



IV. Community building

There is not much point teaching people to co-counsel unless equal attention is paid to building up a supportive community within which effective ongoing co-counselling can be sustained and developed. The pressures toward privatization, bourgeoisification, in contemporary society are very strong. These pressures create an ambience of apathy and powerlessness, which reduces people back into a state of alienation from their own growth and development.

There are at least three degrees of a co-counselling community. They are three types or stages of community development. The first is where we have to begin, for the most part, It provides the minimal essential concept of community:

Type One Community

A co-counselling community as an association exclusively for purposes of co-counselling and of directly related matters. The community is thus a community only in the weakest sense: a network of persons who engage in a similar practice, and who meet from time to time to engage in and develop that practice. There are several aspects to such a community:

1. Activities directly involving co-counselling:

- The basic activity is regular ongoing co-counselling sessions in members' own homes, involving those who have done the basic training. Then we have:
- Basic co-counselling training courses: 40 hours minimum training by a competent teacher, in a five-day workshop or double long weekend workshop or in a weekly evening class for 14 weeks, or in any mixture of weekends, full days, evenings.
- Advanced co-counselling training workshops: 3 or 5 day workshops led by an experienced co-counselling teacher covering such things as intensive or non-permissive counselling, body work, transpersonal work, birth work, in depth direction-holding, advanced psychodrama, reality training, self-monitoring/objective-setting/ thinking-in-living, social change and social action, community development, co-counselling applications in diverse spheres, especially child-raising and education. And many other issues.
- Co-counselling teacher training workshops: 5 day workshops or the equivalent for experienced co-counsellors who want to train to be teachers of co-counselling. Led by the most experienced teachers available.
- Follow-up groups: for those who have done the basic training. Such a group is facilitated by a teacher and has a teaching content - to remind members of the basics of theory and practice, to help people with direction-holding and the interruption of chronic patterns. It meets perhaps

weekly in repeated cycles of, say, 10 or 20 weeks.

- Independent ongoing groups: organized by any group of experienced co-counsellors; not dependent on the primary interventions of a teacher. Each member may facilitate it in turn on a rotation basis; or the group may use consensus decision-making. For co-counselling, group work, direction-holding, and whatever the group want to use it for. It meets weekly for any period of time.
- General workshops: of from 1 to 7 days, for co-counsellors who have done the basic training. Primarily for intensive co-counselling and group work. Can be facilitated by a teacher and have a teaching content (reminder of basics); or can be facilitated by one or two co-counsellors who take the initiative in setting it up.
- Theme workshops: of from 1 to 7 days, for experienced co-counsellors. The workshop uses co-counselling techniques to develop awareness and understanding in specific areas such as sexuality, role stereotyping, parenthood, obesity, creativity, politics, third world, spirituality, organizations, and so on. The workshop will also tend to develop policies and plans, related to the theme, for subsequent daily living. It will be organized and conducted by one or more competent teachers or group facilitators.
- Marathons: of one or more days, for co-counsellors who have done the basic training. This doesn't need a facilitator, just a good arithmetician. The arrangement is that each person present has a continuous 3 or 4 hours as client, with a changeover of counsellors every hour or hour and a half.
- Peer primalling workshops: of from 1 to 7 days, for experienced co-counsellors to assist each other in a group setting to re-enact birth and do associated primal re-integration work. Will be initially facilitated by at least one person with prior experience of birth work and body work. The skills can then be progressively disseminated throughout the workshop.
- Teachers' workshops: for teachers and assistant teachers of co-counselling, to share experiences, to develop skills by mutual teaching and learning. A series of these can be run on a basis of rotated facilitation.

These are some of the obvious sorts of activities directly involving co-counselling. No doubt there are many more.

2. Activities not directly involving co-counselling, but supportive of it. These are the organizational sorts of activities. We had better include structures here too.

- Allocation of roles. Persons are needed to take responsibility for - finance, newsletters, address lists, organizing/facilitating workshops and groups of all kinds where teaching is not at stake, teaching basic training courses and advanced courses and teacher training courses, facilitating community decision-making.
- Decision-making structure. A peer community has to find a way of effectively making decisions without relapsing into democratic chaos or inertia on the one hand and hierarchical authoritarianism on the other. One model is for all the community members to meet and agree

on the appointment of a Facilitator of Community Decision-making for, say, a two year period. Such a person would need to be skilled in working with and knowledgeable about the dynamics of small and large groups, and the range of decision-making procedures. My recommendation would be that this Facilitator uses genuine consultation as a decision-making model.

