

Journal introduction

**Navigating
the system
for program
implementation**

**Student to early
career reflection**

**Self-care in
practice**



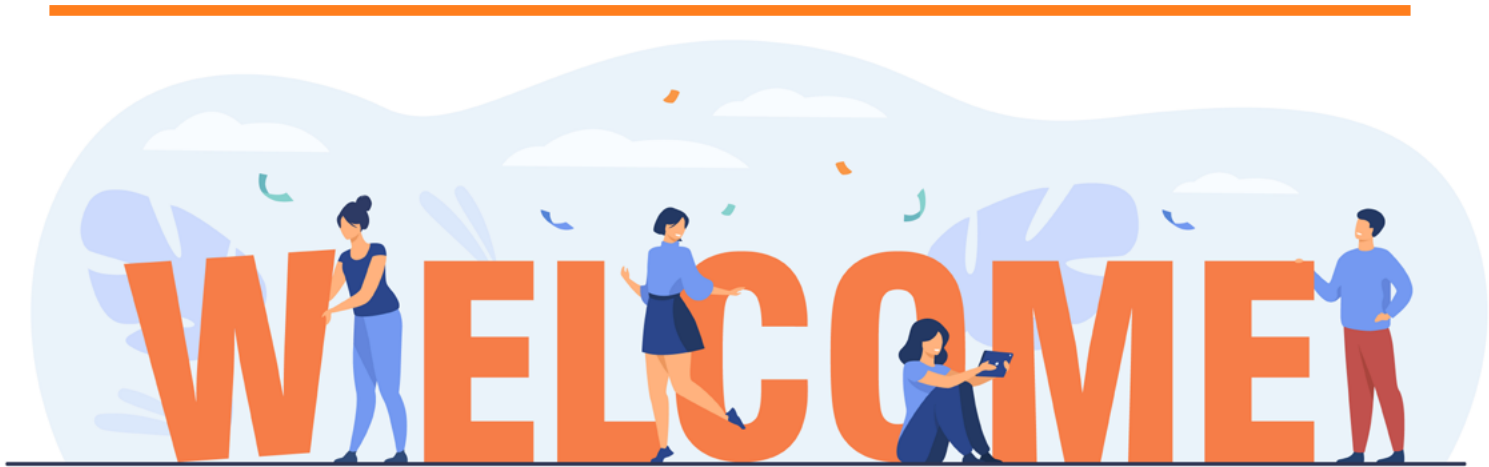
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Journal introduction

It is with great pleasure I present the first journal of the CPCA. This winter edition looks at counselling from the perspective of the practitioner. We recognise that counselling is subjective and experiential. This means that everyone will have a slightly different perspective on practice. By reading about these experiences and perspectives we can expand our own understanding.

On reading the articles you will see a consistent underlying theme of the importance of reflection and self-care. In an industry where we deal with the vagaries of human nature and existence, this is critically important. It was reflection on the need to support our colleagues that led us to the creation of the CPCA. Everyone in the industry, from students to new practitioners to old hands, need a collegial environment where they can get support and resources.

This is a task we do not take lightly as board members. We recognise the importance of good governance and good service to our members. It is through this process that the industry as a whole becomes better able to provide for the needs of the community in a timely and appropriate fashion.

I trust you will enjoy the journal and perhaps reflect on your own experiences. We might even be reading your article in the next issue.



Mark Cresswell
President | CPCA

Mark Cresswell

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Mark has previously been a board member of two peak bodies, the Australian Psychological Society and the Scottish Drug Forum. His focus is on member experience, governance and service delivery. Mark has also managed rehabilitation services and training organisations here and abroad. Mark has over 35 years of experience as a clinical and consulting psychologist. He has worked with all levels of government in Australia and overseas as a manager and consultant. He currently runs his own organizational and training consultancy.

He is currently the President of the Australasian Association of Counselling Professionals Inc, President of the CPCA, Vice president of the Men's Information and Support Association Inc, and Secretary of the Lockyer Valley Community Centre.

Navigating the system for program implementation



As part of a Master's of Narrative Therapy and Community Work, I recently designed and implemented a fourteen-week program working with men who have used domestic violence against a female partner. A narrative paper on the program was submitted and published in the International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work ¹.

I was approached to write this article to reflect my personal experience in developing and implementing this program. For those considering a program, this reflection may help to demystify the process and give some insight to potential considerations, traps or even barriers. For those that have implemented a program, this reflection may provide some alternative insights and even validation for what they have accomplished in their program.

