transparent glass but we are wrapping the bottom half in a semi-transparent film that will mean when people sit the window is blurred, but any member of staff can approach it and look in to check on the wellbeing of those inside.

These rooms' doors have a silent latch system that prevents them from clicking when they are opened or closed, avoiding the feeling of being trapped.

## For the community – and the planet

With climate anxiety an increasingly prominent feature of mental health problems, it has been important to us that we reuse wherever we can. This is why we've focused on reclaimed materials, such as agricultural boards, wherever possible, and worked with local suppliers, reducing our carbon footprint through fewer transport miles and supporting local skills.

We've also teamed up with a Glasgow-based social enterprise who transform reclaimed wood into furniture, further reducing the new materials required to create The Nook.

## Furnished with wellbeing in mind

Rather than the hard plastic uniform seating that you might expect in a hospital waiting area, each chair around the table and throughout The Nook is a mixture of modern and vintage, giving visitors choice and a potential talking point when they sit.

Feedback from our lived experience sessions uncovered that many of the people we support find stools and pouffes helpful for feeling grounded and better connected to the ground. Because of this, we have a wide array of both furniture types around The Nook.

For chats that don't require the most private settings, we have a series of "sheds" – booths with one side open. There will be four of these located around The Nook, some fixed while others can be moved around, to create flexibility. These have specially selected 100% recycled fabrics which insulate and muffle sound to avoid echo and create a better sense of privacy.

Each shed is a different colour, offering a wayfinding technique that allows staff to direct people to specific sheds by referring to a colour rather than a number, again subtly reducing clinical language.

## What's in a name?

Language is so important in mental health. Finding the right name for this project felt crucial. Our team agonised over what to call this network. We naturally wanted something that reflected what we're trying to achieve. The first thing we landed on was "Your place for mental health support" as a tagline – a short and clear descriptor focused on the person and the offer. That was the easy part. What we found particularly challenging was the actual name. We eventually landed on The Nook, which has felt right ever since we decided on it. It feels Scottish, warm, friendly, safe and informal. Now we can't imagine calling them anything else.

We dropped the word "service" from our messaging because of the baggage associated with that word – it can feel too transactional, too hierarchical, too pre-determined.

## Supportive technology

Our promise is to transform community mental health provision by delivering accessible support that provides choice and flexibility. Choice and flexibility is central to what we offer and technology is one way to help people to make their own decisions about how The Nook can support them.

In addition to creative interior design techniques, we are deploying the latest technology to make everything easier. We will be introducing a digital booking platform throughout The Nook and integrating it with our other self-referral offerings such as Time For You (our online psychological wellbeing support programme). No one needs to book an appointment to attend The Nook but we recognise that some people prefer the structure and certainty of an appointment time, so we're offering that approach to those who would like it. We will also have further digital interactive tools and resources available for people to access instead of, or in addition to, speaking to our staff.

We recognise the space needs to support diverse communities so providing a variety of methods to engage and understand the support offer has been important. In one of these pathways we have developed an audio experience whereby people can listen to messages which will support their visit

to The Nook, explain what we can offer, and give them support and advice at the same time. This will help individuals take the first to asking for help or considering self-led options available.

### **Connecting to the wider mental health ecosystem**

Reducing pressures on statutory services is one of the key aims of The Nook, providing alternative pathways and flexible options to help people who need more clinical care to be able to wait well.

Our hope is that The Nook offer will complement the work you are doing in your communities and wider statutory services, offering more capacity and reducing waiting times, so that those who need support can ask once and get help fast.

While The Nook's location is aimed at being easy to access and available to the most people possible, we recognise that travel's not always possible for everyone, so it is also accompanied by a significant outreach element, connecting with the surrounding area in a hub and spoke approach.

This means that we'll be able to support even more people, meeting them where they are. We know that to make this outreach a success, it's crucial that the mental health community embraces our offering and signposts people to what we are offering.

I'm personally so excited by our plans for The Nook and eager to open its doors to the public, many of whom will be able to access barrier-free mental health support for the very first time.

