

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me Marie! I want to be mindful of your time, so I've prepared a few questions to help guide our conversation during the meeting.

Q: Can you share your journey about getting into counselling and how you got started in the field?

I love this story! I was working in human resources (relocation and recruitment) right after high school and years later, was taking University business courses part time, at which point I hit a personal crisis in my life that led me to seek counselling for the first time. I enjoyed my therapeutic experience so much, and actually said to my therapist "I want to do what you do". It was incredibly impactful for me and I wanted to be that kind of support for other people so I switched my major to psychology, quit my job to study full time and did two degrees back to back (later in life, in my 30s) I've never looked back!

I also completed the YU MACP program when the program was quite new (early-mid 2000s) and so that was a leap of faith that worked out quite well for me. It also fit my life at the time to work remotely and be self-directed in nature.

Q: Can you describe the process of how you got into private practice and how long have you been self-employed?

I worked in clinical practice on a part-time basis since I graduated. I continued on with this after I achieved my "RCC" status and worked like this for several years. Fast forward to 2020, and I was working FT as a Clinical Manager for an EAP company and then Covid-19 happened. I needed to step away from work for personal reasons, and it was during this time that I decided to take another leap of faith. I made the decision to step away from FT work and built up my private practice to full-time status. I began working with some contracts to stay busy but my private practice flourished. Took some time and patience, but I'm happily busy these days.

What are necessities of being in private practice: aligning with an association for several reasons, mine is BCACC in BC, and as an RCC we collect GST, so you need your own GST number. I had a website for a while but now I just run with a Psychology Today profile. I am also involved in a large clinical network of other mental health practitioners where we assist each other and make referrals as appropriate.

Q: What are some the major rewards as well as drawbacks of a counselling career?

I was very much in alignment with the passion with what I did [changing careers to mental health and counselling] and that has not changed.

This work is very stressful and complicated and you need to do it for the right reasons. If you don't have a passion for helping people and if you are in it to make large amounts money it probably won't work out for you. You will hear many wonderful stories from clients, as well as tough, difficult or incredibly sad things and you need to be able to "ground yourself" through the process of this work. Ultimately, what keeps me motivated and connected is knowing that I am making a difference in someone's life the way someone had done the same for me.

The drawbacks? Most of my colleagues and I would say that the isolation of working in private practice is taxing. However, we stay connected in meetings via Zoom or FTF (e.g. socials, dinners, seeing others at the office) to maintain that social connectivity. Self-employment also carries more work (e.g. paying the GST to the government) and managing your own time effectively. However, personally I would have say that the drawbacks are tolerable because, again, I love what I do.

Q: What practices do you have for self-care and maintaining a health work-life balance?

This is one of my favourite topics! Certainly the pandemic highlighted the importance of self care due the conversations clinicians were having with their clients. And I always believe in “walking the talk”, I would never say something to a client and not do it myself. My rule is when I get highly stressed, I stop and say “what do I need?” (e.g. sleep, rest, move, etc.)

I practice yoga, biking and maintain those social connections to manage the isolation of private practice. I also book my clients during the day when it suits my schedule for example, morning or evening appointments so that I can get out and bike/walk midday. I also eat healthily as well as maintain proper sleep and rest hygiene.

Most importantly to prevent burnout I won't work beyond my ability and capacity in a day. I also check in regularly and see what I need and adjust accordingly. Self-care and self-compassion go hand in hand and everyone could benefit from this.

Q: Can you share any emerging issues or trends you see in the counselling profession today?

I've had conversations with my colleagues about this and we have noticed some trends since Covid-19.

There is a propensity for doctors and health care providers (due 10 min. max appts.) to over-prescribe psychotropic medications (e.g. anti-depressants) and use “quick” psychological diagnoses with clients (esp. late teens and those in their early 20s) when they are experiencing general mental health issues (e.g. mild to moderate anxiety and depression) which is a normal human experience. And this is where the conversation of seeking therapy and self-compassion come into play where I help the client to see that it is normal to feel your emotions, or experience stress or anxiety at times and perhaps they will benefit from addressing their resiliency or coping skills instead. Once clients receive some psychoeducation (e.g. talk therapy, other means of coping) on managing their stress reactions, they then realize they may not need medication and this also increases client capacity in their own decision-making and confidence.

Q: What advice do you have for someone starting their career in counselling?

In supervision, this is what I tell clinicians: First you need to do the work yourself, increase your own self-awareness, perhaps get a client yourself and work with a good therapist to assist with this. Second, recognize your strengths and limitations (e.g. working with couples vs. individual, crisis work, etc.). And thirdly, make sure you are connected through supervision for ethical purposes and that you are seeking consultation from someone to help you through your own learning in practice.

Also, learning is ongoing, ask lots of questions and be sure you are staying on top of the research/current trends (e.g. articles, textbooks) and learning about different approaches (e.g. tapping and somatic therapy). You're also going to learn a lot from your clients and fellow colleagues and staying on top of the literature will serve your clients better.

Above all I would advise future counsellors to increase your capacity to be flexible, to be comfortable with the unknown, join as many groups as you can to network (e.g. social media, organizations, etc.) and share resources, as well as have a solid self-care plan in place.

A mantra I relay to my clients and new counsellors is to have a “hat hard and loose hips” approach throughout life and what this means is to have a sense of solid protection within yourself with the hard hat while still being open to change and keeping yourself flexible.

Also, find ways to give back if you can. I’ve spent many years mentoring others from both my Alumni, including Yorkville U. It’s a great feeling to contribute to the next generation of therapists being launched in the world.