The key areas that I will cover in this reflection are:

- a) What program will I create?
- b) Planning versus preparation
- c) Ethical dilemmas
- d) Mentorship, coaching, sponsorship, "other input", and the differences
- e) Third-party review (quality assurance)
- f) Execution - flexibility and adapting
- g) Evaluation and research considerations
- h) What next?

a) What program will I create?

This is probably the most difficult part to any program. If I did not have to move forward and choose or develop a program for my Masters, I would probably still be thinking about it.

There are many considerations to this choice and each person's personal and contextual situation will play into this selection. For me the key influences were:

- a) What work do I have passion for?
- b) What situational context will provide me access to program participants?
- c) What situational context will provide me support and validation through planning, execution and evaluation?
- d) What outcomes am I hoping for?

My initial sense of injustice at the disproportionate rate of violence against women within the domestic landscape in Australia was adequate fuel to direct me to some sort of program dealing with men on matters of domestic violence. Interestingly, in that journey, the passion for this crusade morphed into a compassion for the men and women impacted by domestic violence, both the people having domestic violence inflicted on them and the people inflicting the violence.

From a situational context of work and support, my workplace provided an ideal workplace to plan and execute a program on domestic violence. The Men's Information and Support Association (MISA) is a not-for profit organisation delivering both counselling and programs to predominantly men with many situations of domestic violence. What I had not adequately considered was whether the organisation would have the same shared enthusiasm for a program like this with the direction, ethical, legal, risk, staffing and budgetary implications on the organisation. In hindsight, I should have presented a more thorough business case and

¹ Stoddart, S. (2022). Using social rather than personal framing to demystify abuse and achieve meaningful change, International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work, (1), 55–65.



impact assessment, and was fortunate in having strong support and mentorship from the practice manager in supporting me through my interactions with the board.

Lastly, while I had articulated desired outcomes in my business case, it was only when I moved to the planning stage that I realised the initial outcomes I had identified were superficial. By taking these more seriously (largely due to input from an external review), the revised target outcomes changed the way I prepared and communicated group sessions and measured/evaluated outcomes. For example, initially I might have had some high-level objectives, such as cessation of violence; taking responsibility for violence and understanding the effects of violence on others and self. As a result of internal and external consultations this was refined to a greater level of granularity (as shown in Table-A) and this significantly shaped the scope, approach, resources and measurement of the program.

Table-A

Outputs:	
Short Term	Medium Term
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cessation of violence (Safety/Support for partner) 2. Women becoming visible 3. Taking responsibility for Violence & Abuse 4. Name and understand violence and abuse 5. Understand the role of power and culture in violence and abuse 6. Develop understanding of 'becoming ethical' 7. Relating to others 8. Connection of non-violence to 'becoming' and preferences 9. Exploring and re-storying shame as a path to restitution 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduction, cessation in violence 2. Increased feeling of safety, less fear from Partner 3. Taking responsibility for Violence & Abuse 4. Reclamation of identity for person who has been abusive 5. Some resolution of shame 6. Some form of restitution for harm done 7. Increased awareness and ability to prevent and address violent and abusive behavior

In summary, it is important to ground the selection of a program to feasible access to participants, and, support and resources. It is also important to have a clearly articulated plan that identifies key risks, outcomes and resource requirements.

b) Planning versus preparation

This was all new for me and coming from a past life of project management, I started to develop a detailed project plan. At some point I realised I was getting 'carried away' by this detail and the nature of the program (group workshops and individual counselling) only needed a framework to allow fluidity in a non-directive way for participants to explore, express, discover, share, and grow within a context of targeted outcomes.

There was a catch. While the workshops and program process required a lighter framework of planning than I had anticipated, by taking a lighter touch to planning, I significantly underestimated the amount of program infrastructure that needed to be created and the time that would take.

Programs will significantly differ in size, approach, risk, and many other factors. It was only when I moved into the program development that I began to appreciate the gap in the plan to the actual effort to implement the necessary policies, risk-management, roles and responsibilities and other critical documentation for the program. In addition, the risk analysis had not adequately addressed some key risks. For example, responsibilities for the safety of the women and children associated with the men who had been violent and the safety of the participants and facilitators.

To address this gap in the plan, I engaged with other domestic violence programs to better understand how they managed these programs and what sort of processes they followed in vetting, selection, workshop process, risk-management, and evaluation.

In hindsight, earlier engagement with other related programs, reading from related published works and consultation with related special interest groups or professional bodies would have avoided this potential gap.



c) Ethical dilemmas

This was not a formal thesis with its prerequisite ethical review and approval process. Regardless, I attempted to make ethical considerations and vetting a key part of the project business case, planning, and approval process.