- On some issues the Facilitator (F) consults a small community management group of, say, the main role bearers (newsletter editor, treasurer, principal workshop organizer, a teacher of co-counselling). The management group would also be appointed by a meeting of the total community, to hold their roles for some specified period.
 - On other issues F consults the whole community at a special meeting for that purpose. These would be major long-term issues of community policy.
 - In both cases, having consulted others, F takes a decision which represents her own clearest thinking on the issue, where that clear thinking occurs in the light of what each other person has said. This does not mean that F simply summarizes as best she can what appears to be the consensus of views expressed. Rather she takes this consensus as a complement and aid to her own clear thinking - and her final decision may or may not coincide with this consensus. This model presupposes that the community has a great deal of trust in the integrity and wisdom of F. F can, of course, delegate decision-making.
 - F is accountable to give reasons to those concerned for her decisions. Anyone conscientiously unable to accept them can say so and act accordingly. When F's decisions no longer carry community support, then she can be demoted at a special community meeting called for this purpose.
 - It would be a community principle that the F role rotates every two years: a previous F is not eligible for re-election.
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- Newsletter. This is a very essential part of this first sort of community, since it alone provides its members with full details of what the community is doing. So the newsletter is primarily a vehicle for publicizing workshops of all kinds in the immediate community, maybe in adjacent communities and on the international scene. There can also be reports of past workshops, papers on theory/method/organization, and so on.
 - Address lists. There needs to be an up-to-date list of names, addresses and telephone numbers of all those who have done a basic co-counselling training in the community and who wish to be on such a list. Copies of the list are available to everyone on it, primarily for purposes of making co-counselling contacts. It is also the newsletter distribution list. It can further serve as a basis for any follow-up research on co-counselling training outcomes.
 - Finance. Money is needed to meet, at least, printing, distribution, publicity and administration costs. This can be raised by any one or more of: newsletter subscriptions, annual community membership dues, levying a percentage tithe on all workshop fee receipts, donations, sale of literature, special fund-raising exercises.
 - Primary workshop organizer. It makes sense to have someone who takes responsibility for

thinking about the total range of workshops the community provides, the weighting and balancing of different types of workshop, and for prompting and encouraging the appropriate people to put on the different types. This person would work closely with F and the community management group.

- Teaching. A community has a right to exercise some control over the legitimacy of teachers within its domain. For if a teacher expects a local community to accept those she has trained as active co-counselling members of that community then it needs to be assured that they have been adequately trained. Thus accreditation of teachers somehow needs to come within the scope of community organization. See below: Assessment and accreditation procedures.
- Conflict resolution. It makes sense for the community to have in reserve some well considered procedure for resolving major conflicts between persons or groupings within the community.
- Outreach: this has two senses.
 - Some well thought out plan for reaching out to those who have gone through a basic co-counselling training but have dropped out of all community activity including regular co-counselling. This has to be done sensitively to take account of two possibilities: that a person who has dropped out has chosen quite intentionally to do so for what she judges to be good reasons; that she has dropped out through the grip of old distress patterns and so may ultimately welcome the encouragement to continue co-counselling activities.
 - A policy and programme for reaching out to those as yet unfamiliar with co-counselling in order to introduce them to it.
- Social activity: there is both a negative and a positive case to be made out here.
 - The negative case is that it makes sense absolutely to rule out all kinds of unaware, compulsive, stereotypic conventional sorts of social interactions (including the sexual) with other co-counsellors - firstly because they will inhibit the competence of people to co-counsel really humanly and effectively with each other, but secondly and more importantly since it is just that kind of behaviour that co-counsellors are trying to get out of anyway. I encourage people who are learning to co-counsel with each other in their own homes to cut out all pre and post session entertaining routines, and in a disciplined way get down to the business in hand then depart.
 - The positive case is that it makes sense for experienced co-counsellors who have reclaimed some of their intentionality and flexible humanity to explore new, aware ways of relating other than co-counselling, so that their shared self-expression can be on a basis of mutually shared assumptions and experiences. These aware ways of relating may be to do with creativity, recreation, sexuality, various kinds of conjoint enterprise. But this is the natural bridging point with the next kind of community.

See also: Co-Counselling Teacher Trainers' Manual : [Community building](#)

Type Two Community

A co-counselling community as an association of those who engage in co-counselling activities

and their supporting organization, but who also co-operate on aware, intentional enterprises other than co-counselling. This covers all the sorts of activities listed above, and adds to them organized mutual aid and mutual effort activities that are quite different from co-counselling. This is the community that seeks to give practical expression to its members' new found creative intentionality in living. Its members, however, are still involved in the sorts of occupational, domestic and housing situations that characterize the existing social system.

- **Mutual aid.** One method is a token system for mutual aid among co-counsellors with respect to any number of practical tasks such as gardening, house repairs, decorating, baby-minding, and so on. I help you out on some task, and we agree on how many tokens my contribution represents, then for the future you owe me work of any kind equivalent to the same number of tokens. This method needs very clear criteria of token allocation per unit of work. There are many other possibilities.
- **Mutual effort.** There are at least two versions of this.

- *Members work together to provide some new resource for their membership: a theatre, sports centre, studio, or whatever.*
- *Members work together to introduce change into the surrounding social system: transport, local politics, education, anything.*

Type Three Community

This is a co-counselling community in the full sense of a community. It is an association of those who live together on shared land in various forms of habitation, on some mutually agreed basis of ownership and management, and for whom co-counselling is a central or important component of the shared life-style. Initially this is likely to be a sub-community within Type One or Type Two Communities. The group may also be concerned with new forms of decision-making and conflict-resolution within the community life, with new ways of structuring and living intimate relationships, with new forms of child-raising and child-minding and education, with new sorts of economic arrangements and ways of subsisting, with different forms of technology, with shared approaches to the transcendental. And so on. The Life Center in Philadelphia is a good example of this type of community.
