

Introducing Us – Connection Heals the elements to the art of listening

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In this podcast the hosts Dr Nicola Brough and Judy Hemmons introduce themselves, share their backgrounds and experiences that brought them to work in the therapeutic field.

Hi, I'm your host, Dr. Nicola Brough. I've been a complementary health practitioner for over 20 years. And I'm the director of Measure Well, a company established to help those that help others deliver best practice through education and training. And to promote the use of the Warwick Holistic Health Questionnaire, which is a measure of wellbeing.

I'm passionate about sharing knowledge to enhance practice. The idea for this series of podcasts came about through conversations with one of my supervisors Judy Hammonds, who I will introduce you to shortly. Judy and I met in 2009, when we were both volunteering on the cranial sacral therapy Association Research Committee, during which time I undertook research into clients' experiences of cranial sacral therapy and went on to develop the worry holistic health questionnaire as part of my PhD. Over the years, our relationship has taken many forms. We have been peers, supervisor and supervisee, we have co facilitated training together. And in that time, Judy has been a supportive and encouraging presence for me personally and professionally. I want to say what a privilege it is to be working alongside Judy, once more. She brings so much experience and a depth of understanding of therapeutic relationships. And more importantly, she is a beautiful human being. Welcome, Judy.

So for the podcast, we're going to look at introducing ourselves. So people who are listening to us understand not only our background, but what's motivating us to do this.

So Nicola, tell me in the confined space, rather than the kind of 15 weeks, we'd need to get a sense of really what this is about, just in a short time. How did you get here, what drives you? What's your background and experience?

So I first started to have an interest in complementary and alternative approaches to health and body work through my own health issues.

And that is certainly over 20 years ago now. And I did my initial training in Australia. And I trained as a massage therapist, aromatherapists, reflexologist. And I also had an interest in Reiki at that point also. So I would consider myself a body-worker, and an energy practitioner. And I've also qualified as a craniosacral therapist and have been in practice for around 18 years as a craniosacral therapist.

So I have some experience of being in private practice, I've always been in private practice, and really feel very privileged to do the work that I do with clients. My area of interest is working with people whose lives have been too scary to be in their bodies. So I see myself as a guide and a way of helping someone to move towards themselves, and to befriend their bodies and find the bodies as a place of safety, as opposed to a place of, you know, of not being safe. So that's my area of interest. And in terms of this journey with yourself and the podcasts and Measure Well. I'm really interested in best practice, but not in a rigid way. Yes, I think there are practices that are good practice and are good things to do that ways of practicing that can enhance therapeutic relationships. But I'm also for taking risks and permission giving and going where you need to go in order to enable a client to find themselves actually. Yeah.

I really like risk taking it's a combination of ethics and connection that you're doing it at the service of your client, not for kicks or ego. Yes. Yeah and I guess I want to say here as well that my own therapeutic journey is really important enabler I believe for my clients. If I hadn't gone to the places I've gone to within myself, I don't know whether I would have the insight or expertise or you know, ability to, to meet some of my clients where they are. That feels important to bring an embodied knowledge forward also. Thank you. Thank you.

So on the same note Judy, I'm really interested to hear more about your background as a therapist and what inspires you and why you're also interested in sharing your knowledge.

What's come to mind listening to you, is the fact that I've had five near death experiences in my life, and thoughts, they've all been very different. And the existential loneliness, I think, from having been in such extremities at times, and the unwillingness of people around me to be able to meet me there, has been quite a strong driver for me to be sensitive and wanting to be present with people. When they're in pain or distressed in some way. I started my career originally as a nurse. I thought I wanted to travel. And I thought I could always travel anywhere if I'm a nurse, it wasn't any great calling. But nursing taught me a real horror of how the medical system dissects bodies and cuts them up into specialisms and doesn't allow a communication between the whole and I graduated in 1979.



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So holistic medicines have come on a lot more since then. But actually, practice hasn't changed that much. As far as I can see, it is easier to be mechanistic than it is to see the whole of a person. So, once I graduated, I decided to study homoeopathy because I thought it didn't, really now I can't remember what pushed me towards that, other than a desire to understand healing and better lives. And that taught me my philosophy of healing. And the understanding that we are the kind of Law of Cure, which I think stands the test of time. I think it's Hahnemann who wrote about that, and that we hear from the inside out, and from the above or below. So if you've got some, you know, the most important the brain and the heart, which is single organs into the lungs, and kidneys, and there's less their organs that you couldn't live without, like the spleen and, you know, large parts of the gut, but you can't survive if your hearts gone. So, kind of understanding that priority and listening to symptoms. I've probably always been a listener in my life, and to the training that I've done bit by bit. Homoeopathy was too intellectual. And I felt like if I didn't marry homoeopathy and just become a homoeopathic nerd, I wasn't good at it. You have to know remedies so well, and to be effective, it's such a difficult process to do. Probably easier. Now. I think there's lots more kinds of ways of distilling information, yes, but just in terms of book knowledge. It was too cerebral for me. So I, too, went off and studied massage.

Homoeopathy taught me about cranial sacral therapy. At that stage, I was taught that the only physical treatment of somebody had a lot of back pain or physical pain that couldn't be remedied by homoeopathy. A cranial treatment is gentle enough and supportive enough not to antidote the energetics of a homoeopathic remedy.