My hope is that you support The Nook and, where appropriate, signpost the people you support through our doors. We're all trying to achieve the same thing, and our hope is that by raising the profile of mental health and reducing the stigma around it, we will encourage more people to seek out help when they need it, with ourselves and with what you offer.

*If you'd like to find out more about The Nook, please visit our website at: [samh.org.uk/the-nook](https://samh.org.uk/the-nook)*

**Alex Cumming** is Executive Director of Delivery and Service Development at SAMH  
(*Scottish Action for Mental Health*)



Mike Moss

# Who's Holding My Coat?

by Mike Moss

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I am in the middle of a session and Tom starts to cry. This is the first time he has cried with me, and it seems he has been building up to this, having recently described feeling there was a wall of tears just waiting to rush in, but he had to hold them back in fear of what might happen he said. He also once talked about a dream where he was walking by the sea and had to try hard to resist being pulled in. We wondered if this might have been a symbol for the tears inside him and, indeed, the fear inside him of what might happen if he did start to cry.

He seems full of tears. It's strange. Here is someone crying and experiencing some overwhelming emotion right in front of me, and I don't speak, I don't act. And yet I experience a feeling of deep empathy, as if I am alongside him as close as I can be, being present in the fullness of my nature of being a helping human. There is nothing to do but be. Something important is happening to Tom. I feel I know this from somewhere deep inside me.

I remember once, in my own therapy, being in a flow of tears and the therapist offered me a tissue. Well meant, of course, but it stopped me experiencing that feeling which felt raw and new and relieving. I wished it had gone on a little longer. On reflection I believe that I would have experienced more about myself at that moment, packed into the flow of tears, if I had been able to just cry, uninterrupted, with an understanding and knowing there was someone there.

So here I am with Tom, I trust he knows where the tissues are if he needs them. It feels as if there is something kind being placed in motion between us. A sensation I can only describe as me being able to connect to something life affirming. Having a strong sense of being alongside, witnessing new feelings happening and being lived, and in these moments getting closer to who Tom is. Getting closer to who I am too, as Mike the therapist, the man, the child, the human being. Trusting there is potential new life forming and growing. And all is meaningful in this experience; honouring Tom is finding his way. Feelings surfacing slowly and powerfully, releasing gently at their right time, ebbing and flowing, and things being put in place somehow, opening, and easing towards healing.

I am moved. Tom's distress seems to touch me in my heart. I reach out to him from what feels like my heart, following an invisible stream of energy between us, linking our spirit over many feelings passing through an unseen realm: a whole system of fibres of presence, outside and inside ourselves, criss-crossing and vibrating, activated, live, setting in motion the depth of sacredness in both of us. Here and now in this moment. There is softness in my own tears too as I feel his tears through me. I am seeing the fullness of Tom lovingly through them, reaching out, listening, understanding, and being aware of gently holding. He is crying because there is something that needs to be expressed and his body is communicating it.

Carl Rogers (1902-87) writes about a similar experience he had in connection with a client where he reveals that "It seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present." (Rogers, 1980, p. 129)

Tom is having a big experience right now. I know this is difficult for him, and I know this might feel scary, but I also feel it might be truly helpful, as if the tears he has been holding back over

the years may be starting to dissolve some of the fears he has held. I imagine a cleansing of the wounds of painful memories just enough to see what else might be there. This is a small step. What else might be understood, what else might be longing to be heard, to emerge into a safer place in the world?

And then later, as we slowly move towards ending the session, I finally want to confirm if Tom is ok to meet again.

“Yes, please.” he says, and “thank you, I would like that, same time next week if that’s ok?” And then he gets up and puts his coat on and smiles.

“It’s all about coats isn’t it,” he says.

The space in the room feels like it has taken on a new shape, it is brighter and more open as he walks out. Tom also looks lighter somehow and I feel lighter too. Working with clients close to the edge of their painful experience is tough sometimes, and also remarkable. I am always aware of the potential risk, and growth, and also the possibility something will change whenever a struggle is touched on. It is not straightforward moving into the realms of what is making us struggle, where something starts to emerge, not quite formed, but in the process of forming, as if it is just letting us know it’s there.

