
Transformational Leaders in the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association: An Interview with Blythe Shepard Leaders transformationnels au sein de l'Association canadienne de counseling et de psychothérapie : Une entrevue avec Blythe Shepard

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ABSTRACT

This article provides highlights from an interview with Dr. Blythe Shepard, a prominent leader in the counselling profession in Canada. The article focuses on Dr. Shepard's involvement with various professional counselling organizations in Canada and advocacy projects developed to increase awareness of the profession. Dr. Shepard also outlines her hopes for the future of the profession in Canada, and perceived obstacles which need to be addressed.

Blythe Shepard, PhD, is of British and Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) ancestry and a professor of counselling psychology in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge. She has extensive research and elementary teaching experience in rural settings. Her research and teaching foci includes life-career development and counselling, counsellor training and identity, clinical supervision, and child and adolescent mental health.



Dr. Shepard served on the Board and the Executive Committee of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) for 10 years and is now president emerita. She co-chaired the National Symposium on Counsellor Mobility for two years (2009–2011) and sits on several committees involved in regulation of counselling therapists in British Columbia and Alberta. She served on the BC Task Group responsible for the creation and revision of entry to practice competencies for counsellors. She co-chairs the CCPA Clinical Supervision Competency Framework project and is a recipient of the CCPA Professional Contribution Award in recognition of outstanding promotion of the counselling profession in Canada. Dr. Shepard is the treasurer of the International Association for Counselling (IAC) and chairs the IAC Indigenous Roundtable. She provides counselling services to rural youth and women and offers supervision to clinical supervisors in Canada.

RÉSUMÉ

On présente dans cet article les points saillants d'une entrevue menée avec la D^{re} Blythe Shepard, chef de file de la profession du counseling au Canada. On y aborde l'engagement de la D^{re} Shepard au sein de divers organismes professionnels du counseling au Canada et ses projets de sensibilisation à la profession et de défense de ses droits. L'entrevue fait aussi ressortir ses espoirs en ce qui concerne l'avenir de la profession au Canada, ainsi que les obstacles qui, selon elle, devront être surmontés.

LINDSAY MORGAN KOZAK (LMK): Hi, Dr. Shepard. Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. To start, could you share some of the background of your training and career with us?

"I was an elementary teacher for 15 years before entering a graduate program in counselling at the University of Victoria in 1995. I had an undergraduate degree in psychology, which allowed me to work with mental health services in a small community as well. I finished my doctoral work in educational psychology (counselling stream) in 2002. I completed two counselling practica at the masters' level, one in a school setting and the other at the university counselling centre. The doctoral internship took place with Child and Youth Mental Health and School District #61 in Victoria, BC, under the supervision of a school psychologist. Since graduation, my clinical work has included counselling youth and women in rural communities, working with adults exiting the sex trade, and career counselling with unemployed loggers.

"I became a counsellor educator in 2000 when I was hired as a visiting professor on a one-year contract with the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, University of Victoria. Upon graduation, I obtained a tenure-track position at the same university. In 2008, I moved to the University of Lethbridge to teach in two programs—the Masters of Counselling blended program and the on-campus Masters of Education program (Counselling Psychology)."

NEAL D. GRAY (NDG): How did your involvement with the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association begin and in what ways have you contributed to the advocacy of the profession?

"As a graduate student in counselling, I served as vice-president of the Career Development Chapter of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) for two years. Upon graduation from my doctoral program, I was elected British Columbia/Yukon National Director. I became involved in efforts to have the counselling profession regulated in the province and joined the BC Task Group for Regulation where I helped to develop the first entry to practice competencies for the profession from 2004 to 2006. This profile was revised in 2007 following a national consultation and validation process. The Entry-to-Practice Competency Profile for Counselling Therapists was taken up by the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO) with some revisions and used as part of the registration process. I continue to work in BC with the Federation of

Associations for Counselling Therapists in British Columbia (FACT-BC) as an observer at the Board table, as a member of the Registration Process Working Group to draft a registration process for the proposed regulatory college, and as a member of the Competency Profile Committee that has revised the 2006 profile. The competency profiles are utilized in the Canadian Professional Standard for Counselling and Psychotherapy (CPSCP): Entry to Practice Competency Assessment, a computer-based simulation-style competency assessment currently used by CRPO in assessing applicants.

