



Manchester, UK (1984)

By Gretchen Pyves

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Introduction

Gretchen Pyves did her Fundamentals in 1979 and did her Co-Counselling teacher training in 1983 with James Kilty and John Dave Kearny. She started teaching Co-Counselling in and around Manchester in 1984. Her teaching eventually resulted in a blossoming Co-Counselling community in Manchester and a reputation as Co-Counselling facilitator far outside Manchester, attracting many people for her courses from all over the UK.

Q1. What was Gretchen's vision when she first set up her Co-Counselling project in Manchester?

Gretchen just wanted a few Co-Counsellors to work with initially. It grew from there.

Q2. What factors did Gretchen consider to be important in turning her vision into reality?

The helper system

I decided to introduce the helper system which I believed was a critical factor. Once people have done Fundamentals they can join another Fundamentals as a helper for free. There is usually one helper to two new people. She usually taught groups of 30, including 10 helpers. The advantages of the helper system are that it provides:

- a refresher for the more experienced Co-Counsellors, particularly giving them an opportunity to listen to the theory with more experience
- support for the teacher in practical ways e.g. washing up, clean up food
- it speeds up the learning process for the new people, particularly since new people get to work with more experienced Co-Counsellors and learn from that experience
- there is a different energy balance in the group - a third of them are already committed to Co-Counselling - and new people are inspired by this.

In Gretchen's own words: "Now one of the benefits that I found was that the energy balance

was different as a consequence ... because there were ten people who were totally committed. ... there was the energy of commitment so if any controversy came up I would have to wait and one of the helpers would say 'Well I don't know, that wasn't my experience because this is what happened to me'. And so it was a total sort of way of teaching - the evidence was there, I didn't ask anything from the helpers, it came quite spontaneously."

- helpers model how to use Co-Counselling sessions as client, this means the teacher doesn't have to and can keep his/her attention on facilitating the group
- the helper system creates a real peer network, because new people see experienced people working on their own distresses. New people get used to working with experienced people right from the start and see that their interventions can make a difference even to someone who is more experienced than them, this helps them gain confidence
- the helpers provide tangible evidence that Co-Counselling works

Her basic co-operation agreement with helpers is that they are there to work on their own stuff, that they are there to work with new people, not each other and that they move round and work with different people. She also asks them to inform her if anyone is too distressed to give free attention although this rarely happened because of the system of getting people usually through recommendation by Co-Counsellors to their friends and acquaintances.

The teacher role.

She developed her style of facilitation over time. In her view the teacher/facilitator is responsible for holding the group together. This makes it difficult for him/her to switch into and out of the client role. She chooses not to be in the client role when teaching, because it is a quantum leap from the client role to the facilitator role. When in the client role it is not possible to keep an eye on the group.

She believes it is important to teach from a deep place of personal awareness and self learning through Co-Counselling and/or therapy, not by rote.

Keep running Fundamentals.

Fundamentals provide opportunities for new people to learn Co-Counselling and for existing Co-Counsellors to refresh their skills and understanding. It also maintains and feeds new members into the community.

Running frequent workshops.

This is important as it enables a deeper understanding of one's pain and to experience a variety of other Co-Counsellors and their expertise.

She used to run a **follow up** workshop 6 weeks after Fundamentals which provided a space for problem-solving. Not everyone came to this, even it was open to anyone who has done a Fundamentals.

Advanced workshops She ran workshops on topics such as bereavement, sexuality and NLP. She got ideas about which workshops there is a need for, by listening to what people said in any workshop or group she ran.

Inviting other facilitators in

This allowed local Co-Counsellors to see different models of facilitation and avoids Gretchen being seen as a guru. It also means that different skills are brought in and taught.

Promoting attendance at workshops

She markets all her courses and workshops during her courses. She also encourages people to attend national CCI UK workshops.

Q3. Which aspects of her Fundamentals course support new Co-Counsellor to settle in to Co-Counselling?