I am beginning to trust this idea of feelings letting us know they are there and how they communicate what is needed through us both, client and therapist. Even if it is only confirming there is “a something”. See Eugene Gendlin (1926-2017) in Lou (2017, Feb 5)

There may even be symbols, which are always correct in my experience, like the wall of tears for instance that Tom described, or also being pulled towards the sea. We may have to wait a long time for understanding to emerge, and it may never come up fully, but we know it’s there. I also believe at times when clients experience their feelings and release them through tears, as with Tom, tears may be able to wash away something from inside. It feels like a cleansing. Perhaps some of our pain starts to dissolve, as if it has been waiting for the right moment, and I wonder if this can help another part of us start to grow.

Rogers also writes about the therapist’s skills in listening deeply at these moments of intimacy, where being listened to can have an effect on the client when they experience being genuinely heard by another person.

Writing in *A Way of Being* (Rogers, 1980), although not writing specifically about tears, Rogers describes how “elements that seem insoluble become soluble when someone listens” (Rogers, 1980, p. 12) and how he believes this can transform the client’s experience of what they might be struggling with when they are heard deeply by another person. And “how confusions that seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams when one is heard” (Rogers, 1980, p. 12).

I appreciate this image of clear flowing streams, which takes me right back to Tom’s tears and my own empathic tears, the stream being a symbol of the flow of connection and how powerful and transformative this work we do as therapist can be. I also know from my own experience as a client, a release of tears can let hope in, and how the freeing of feelings I have been afraid of or ashamed of can offer clarity and a way forward. Rogers also describes listening to his clients as being like “listening to the music of the spheres because beyond the immediate message of the person, no matter what that might be, there is the universal. Hidden in all of the personal communication which I really hear, there seem to be orderly psychological laws, aspects of the same order we find in the universe as a whole.” (Rogers 1980, p. 8)

He goes on to say that over time he has learned to make an attempt to really hear the sounds and shapes of his client’s “inner world” and asks himself “Can I resonate to what he is saying so deeply that I sense the meanings he is afraid of yet would like to communicate, as well as those he knows?” (Rogers 1980, p. 8)

I believe that when a person tells the story of their struggle, in whatever ways they can manage to tell, and experience their story being empathically witnessed by another, regardless of colour, privilege, race, politics, gender or sexuality, it is a way of inviting a person from isolation to connection, from their being alone to being all one. My questions to myself as a therapist, then, are: Am I able to really listen to my clients and how do I know I am hearing them well enough? Do I really believe that how I am able to be inside and outside of me will be sufficient enough? Can I effectively be alongside a person in their sadness, their pain, their joy, their confusion, their trauma? Can I fully hear them in their heart by listening from my heart?

I have to say that I don't know if I can, truly. I don't have a plan for my next client. I don't know if I can help them. I am not an expert in them. I am not an expert in me either. I also know that sometimes I am not fully present every time with every client. However I try to be, as best as I can. Being able to listen and genuinely trying to understand a client is something I can only truly strive for. I believe we are all in the process of learning how to be in the world, and that we can all learn from the experience of being helped and helping each other, and that we always take our individual experience onto the next situation, or person, or client.

Tom's parents struggled with alcohol and drugs. He said he could understand how they were like that, and it didn't really bother him that much now. But I also heard in his words that he had failed at school, failed at getting a job, failed at finding a relationship with a girl, and had failed at being the child he wished he had been growing up, and that life sucks most of the time. Listening to Tom this way was difficult at times for me, as I really wanted to help him look at how he appeared to be stuck in his view of his past which he felt didn't really bother him. To me, it felt like there was incongruence.