“I co-chaired the Inter-Provincial Mobility for the Counselling Profession projects for two years (2009–2011), which was funded by the government of Canada with the aim of developing occupational standards in a manner conducive to labour mobility. The projects brought together stewards of the profession from across Canada to develop scopes of practice and definitions of counselling, and to survey members of the profession about key issues facing the profession regarding recognition.

“When I moved to Alberta in 2008, I took on the position of the Alberta/NWT National Director and the National Treasurer of CCPA. During that time, I formed the Alberta/Northwest Territories Chapter with the aim of advancing the profession and promoting the identity of those in the counselling field in the province and territory. In early 2016, I played a role in assisting the Chapter to form a federation of 13 counselling associations, namely the Federation of Associations for Counselling Therapists (FACT-AB), to develop competencies, bylaws, standards of practice, a definition of counselling and counselling-related activities so that an application for recognition and regulation could be presented to the current government in late 2016.

“Throughout my tenure as President, I strove to promote the profession and its contribution to the mental health and well-being of all Canadians by continuing to build the Association and its outreach to current and future counsellors/psychotherapists, developing the supervision certificate program, increasing the visibility of research undertaken by our members, increasing research-based and applied CCPA publications, reaching out to our northern members, and continuing to support activities that ensure and sustain counsellor competency that include professional learning opportunities and collaboration with national and international counselling associations.”

LMK: Based on your involvement with the association, what have been the major accomplishments of the counselling profession in Canada?

“In my many roles in CCPA including four years as a board member, four years as an Executive Committee member, and four years as Chair of the Certification Committee, I helped to advance the goal of CCPA to promote the profession and its contribution to the mental health and well-being of Canadians by

- assisting in the creation or updating of text-based resources including the *Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Experience: Ethics-based Issues and*

Cases (co-editor, co-author), the revised *Standards of Practice, Supervision of Counselling and Psychotherapy Handbook: A Handbook for Canadian Certified Supervisors and Applicant* (co-author), and the *Clinical Supervision of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Profession*.

- highlighting the importance of receiving effective and competent clinical supervision. Counsellor education programs tend to offer very limited training on the theory and practice of supervision. Consequently, many supervisors have not received adequate training in supervision and may draw largely on personal experiences when supervising trainees. It is critical that supervisors continually seek out opportunities to educate themselves to increase their competence as supervisors, for example, by attending conferences and workshops, reading articles about supervision, and reviewing ethical guidelines of supervisor-supervisee relationships.
- obtaining funding to support the Supervision Competency Profile Project that is funded by CCPA. The project is co-chaired by Dr. Beth Robinson and me and includes a team of five CCPA members who are experienced clinical supervisors. The study commenced with an examination of the literature on supervisor competence in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. We consulted with American experts, Drs. Carol Falender and Janine Bernard, and interviewed experienced Canadian clinical supervisors who represent diverse geographical and employment settings. As a second step, we administered a pan-Canadian survey on clinical supervision in late 2016. The primary objective of this study is to establish a national competency framework to support the continued growth and development of clinical supervision practice in Canada.
- developing a graduate-level course in supervision that was initially offered online through the University of Ottawa. CCPA continues to sponsor the *Counselling Supervision: Theory and Practice* course now at the University of Lethbridge. I am the instructor.
- creating the Canadian Certified Counsellor–Supervisor (CCC-S) designation. The intention of introducing CCC-S includes
 - o promoting professional credibility of clinical supervisors;
 - o assuring the public, employers, regulatory colleges, and practitioners of a minimum standard of competency in clinical supervisors;
 - o promoting the delivery of competent, professional clinical supervision services;
 - o establishing a recognized credential of professional supervision competency;
 - o establishing guidelines for new clinical supervisors; and
 - o promoting continued professional development for clinical supervisors.”