Feeling acknowledged / the spiritual dimension

During Fundamentals most people for the first time feel recognised, accepted and valued for who they are. This key experience is more important than any support afterwards. People recognise that this is what they need and hence they come back for more.

In Gretchen's own words: "I think that one of the most important things for people to actually come back for, is if they have felt recognised, supported, they feel valuable and they feel accepted for themselves, whatever that is and I think that has a lot to do with teaching, the non-judgementalness, the acceptance part ... all behaviour has a positive intention so to look behind behaviour in terms of people, where they're at, and it's working with the heart and with the soul that's attempting to come through all the stress, the shit that we have been hiding, at that level, that's the focus, not anything else that anyone's done, but that is the focus in teaching, that we address the soul, the spirit. I don't use these words because that puts people off but that is essentially what I am doing ... it is that aspect that I think has much more to do with why people come back because they will come back for more, they will be hungry to be accepted, they will be hungry for being able to be regarded and supported and have permission to say what they have never been able to their "persecutors", in a session and so feel relieved of carrying these burdens around. say . That's the key."

Also...

The helper system provided new Co-Counsellors with potential partners for after Fundamentals.

Q4. What is available to new Co-Counsellors in Manchester that might support them to settle in to Co-Counselling?

- Fundamentals follow-up days

- becoming a helper on Fundamentals
 - advanced and themed Co-Counselling workshops
 - encouraged to attend several residential workshops throughout the UK
 - the newsletter which publicises workshops and other opportunities.
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Q5. What other things have been tried to help new Co-Counsellors to settle in?

Nothing.

Q6. Is there anything else that Gretchen thinks is relevant about teaching Co-Counselling?

Fundamentals is about Co-Counselling sessions not about socialisation.

Gretchen's view is that if people have difficulties with other Co-Counsellors outside of sessions it's up to them to sort it out. Her responsibility is to teach people how to function in a Co-Counselling session. Outside of sessions normal socialising rules prevail, not Co-Counselling rules. If used properly Co-Counselling should be self-eliminating. If someone's behaviour in sessions is persistently problematic, other Co-Counsellors will choose not to work with that person. This means there is no need to formally exclude people from the community, or for more experienced Co-Counsellors to get involved in the situation. If people have problems with others, she teaches them that they can use Co-Counselling to look at their own stuff in the situation with another .

In her own words: "I say this, you are normal people, the only thing you have learned is how to have a session. I'm not advocating how you deal with other people in a social setting or group. They come and say: 'A Co-Counsellor has said...' and I say 'Was that in a session?' If it wasn't, then I remind them that they're allowed to say anything they like. And sometimes if I've said something judgmental in a remark, they say 'That is very judgmental'. I'll say 'Yes I'm very judgmental'. - 'But you're a Co-Counsellor'. - 'I'm a Co-Counsellor. I do not judge in a session but I can be as judgmental as I blooming well like outside in a social setting'. Co-Counselling is about teaching how to have a session, I think there can be a lot of confusion, if this point is not made clear."

'Free attention'

The term 'Free attention' is not appropriate out of a session. It is a particular state to enable another person to work. This is where the cross-over from Co-Counselling to social setting can get muddled, if we are not very clear about it.

Interrupting the pattern

Gretchen's view is that if people want to point out other people's patterns they are probably

running a pattern themselves. She's not interested in this kind of input from people. She believes people will follow their own paths and learn at their own rates. This kind of 'challenging' behaviour is not helpful, nor is it supportive. Co-Counselling gives people an opportunity to work through their interpersonal difficulties with another Co-Counsellor not involved.

Introducing RC techniques into Co-Counselling

She's not against this as long as people say that this is a re-evaluation technique, not a CCI technique when they introduce it.

Teaching big groups on Fundamentals

You need a big room! Big enough for 15 couples to sit down and work together. A carpet is good for this.