I could really feel Tom's need to be held and to know that he was ok. He was a survivor, and yet he wasn't aware of having been wounded. I felt he had a lot more to say at times, and then he would talk about something else. I felt sad and heard his struggling. My experience of him was that he felt rejected, although he always appeared positive, and I often wondered what it might be like for him to explore what was behind his ways of being. I knew his life had been very difficult and he had experienced some very violent physical abuse from his father, and there were some horrific stories.

On reflection I honestly do think we created a safe space to explore some of the things he had never been able to tell anyone. Most of our work together was around the things he was doing now, his hopes for the future and how he was coping. I felt like it was a warm relationship, and we shared some humour, and I think he began to trust more of himself in our being together. I felt privileged he had been able to talk about some traumatic events. I trusted this experience of therapy had been helpful, being listened to deeply at times and that we could talk about other things in his life that seemed lighter, still held in the knowledge we had connected at depth.

Tom was the youngest in his peer group. He would talk about the adventures he and his friends had and would share some lively stories. I sensed his yearning to feel better about himself and put distance between his past and present experiencing. He once told me he had lost a bit of confidence and described being anxious at times and that he wanted to be happier, and then – almost in the same breath – didn't want to go any further.

*“Well, that's life”, he used to say.*

I had been working with Tom for just over a year, and I sometimes felt sadness in me when he talked about his friendships. He wanted to feel accepted in a particular group of friends and, at times, talked about wishing he was more like them. On one occasion he told he had been out at the weekend where he and his friends visited a night club in town. They had been out till the early hours, and he had got drunk. He said he had a great time. During the conversation he mentioned he had been “holding the coats”. I was curious. I asked some more and discovered that whenever he went out night clubbing with his friends, they would give him their coats to hold. I wondered what this was like for Tom. I imagined him standing at the bar with his arms outstretched, each coat being dumped on him so the others could have fun, and he would be smiling.

“So, how many coats?” I asked.

“It could be 6 or 7.”

“So, you hold all the coats while they dance?”

“Sometimes they don’t dance that much, we just stand and watch.”

“What if you want to dance?” I asked

“Oh, that’s ok, I am happy just to watch. They like me being there to hold their coats. I don’t mind.”

This was how it was for Tom on a night out and from his experience he was having a good time. At these moments he felt part of the group; he was happy and felt that he was being included by looking after their coats. It was me who was frustrated; me who was annoyed, me who was sad for him. It felt such a shame, here was this young man trying to join in and yet, to me it, seemed he was being taken advantage of. I didn’t say this though. I listened to what was happening in me, and it felt like a judgment, and then I listened to what I was hearing from Tom and on one level he was genuinely happy. To me it felt worthy of further exploration though, as I was curious about what else might be happening for him, even though he may not have been aware of anything else other than he seemed to think this was ok.

“But what if you want to dance, would someone hold your coat?”

“Oh, I don’t really like dancing”, he said.

“I feel a bit sad for you, standing there on your own with the coats.”

“I’m ok, I am not on my own”, he replied.

“Well Tom, all I can say is that I hope someone would hold your coat if you ever changed your mind and wanted to dance.”

And he smiled.

Eventually I think our work together helped Tom find more understanding of what he felt he wanted in life, also discovering what more accurately fitted his experience from his perspective. I hoped that he would continue to move a little more freely in terms of the suffering he experienced and find a more peaceful way perhaps to walk along the beach without fear of being pulled into the sea.

The events from his past had affected him and he had spoken about some of the things that had happened, but they had not “made him” he said. He began to find that he could trust himself to experience his feelings a little more and in addition was able to make connections more easily with the events in his past and find some understanding.

Tom also felt some of the challenges he had experienced had made him unique and that he was now able to accept his own value in being the person he was. I believe that, from having been genuinely listened to and being in relationship with another person, this had helped him listen to and be in more genuine relationship with himself. In my experience this kind of deep listening can have a profound effect, and evidences that indeed we are all connected at some level, all the way back to the first humans, and that we can help each other. And how we relate with each other is important.