NDG: What are some of the biggest changes you have seen during your time with the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association?

“Five areas stand out: increasing the visibility of the profession by joining with health-related organizations, by actively advocating with members of parliament, by including an Indigenous Director on CCPA’s National Board, by increased regulatory activity across Canada, and by highlighting the increased need for clinical supervision.

“There is increased visibility of the profession through CCPA contributions to health-related national associations such as the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH). Through partnerships with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, Canadian Primary Health Care Research and Innovation Network, Health Action Lobby, and the Psychotherapy Practice Research Network, and through our reciprocal memberships with the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention and the Canadian Education Research Institute for Counselling, CCPA elevates the awareness of the profession of counselling and psychotherapy to other professionals, government ministries, research funders, and the public. CCPA has been involved on the CAMIMH Champions selection committee and attends CAMIMH’s lobby day in October each year. CCPA sits on various committees and engages in many activities such as drafting positions, statements, and recommendations for actions. Through CCPA advocacy efforts, CCPA has played an important role in advancing federal policy, programs, legislation, and regulations related to mental illness and mental health.

“A meeting with the federal Standing Committee on Health (HESA) resulted in an invitation to prepare a written brief for consideration in HESA’s study “*Best Practices and Federal Barriers: Practice and Training of Healthcare Professionals.*” CCPA has also participated in the federal government’s pre-budget consultations by making submissions to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance with specific examples of actions related to mental health that the government should consider as realistic inclusions in the budget.

“CCPA engages in a letter-writing campaign to advocate for the inclusion of counsellors and psychotherapists as eligible service providers. These campaigns have resulted in meetings with Members of Parliament in Ottawa. One such meeting with Mr. Laurie Hawn resulted in an invitation to meet with General (Ret.) Walter Natynczyk, Deputy Minister of Veterans Affairs. CCPA was then invited to prepare a written brief for consideration within the context of the Standing Committee on National Defence study, “Care of Ill and Injured Canadian Armed Forces Members.” CCPA was invited to attend the “lock-up” in which news media, MPs, cabinet ministers, provincial government representatives, and other stakeholders are locked in rooms without phone or Internet access so they can comb through the budget before it is presented in Parliament.

“CCPA consulted with Indigenous leaders in the Association membership to determine ways to enhance representation of Indigenous members on the Board of Directors. In 2013, our first Indigenous Director joined the National Board. Among the numerous roles of this director is finding ways to connect with In-

digenous community counsellors and psychotherapists and to develop culturally appropriate continuing education opportunities that include Indigenous healing methods.

“Efforts toward regulation continue across the country. Currently, counselling and psychotherapy are only regulated in the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. CCPA is actively working toward regulation alongside the following associations under the umbrella term of the Federation of Associations for Counselling Therapists: FACT-BC, FACT-AB, FACT-SK, FACT-MB, and FACT-NL. In New Brunswick, CCPA has provided funding to develop a Private Member’s Bill that is now complete and is scheduled to be tabled in the NB Legislature in 2017. The Counselling Therapist Chapter of the Prince Edward Island Counselling Association sent a letter of intent to the government and is responding to the government’s questions.

“One way to strengthen the profession is to ensure that all counsellors and psychotherapists have access to a qualified supervisor and that they seek out supervision. Ongoing clinical supervision is the key method for improving professional competence. Consistent, high-quality clinical supervision will attract new counsellors, enhance career satisfaction, mitigate burnout among veteran providers, and help clinicians become (and feel) more competent and effective.

“The growing importance and the essential nature of supervision are reflected in two arenas: (a) the increasing competencies sought by professional bodies for counselling therapists, psychologists, psychotherapists, and mental health professionals; and (b) the demand for formal training of clinical supervisors. All counsellors and psychotherapists, regardless of experience, need supervision. Not only do many professional bodies require that members be supervised; it is also seen by many as an ethical imperative.”

LMK: What are your hopes for future counsellor advocacy in Canada?