So kind of I clocked cranial sacral therapy just then as little, oh that's interesting. So I studied massage, and then realized that I got a huge amount out of it and learnt the body mind spirit as people kind of relaxed the armory of their physical bodies that start to talk. And then I realized that I needed to get some skills in helping support people while they talked.

So I've done this kind of zigzagging all through my life and my professional career, of moving from some kind of bodywork and healing into skills of listening and learning how to support people through emotional upheavals. So I went, I think I went, doesn't matter now. But I did a Relate training, I then did a craniosacral training parallel to that. And it was the depth that I was learning to work with people that brought me to my own limitations. And as you're saying, about healing and personal therapy and the work, the only work that's really relevant is what we do on ourselves. That's the biggest learning we can do.

So, understanding when I was working with people as meeting, the same block, eventually the penny dropped, that it was me that was in the way, that it wasn't the other person. So that took me into my therapy. And then I understood the depth that I wanted to work with, which took me into my psychotherapy training. And that's when I qualified in 1998, from psychotherapy. And I did a course that I thought I could incorporate body work with talking and was told at the end of the course, we weren't allowed to, we hadn't been trained to touch people. So it truly infuriated me to put it mildly, after a huge amount of investment in my masters at that point.

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And I went on and did a Zen based philosophical training. And that really, I think that's what helped me distill my understanding about the quality of listening. Yes, and how to listen, psychotherapist, and capsules talk about in body listening. And it's like the depths that are listening that you can achieve through cranial work. When you're kind of you're using the fluid body to resonate with, it just takes it to another level. Yes, so after my craniosacral training was Paul Vic, I spent 10 years I found a really good supervisor, who could support me working, learning how to work as a psychotherapist touching people. So how to integrate both specialisms. And I found for a good while somebody could come to me with a bad back, didn't want to talk just wanted to feel better, or somebody could come and they wanted to talk and were appalled at the idea of me touching them. But most people, there was some combination where we'd explore kind of working cranially and listening. And kind of over the last 10-15 years, I've probably moved away from hands on, and just really developed, embodied listening. And interestingly, the last six months or a year, post COVID, I think, the isolation that people have felt, I think there's more of a call for hands on treatment now. Yes. So I'm open to the kind of evolution of my practice, really.

So the pluralism?

Thank you. Over the years, because I've had this interest in body, mind and spirit and felt quite an outsider, I've chosen really good supervisors to work with. And the last supervisor that I've had to I now have developed a relational school along with another colleague, through supervision with him and discussion about what I was doing from a clinical perspective and a psychotherapy. We were starting to distill the different elements that are in a therapeutic relationship and not differentiating between touch or speech, but just really accepting that any healing relationship has common components.

And I'm very happy to do a podcast and look at that in more depth. But what I wanted to do was validate the model that we'd established. So I started a doctor referred to the search, I'd set up a curriculum based on my, on this relational model that we've set up. And I wanted to research the subtle differences between the cohort of students that I had taught to the old curriculum, and the cohort of students that I taught to the relational curriculum. And the only common ground between the two and understanding was me. And I did two years of my doctorate, but when it came to get ethical approval of the way that I wanted to run the research, which was me as a questioner, because it's me, that's a common ground, I couldn't get ethical approval for that. So I didn't pursue the doctorate. I've actually feel quite angry about that, because I was always clear that that's what I was going to do.

And there's something for me in my process about, because I've always felt like I'm on the edges of acceptable practice. It makes me very interested in ethics and validation. Because what I'm doing may be out of the ordinary, but it doesn't feel wrong. Because my intention feels really clear and my intention, and really passionate about bringing the work and the knowledge that I know, to as wide an audience as I can. What I got out of my doctorate was the introduction to pluralism, as a philosophical, ontological perspective towards therapy of any kind, that actually, you're not even integrating. And you're not gonna say elliptical,

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what I think of the word that's gone for me, the disparaging ways of talking about people who draw different theories in together to work with somebody. And for a lot of purists, it's seen as a vague, clumsy way of working. pluralism, as an idea isn't an acceptance that if there is a theory, somebody's developed, it has validity. And you can't prioritise one over the other.

To my mind, pluralism is what Carl Rogers was talking about when he was working in a client centred way. Because, ideally, what you're doing as any practitioner, you're bringing your world and life experience into the service of your client. Yes. And so if you've got experience, as a librarian, you might be able to bring the kind of whole world of books and stories into your treatments, if you're a aromatherapist therapist, or understanding the census and the power of aromatherapy, or there's no one road that leads to healing. Yes, it's what works, what's drawn you as a practitioner and into the work. So a lot of what I do in my supervision now, is really giving people who come to me for supervision, permission to be themselves fully in the room. And that's a lot of what motivates me to do these podcasts is giving new practitioners permission, with a really ethical mind, to work in the service of their clients.

So it's just such a gift for me to be sitting opposite you and to be having these conversations with you because you have so much knowledge. And I guess what I've just heard you say that not only are you at times a client, you are also the therapist, but you are also a supervisor and therefore guide of others. And, you know, so you really have those depths and levels of understanding of all of the layers that it is to sit in and be part of the therapeutic relationship.

I'm just so excited about these podcasts and have no doubt that our conversations will spark curiosities for other new practitioners and those that are you know, I have experience as well, because I just know that the topics of discussion, and the places that we will go will be boundless. So thank you so much for being on this journey with me. It's so exciting. Thank you.

End

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