**My experience as a new therapist on placement at Riverside counselling service.**

An exciting and at the same time a terrifying part of the journey towards becoming a therapist is the thought of the first client encounter. Fortunately, my placement at Riverside, with the support of a compassionate team, I’ve been able to gather together all that was spilling out. Writing this as I look back over the past year, I can see that I have had many enriching experiences.

As I started out with clients, I felt like my hand was being held and learning at a pace which best suited me. This support has helped me build from a single client up to supporting four at any one time. I’ve worked with adolescents and older clients; both presenting their difficulties with how to live their life. Each client had an initial consultation with a qualified Riverside therapist, following which, suitable clients were allocated to me. This provided reassurance that I wouldn’t be too out of my depth. Having one-to-one supervision, provided fortnightly by Riverside, was both valuable and supportive, and I learned how to make the most from this.

Clients have at times been challenging causing me to occasionally lose confidence and feel vulnerable. This is where the reassurance of a compassionate support environment is extremely important. An allocated buddy (another Riverside therapist) was also available to listen to any of my concerns throughout the year.

Monday mornings are a time to gather as a team and this is something I look forward to. These are supplemented with monthly team meetings to reflect and exchange experiences, participate in clinical discussion groups and review workshops. I also participated in a young person’s workshop during the year. These sessions are all part of immersing myself into what Riverside has to offer and I have learnt so much by participating in these. The opportunity to attend freely available monthly CPD events, listening to some fascinating speakers, have also built my knowledge. When unsure of any aspects of my development, I have been able to use these group meetings to clarify my thoughts with more experienced practitioners.

Important administrative aspects of working in private practice have also been introduced via Riverside. These include being responsible for receiving payments, maintaining contractual boundaries, and managing my time effectively with clients.

I view the experience at Riverside over the past year to be beyond my expectations. This is particularly relevant in light of the COVID-19 situation as we transitioned to working online. This support has meant that I have been able to keep working with all of my clients.

The dynamic at Riverside can be characterised as a freedom to express one’s own ideas and an openness to allow us to develop as individual therapists, whilst following the ethical guidelines of the BACP. It does feel a privilege to be part of such a compassionate and dedicated team, yet each of us having something different to contribute.