When we go towards listening deeply with the intention and hope of understanding the other, we may discover we speak from the same inner voice, the same spark, igniting a universal law of actualisation, where healing and growth is waiting for its potential to be activated in us all, in me and in you and in the other and in the world, whenever we are deeply heard.

I enjoyed getting to know Tom and sometimes felt that I was holding his coat during our work together. I remember mentioning the idea of me holding his coat a few times, and I think he appreciated this. And then he got up and put on his coat and smiled.

*“It’s all about coats isn’t it”, he said.*

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This article was previously published in the Spring 2025 issue of *Person-centred Quarterly*. Personal details have been altered so that any individual cannot be identified either directly or indirectly and any themes are a composite from the authors experience over many years.

## Biography

**Mike Moss** is a BACP registered Counsellor and Supervisor. He has worked in voluntary and statutory organisations for over 40 years and is currently employed as a counsellor in a school. He describes his approach as Person-Centred with an interest in the Transpersonal. He has written widely about the power of the therapeutic relationship and presented his work at workshops and national and international conferences. He has a small private practice offering counselling, supervision and training and can be contacted at: [mike.moss@outlook.com](mailto:mike.moss@outlook.com)

# COSCA Spotlight On...

## Recognition Scheme Assessors and Verifiers



Jenna Fraser

by Jenna Fraser

COSCA is delighted to announce a new regular article in the COSCA Journal: *Spotlight on...* Each Journal will now include an article on an aspect of COSCA that you may not know much about. If there's anything that you would like me to include, please email: [jenna@cosca.org.uk](mailto:jenna@cosca.org.uk) and I'll see what I can do about including it in a future Journal.

COSCA's Recognition Scheme is COSCA's stamp of excellence for COSCA Member Organisations. It involves an initial policy review and then site visit for membership of the Scheme; and then annual policy review and three yearly external verification. To find out more see: <https://cosca.org.uk/our-services/cosca-Recognition-Scheme/cosca-Recognition-Scheme-organisations>

To ensure impartiality and to offer fresh points of view, COSCA has a team of experienced and enthusiastic Assessors and Verifiers who accompany me on site visits and review policies and procedures. All COSCA Recognition Scheme Assessors and Verifiers generously give their time free of charge, and I thought you like might to hear a little about why they do this:



Let me start by introducing myself. I am Fiona McCall and I am now retired. For more years than I care to mention, I have been involved in the counselling sector as a trainer, counsellor, and lecturer. It was the emergence of COSCA as an organisation that resulted in me becoming involved as a volunteer. I have had and continue to be involved in several roles within COSCA, one of which is being an Assessor and Verifier for the Recognition Scheme. I joined the Recognition Scheme nearly 20 years ago. It was a role that I could do, as in the past I completed the SQA assessor and verifier qualification and had practical experience in this area of work. However, once I began to carry out the role, it was the process itself which I enjoyed.

Prior to Covid lockdown this involved site visits and meetings with a range of staff and volunteers face to face. This was an invaluable experience and showed the diversity of people and organisations within the counselling sector. Post-Covid the how of assessing changed and became more of a paper exercise for me. I have mainly been involved in looking at applications for continuation of Recognition, which happens every three years. This for me has become a fascinating experience. Now I have the chance to see organisations development and expansion over longer period of times. How they responded to the challenges of lockdown and adapted and used their creativity to ensure services continued was reassuring. That organisations managed to maintain standards and counselling services, as they managed to move over to offering online in a very short timescale, was a credit to the staff and volunteers. As an Assessor it was crucial that we also adapted to the organisations needing to work differently yet still meet the Recognition standards. It was a steep learning curve for everyone. The mixed services now to be found in the organisations is reflected in their continued Recognition by COSCA.

Having been involved with the Recognition Scheme for so long, it has offered the opportunity to see how the services have grown and developed. I now see organisations that I assessed for their initial Recognition now submitting for continued Recognition 12 years on. This is a credit to COSCA and the workers who have set up and developed the Scheme. It is a central part of counselling standards now. The Scheme also challenges organisations to work continually on improving and developing

both within existing services and in expanding into new fields. It is this aspect of the assessment process I particularly enjoy reading about. As with many of the groups of volunteers working within COSCA, what can look like a boring and mundane activity ends up being far more complex and intriguing than expected. So, give it a go.