My learnings were that new ethical dilemmas will emerge or morph during the program execution, and these need to be assessed and dealt with in a timely ongoing manner with involvement of relevant people and roles.

As a reflection, if doing this program again I would have had a distinct ethical review process with periodic check-ins during the program. As an example, the workshop planning had included a part-time women's advocate for the partners of the workshop participants which was considered adequate given the assumed target of low risk participants. However, when the risk assessments were done, of six men on the workshop, only one was low risk. This then meant there was an unethical exposure of risk to participants' partners and this accountability to the partners and children needed to be adequately addressed. With a more robust ethical review body and process, this risk may have been anticipated and addressed in a more timely and effective manner. In the absence of a formal ethical review and vetting process, I consulted with my supervisor and the office manager to resolve the ethical dilemma.

d) Mentorship, coaching, sponsorship, "other input", and the differences

Due to previous life experiences, I came into this program versed in the need for mentorship, sponsorship, coaching, and the differences between them. All three of these functions are important and awareness of the differences helped me be specific regarding what I was seeking and allowed me to seek these functions from appropriate people.

Mentorship is being supported, almost in a non-directional manner, to assist you develop and come to your own solutions. Coaching (of which there are different types) is someone assisting you in addressing a gap in your skill or knowledge. Sponsorship is support in the form of political support, validation, and financial or resources support.

An example of the value of sponsorship follows. The host organisation for this program was MISA which is a not-for-profit and has little funding flexibility. This was a problem as I needed both a female co-program facilitator and a female women's advocate. MISA could provide a female women's advocate but I had no funding for a female co-facilitator. It was my sharing of the program, its hopes and challenges, and this gap with members of my network that resulted in provision of a funded co-facilitator. On reflection, this should have been a more proactive and intentional activity as this was a critical resourcing risk.

Lastly, "other input". Both internally and externally there may be input that may suggest gaps, flaws, or risks. With everything going on, I was tempted to ignore some of this as I had assessed much of it as well-meaning but distracting or even political. I am glad I engaged with this input as it resulted in an open and responsible engagement and some of this engagement led to adjustments to the program approach as well as support and resources to the program and reduction of program risk.

e) Third-party review (quality assurance)

There may be different ways to address or meet this point. Everyone is busy, and support and assistance from other organisations/experts can be spotty or superficial. For this program we engaged an "expert" in domestic violence workshops to assess the approach, preparedness, process, and target outcomes. We also used this resource at the end of the program to debrief on outcomes and potential next steps.



This was a critical success factor for this program. Turning this into a formal external review meant a fully committed review, an ownership on observations, thorough due diligence on gaps and risks, and support for the program.

On reflection, this type of external relationship building can also result in addressing some of the mentorship, coaching and sponsorship objectives.

f) Execution - flexibility and adapting:

As mentioned earlier, a deliberate strategy was to plan the workshops at a fairly high level (high-level flow, objectives, examples of techniques or aids) and allow the workshop session to evolve. An important skill for the facilitators is being able to “move with the flow” within this framework while having the flexibility and adaptability to keep sight of opportunities to recognise and elaborate on outcomes.

This program had considered this dynamic and had identified key potential skills, knowledge, and experience gaps. Some training and practice sessions were held to further these skills and address or narrow gaps. As a result of this preparation, there was a reasonable match between the program demands (size, scope, approach, participant mix, outcomes) and the facilitators’ skill levels.

In summary, consideration needs to be given to this dynamic so that outcomes are intentional as well as fortuitous.

g) Evaluation and research considerations

It is important to be clear that this program was not a formally vetted thesis or study with all the prerequisite consideration of how approach, facts and findings would be gathered, tabulated, assessed, and presented.

Regardless, collection of evaluation data, questionnaires, observations, and group discussion outcomes were planned for and executed throughout the program. While this was interesting and provided validation of the conclusion that the program was successful, this was in hindsight overkill for a program

that was not a research study and the data gathered was largely unmined.

Consideration of the research publication’s dimension is an important element to be considered. Firstly, awareness of research considerations may allow adjustment of program approach to meet research considerations which can more closely align approach to “best practice”. Secondly, awareness of gaps and limitations of the program relative to a research program can be an important starting point for follow-on programs or moving to a research context. While there are many publications and sources to gain some knowledge in this area, my reference base for this grounding was *An Introduction to Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy*, John McLeod, 2013.