“Over 3 million Canadian children 12 to 19 years old are at risk of developing depression, with 4,000 15- to 24-year-old Canadians committing suicide each year—the third highest rate in the industrialized world (Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA], 2016). In fact, suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15- to 19-year-olds (CMHA, 2016). Despite these statistics, access to services remains a significant problem, as does continuity of care, lack of public funding, and early diagnosis. Given the shortage of mental health services across Canada and the increasing costs for health care, it is critical that we utilize the most appropriately trained mental health professionals across the continuum of care, either as individual practitioners or as members of a multi-professional team.

“Regulation serves many purposes; most importantly, it protects the public from harm. The primary function of a regulatory college is to ensure their members are qualified, competent, and following the defined standards of practice and ethics. Regulatory colleges ensure that the professional is qualified to practice, set standards of practice, and have a code of ethics that the professional must follow.

I hope that within five years, the majority of provinces/territories in Canada have a regulatory college for counsellors/psychotherapists.”

NDG: What challenges to these advocacy efforts exist?

“Currently, in Canada, the major issues that are holding back the regulation of counselling in any jurisdiction appear to be

- the need to prove a case for regulation by a thorough risk of harm analysis, and through that analysis, to define the most appropriate model for regulation;
- the need to define what constitutes counselling for regulation and an understanding that counsellors use many titles for the work that they do;¹
- the need to define what the competencies should be for entry into the profession;
- the need for the different counselling associations whose various members would be regulated by a single college to demonstrate cooperation and agreement on the major issues, including a commitment to fund the start-up phase of the college;
- the need to educate the public about the profession and its purpose: CCPA hosts a public-facing website (www.talkingcanhelp.ca) to assist the public in understanding the role that counselling and psychotherapy can play in supporting individuals, families, groups, and organizations with concerns related to career, education, family, mental health, and mental illness (among others). The website provides the public with information about the profession, how to locate a counsellor, what to expect from counselling, and many other awareness-and-support-related facts.

“There has been recent recognition of mental health as a priority area; recognition of mental health care as a pillar of primary health care and increasing access to mental health care, including the use of multi-profession team approaches. However, there are challenges formally including mental health services rendered by qualified mental health counsellors who have the training and capacity to effectively address many mental health issues in a more cost-effective and timely manner than medical personnel. This challenge can be met by removing erroneous and harmful effects of historical, hierarchical, medicalized approaches to mental health support that have stigmatized persons affected by mental health issues and the nonmedical personnel who provide service delivery to them (e.g., clinical counsellors, mental health counsellors, counselling therapists, psychotherapists). These professionals must be included in existing and new incentive programs aimed at recruiting and retaining health care professionals in Canada’s communities, particularly those in rural, remote, northern, and isolated areas of the country where mental health issues are more prevalent. Multisector planning, social inclusion, and integrated service delivery models are key to ensuring appropriate priority settings and reduction of obstacles and challenges.”

LMK: What could current and future Canadian counsellors do to help with these changes to counselling?

“Canadian counsellors need to step outside their offices and get involved and become informed. Our learning helps us to develop as a profession as we actively advocate for the profession, whether it is becoming personally involved in carrying out an advocacy plan or taking up a membership with an association like CCPA who advocates on your behalf. Individuals can meet with their Member of the Legislative Assembly about the need for regulation of the profession provincially, get involved in regulatory activities in one’s province, or contribute to research and publications based on Canadian research. Become informed about counselling/psychotherapy internationally and join international associations to work collaboratively to professionalize counselling/psychotherapy worldwide.”

NDG: What changes have you seen in counselling degree program accreditation?

“Regarding standardization of counsellor education programs, master’s-level counselling programs can voluntarily submit to a self-study that is reviewed by the Council on Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs (CACEP) under the auspices of the CCPA. To become accredited, a counsellor education program must fulfill certain requirements or standards concerning institutional settings, program mission and objectives, program content, practicum experiences, student selection and advising, faculty qualifications and workload, program governance, instructional support, and self-evaluation.