**Lisa McGilvray**, Counsellor, Supervisor: BACP and COSCA accredited. COSCA accredited trainer. I qualified as a person-centred counsellor in 2013 and went on to complete my MSc in counselling research. I have worked with clients in the third and private sectors and been a trainer for the Counselling Skills, Diploma, Masters and Supervisor training. My love of all things creative and outdoors keeps me entertained when I am not working.

My choice to become a volunteer Assessor and external Verifier for the COSCA Recognition Scheme was driven by my alignment with the values of COSCA as a professional training body. Their culture is practical and progressive. I like how they connect with the national counselling and psychotherapy training organisations. I think this connection enables COSCA organisations to meet UK standards, keep informed and share practice, all of which are essential for the progression of mental health services and support.

On a personal level it was my curiosity about how different counselling services operate that attracted me to the role. It can take time to review all the documentation, consolidate the content and offer constructive feedback. However, it has allowed me a precious insight into the incredible work of COSCA Recognised Organisations and the high levels of accountability, quality assurance and standards they need to meet. It's been a privilege to learn about the different and diverse organisations that COSCA Recognise and most importantly the focus they all share, their clients.

COSCA is so grateful to the work of volunteers who give their time and expertise freely to further counselling and counselling skills in Scotland. If your organisation is interested in joining COSCA's Recognition Scheme, or if you think you have skills that you would like to offer as a potential Assessor and Verifier, please get in touch: [jenna@cosca.org.uk](mailto:jenna@cosca.org.uk)

## Biography

**Jenna Fraser** is COSCA's Recognition Scheme Development Officer, working closely with Member Organisations to improve Standards and supporting the Recognition Scheme Community. She also has a small private practice, working with both clients and supervisees, in Edinburgh and online.

# Creating Space:

## A Reflective Account of Scotland's First South Asian Therapist Networking Event



by Raj Sandhu Chima

Raj Sandhu Chima

### Introduction

There are moments in a career that shift something inside you. For me, that moment happened on 16th May 2025, when Scottish Asian Counselling Services (SACS) hosted Scotland's first networking event for South Asian therapists. It was *Mental Health Awareness Week*, and yet, for those of us in the room, this gathering was more than a calendar date; it was a long-awaited exhale.

For the 24 therapists who came from across Scotland, it wasn't just about networking. It was about recognition. To walk into a room where your name, your story, and your journey didn't need translating or defending was transformative. It reminded us that professional validation isn't only earned through degrees, but also through being seen, heard, and understood.

### Why This Space Was Urgent

South Asian therapists in Scotland often navigate a landscape where cultural understanding is limited, and representation remains scarce. According to the Health and Care Professions Council (2023), 90% of registered practitioner psychologists identify as White, with only 4.3% identifying as Asian. These numbers are not just statistics, they echo through supervision rooms, training programmes, and professional silence.

The IAPT BAME *Positive Practice Guide* (NHS England, 2019) notes that clients from ethnically diverse communities are more likely to disengage when therapy fails to acknowledge their cultural identity. If our clients feel unseen, how can we, therapists from those same communities, feel any different within the profession?

This event was not just a gathering. It was a refusal to keep working in silos. It was about building collective strength in a profession that often renders us invisible.

### My Personal Reflection

As Co-Founder of SACS and a practising CBT psychotherapist, I co-organised this event out of both professional necessity and personal hunger. I did not realise how much I needed that kind of connection until I was in the room. There was a warmth that felt unfamiliar in professional spaces, a trust born not just of shared training but shared cultural context.

For once, we were not explaining ourselves. We were connecting, building, laughing. It felt like a professional homecoming. That emotional release is something I'll never forget.