As an example, as part of the program approach, I specifically considered potential limitations of the program as a potential research program. Table-1 is a summary of key limitations.

Table-1

Key limitations to this program moving to a research program include the following:

1. Due to the small sample size, findings cannot be represented as applicable to a wider population; however, as this is an exploratory study that is not a study objective
2. As an exploratory study, there is limited applicability to government policy
3. Participants have busy lives which may impact attendance and the workshop dynamics due to the small group size

In summary:

- Knowledge of a research program considerations and approach is a useful backdrop to approach considerations and next steps
- Select data gathering processes, frequency and scope that fits the objective and scope of the program
- Understanding the limitations of the program relative to a research program and additional and useful perspectives in validating program and evaluation approach

h) What next

Imagine, the program is over, the last interview or workshop has been held. The last evaluation or report has been submitted.

Questions I have asked myself include:

How do the outcomes and hopes for the program compare to what has been evidenced and what is going to follow?

Is there value here and if so, how do I keep this moving given my job and other commitments?

Is there another way the learnings from this program can be realised?

I imagine you will have some of these and even more questions regarding your program.

Some reflections on these questions as it relates to this program follow:

• How do the outcomes and hopes for the program compare to what has been evidenced and what is going to follow?

In scoping this program, I naively assumed that if it were successful and repeatable it might become an ongoing MISA Program. Unfortunately, the reality of the infrastructure, start-up funding, staffing and compliance frameworks are a barrier to the introduction of funded domestic violence programs. My experience is that this becomes the domain of the existing programs.

• Is there value here, and if so, how do I keep this moving given my job and other commitments?

Yes, there is absolutely value. In follow-up sessions with half of the men that attended the program, there has been a clear adoption of values that relate to non-violence. In addition, these men now have a significant awareness to how social conditioning and beliefs are contributory and influencing conditioners to

domestic violence. Other clear learnings from this are the importance of development of a preferred identity in shaping behaviour, and the significant impact of peer knowledge and learning in moving people forward within their zone of learning possibilities.

• Is there another form that the learnings from this program can be realised?

I am considering other potential ways of using these important program learnings and selecting principles of this program approach in another context, such as working with veterans experiencing disruption in moving to civilian life.

In conclusion:

There are many aspects to designing and implementing a successful program. This includes surrounding the choice of program to your passion while being mindful of the financial and resource feasibility of the program, access to participants, and your own internal and external support network. Planning at the right level of detail is important to avoid the trap of over-planning on workshops and under-planning on critical program infrastructure and communications. Consider a formal ethical review process and have this start early in the program planning. Understand the difference between mentorship, coaching, sponsorship and “other input”. Intentionally engaging with all these aspects of support is important to the shaping, outcomes and perception of your program. If possible, have independent third-party input at various stages in the planning and execution of the program. Lastly, understand what elements of research are necessary to validate your program outcomes.

I hope that you will find some elements of this article interesting and invite you to share any thoughts or elaborations with me (stustod@misa.org.au).

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the Brisbane Australian Institute of Professional Counselling, which funded the co-facilitator of this program.



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Student to early career reflection

Like most people who come into the counselling and mental health field, I am driven by a desire to help others. Many of us have our own lived experiences which enables us to understand what it is like to access mental health services. For the past 14 years I have taught adult learners to become early childhood educators. At the end of my teaching career, I discovered that empowering people to take control over their own lives was what I loved most about my job. I realised at that point in time I must make a career change and become a counsellor. I think many people have used Covid as a catalyst for change. It certainly was for me.

Ironically, I didn't rate the counselling that I had personally received over the years as it always seemed formulaic, impersonal and in truth, not very helpful. Once I enrolled into the course, I was offered to take part in a 12-step program to observe the process. This was an eye opener as it was a very different style of counselling to what I was used to. The more personable and humanistic approach resonated with me, however it was a little confronting as it was so different and initially I wondered if this was appropriate. Luckily my studies validated this approach for me and encouraged me to confidently adopt the methods.

I was surprised to discover that the sector is unregulated and that you don't need a qualification to practice. However, we are guided by a strong set of legal and ethical guidelines and no insurance company will cover you without a minimum of a diploma. I have to say that this is a good thing. I believe we are in a unique position to help empower our clients and help guide them to improve their lives. However, if we do not make the effort to try to understand what we are doing and know which theories underpin our practices, then we can do more harm than good. We have chosen to be in a helping sector because we want to do good, we owe it to ourselves and clients to do this ethically and legally. Having the qualification helps us to achieve this, but it is essential to continue to study, learn, and make yourself aware of current practices.