“CACEP’s main purposes of accreditation have been

- to promote high standards in the pre-service training of professional counsellors;
- to assist the administration and faculty of counsellor education programs to assess and improve their objectives, resources, and programs; and
- to promote a continuing review and evaluation of existing counsellor education programs.

“The overarching purpose of the CCPA-appointed CACEP Advisory Committee is to heighten the profile of program accreditation in Canada and to review the CACEP standards and determine if any changes are required—including determining the feasibility of the standards within the Canadian market place. Currently, there are only four programs accredited.”

NDG: Has this been beneficial to the profession? If not, what more needs to be done?

“Accreditation serves as a quality-control guide for students. Accredited programs offer organized curricula and qualified faculty in adequate numbers with a certain level of supervision and sufficient resources to ensure that their program meets the standards of the profession. The ongoing monitoring and improvement of programs add credibility to the program and to the professional association that

oversees CACEP. Given the current regulatory environment in Canada, the CA-CEP standards can provide an important reference point for provincial regulatory colleges with their mandate to ensure that regulated health professionals provide services in a safe, professional, and ethical manner, including setting standards of practice for the profession. Accredited programs attract students and faculty who demand a high-quality program. Accredited programs are well resourced, a challenge in times when universities are under economic restraint.

“CCPA will need to do more to raise the profile of accreditation of master’s programs in counsellor education in Canada. As new faculty enter counsellor education programs, they will need to be informed about the benefits of accreditation and be encouraged to use the standards as a benchmark when reviewing their programs. CACEP is in the process of revitalizing its standards. Consultations with the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), surveys to counsellor educators in Canada, and the creation of an advisory committee ensure that the updated program will result in quality counsellor education programs.”

NDG: I know regulation standards differ regarding who can provide counselling services in different provinces. Do you find this helpful or hurtful to the profession?

“While it would be much easier if regulation standards could be set nationally, regulation is a provincial matter. It is a challenge to the profession; however, forming the Federation of Associations for Counselling Therapists (FACTs) in as many provinces as possible is one step forward. FACTs use a common title (Counselling Therapist), and there is a policy of sharing documents with each other. For example, FACT-AB borrowed the revised BC Entry to Practice Competency Profile (2016). I believe with the interaction among the FACTs, there will be an increased commonality across jurisdictions.”

NDG: If you were to begin your career in counselling now, is there anything you would do differently?

“I made some good decisions, such as joining CCPA as a student. As a student, I attended the CCPA annual conferences, had opportunities to present my research work, and most importantly to connect with other professionals in the field. If I were to do something differently, it would be to make use of social media for professional networking to develop a professional presence, to stay connected with peers and colleagues, to connect with current research topics of interest, and to take advantage of online communities, employment, and training opportunities.”

NDG: Do you have any final remarks for beginning counsellors in the field?

“I want to welcome you to the profession—an amazing profession! As you know, counsellor growth and development is a continuous and lifelong process. It begins as individuals enter counselling training programs and continue until

they retire. Professional identity is part of being a counsellor and is the integration of the professional self and personal self, including your values, theories, and techniques. Within an ethical context, counsellors rely on their professional identity as a frame of reference as they make decisions regarding their work with clients. In other words, counsellor professional identity includes interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions. Interpersonal dimensions of professional identity involve one's relationship to society and the professional community, including professional organizations and regulatory colleges. Remember that a professional association is focused on you, the practitioner. The association is there for you: to support you in your professional development, to put you in touch with your colleagues, and to advocate for you! Join an association—it is what has kept me alive and engaged in the profession.

“Professional identity is also shaped from within a person. These personal definitions of counselling evolve, and reflection becomes increasingly important to counsellor identity as it is solidified. New professionals move from a reliance on experts to a reliance on their own experience and training—your next step in the journey.”

LMK and NDG: Dr. Shepard, thank you for talking to us today about your experiences with professional advocacy and your hopes for the future of counselling in Canada.

Note

1 Results from Inter-Provincial Mobility for the Counselling Profession projects based on primary research with Canadian practitioners across the country confirmed clear understanding of the generic term “counselling profession” as being inclusive of more than 70 professional titles (CCPA, 2011).

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