### What the Day Offered

We opened with our "Speed Therapist Connections" activity, brief, rotating conversations designed to foster quick rapport. But what emerged wasn't just a connection, it was validation. Therapists found immediate common ground in cultural nuance, community expectations, and shared challenges.

The evening was anchored by our guest speaker, Satinder Panesar – author, therapist, and trailblazer.

With over 30 years of experience, she offered reflections on rupture, race, and safety in the therapy room. Her words gave voice to the very things many of us had internalised. Her presence reminded us: we belong here, and we are not alone.

### A Call for Inclusive Practice

What happens when you finally feel seen? You begin to speak. That's what this event ignited a desire to shape the profession we are part of, rather than merely survive within it.

- CPD must include training on culture, race, and identity, not as token modules but as core components of reflective practice.
- Supervision must hold space for the emotional labour therapists of colour carry daily.
- And inclusion must go beyond numbers. It must feel like belonging.

The Glasgow City HSCP (2022) report highlights barriers BME communities face, such as stigma, mistrust, and fear of being misunderstood. These issues affect both clients and the therapists who serve them. We cannot separate the two. To support our communities, we must also support their therapists.

Another reality we cannot ignore is the near absence of South Asian male therapists in spaces like these. Their voices are vital, especially in communities where cultural norms often discourage men from seeking help. Representation isn't just about presence, it's about permission. When men see therapists who look like them, speak like them, and understand their cultural worldviews, it can dismantle generations of silence around mental health.

### What Comes Next

The feedback was unanimous: this cannot be the end. At SACS, we are committed to building on the momentum through peer support networks, culturally responsive workshops, and supervision spaces that reflect our lived realities.

At the event, we were honoured to receive formal recognition through a motion raised in the Scottish Parliament by Pam Gosal MSP. Her acknowledgement of the importance of this gathering and the work of SACS gave the event a powerful sense of legitimacy and reminded us that inclusion must be recognised not only in therapy rooms, but in our public institutions.

Counselling in Scotland is evolving. But it won't evolve fast enough unless we co-create that change. We must build it together, from the margins inward.

### Conclusion

We did not just host an event. We created space. Space for hope. For truth-telling. For healing.

As we move forward, I invite the wider counselling community, especially COSCA readers, to ask not only, "Who is in the room?" but "Who feels safe enough to speak?"

South Asian therapists are not guests in this field. We are its future. And that future is already unfolding, one conversation at a time.

### Biography

**Raj Sandhu Chima** is an accredited CBT psychotherapist, clinical supervisor, and Co-Founder of Scottish Asian Counselling Services (SACS). She also founded the Sikh Counselling Directory and is committed to culturally safe practice and equitable access to mental health care.

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# New Registrants on the COSCA Register of Counsellors and Psychotherapists and New Members

## **COSCA ACCREDITED COUNSELLOR MEMBER**

STEVE KELLY  
MARK CUDDIHY

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BEIRA'S PLACE  
ALL MINDS  
URBAN COMMUNITY PROJECT  
HOPE PARK COUNSELLING CENTRE  
VITAL PATHWAYS TRAINING



**COSCA**

Counselling & Psychotherapy  
in Scotland

## VISION

A listening, caring society that  
values people's well being.

## PURPOSE

As Scotland's professional body  
for counselling and psychotherapy,  
COSCA seeks to advance all forms  
of counselling and psychotherapy  
and use of counselling skills by  
promoting best practice and  
through the delivery of a range  
of sustainable services.

# Forthcoming Events 2025

Details of all events are on the COSCA website:  
[www.cosca.org.uk](http://www.cosca.org.uk)

Please contact Christina Oliver, COSCA Administrator,  
for further details on any of the events below:

[christina@cosca.org.uk](mailto:christina@cosca.org.uk)

Telephone: **01786 475 140**

## COSCA 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Trainers Event

Theme: "Risk and Growth":

Thursday the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2025

Trainer Accreditation Workshop:

Tuesday the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2025

Counsellor Accreditation Workshop:

Thursday the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2025

### Contact us

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