During my professional experience, I worked with psychologists, psychiatrists, and bachelor and diploma trained counsellors. This gave great insight into the

different practices of each profession. I am a little biased, but being a counsellor offers more flexibility with our practices. The mental health sector will continue to grow as the demand for services increases due to pandemics, natural disasters and the pressures of life. Having an early childhood education background, I am a huge proponent of exploring and treating the trauma which people experience during early childhood. These experiences have the capacity to impact significantly on clients in adulthood and can make us stuck in unhelpful patterns of behaviour.

I have appreciated the opportunity to complete my studies with ACCSC and Mark my trainer was always available to respond to emails, calls, and give valuable feedback on assessments. It is important to tap into this support and to keep your studies on track. I really respect the fact that the organisation is a social enterprise which offers its courses at greatly reduced fees. I value this, as it gives access to education to people who might not otherwise be able to afford to enrol into studies. Social justice at its best! Since completing my studies I have been offered work at the service where I did my professional experience and I have also set up my own business. I have also been asked to mentor current students at ACCSC, which I have enjoyed very much. I am so grateful for this experience and I am looking forward to my next lot of study which starts in May.

Happy studying!



Tiffany Tree, Counsellor

Diploma Counselling
Bachelor Teaching Early childhood
Accredited Mediator

Self-care in practice



When first starting out as a counsellor, part of my idea of helping was to always be readily available to anyone that sought counselling. In my earlier years before becoming a counsellor, I found myself seeking support. Unfortunately, my experience was negative and in fact was told by the counsellor that my experiences with a violent partner was entirely my fault...

You can imagine my response in such a vulnerable position, blaming myself and continuing with the relationship. Why am I telling you this? This experience really gave me the idea to be a counsellor years down the track and this I where I fell into the readily available position.

I could not imagine another person in my position desperately seeking support, not knowing where to turn and being in a really horrible place. This went against any values that I had. So, when looking at who I wanted to be as a counsellor, I took this negative experience as how not to treat people.

I then made the decision to not turn people away, to always be on the ready. You can tell where I am headed with this... how long do you think I lasted before I got tired and drained. When hearing other people's trauma, it puts you in the position of feeling like you are carrying their pain, their stories and if you are not prepared for that load then do not put yourself in that place.

It took me a long time to be able to see that the heavy lifting I was doing was emotionally driven, not only was I carrying my own personal load, but I started taking on board my clients as well. Can you imagine what I was feeling and experiencing?

I was coming home tired; I did not want to deal with anything happening in the home environment and let me tell you I had teenagers... four of them, they all have strong personalities and as proud of them as I was then as I am today, the required energy I needed just was not there. I wish I could just go to bed and not hear any drama or complaints.

Taking time to learn how to look after yourself both physically and emotionally can include areas of spiritual or cultural connections. Do not think that it is easier to shove those feelings and experiences in the back of the closet because eventually it will spill out like a long overdue spring clean.

I had put my hat up when leaving the office in order to leave the work at work. However, when I slowed down; I found it difficult to slow down my thoughts, my brain was having none of that. No way would my brain give me a break... I had trained it too well in responding the way I wanted to respond when working. I was used to working at a fast pace.

Take some time to work on you, not to walk away for your responsibilities but to find that work-life balance. Find what you are enthusiastic about and either learn a new hobby or get back to your old hobby. I love painting but found my brain kept wanting to process and go back to issues the client presented in the session. I took on quilting as a new hobby, it required more thinking on my brains behalf to work out patterns, measurements and gave me time to step out of my counselling role.

Writer's Bio

My name is Julie. I work in community services because in my younger years I experienced blame and finger pointing from a counsellor and felt that others should not have to experience what I went through. My main passion is to work alongside someone to see they have the opportunity to grow and develop, to live their lives in the way they want to.

Counselling I see as an opportunity to walk with people on their journey. More like a co-traveller than someone who is the expert. Counselling is not just sitting in front of a client and letting them know that you are listening to them, it involves validating how they are feeling and accepting that their lived experience has an important role in their recovery or healing journey.

My values are about supporting people to seek a better life, to not tear others down just to make yourself feel better or superior. Counselling puts me in a position of being on that journey with someone and experience their growth and empowerment.

I have a passion for study as well and look forward to working on a doctorate someday soon. Study is never about having the right time, its more along the lines of just getting in and doing it, no matter what your circumstances are BELIEVE IN YOURSELF.



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Winter 2022 Edition

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