

How can new Co-Counsellors be supported to settle into Co-Counselling?

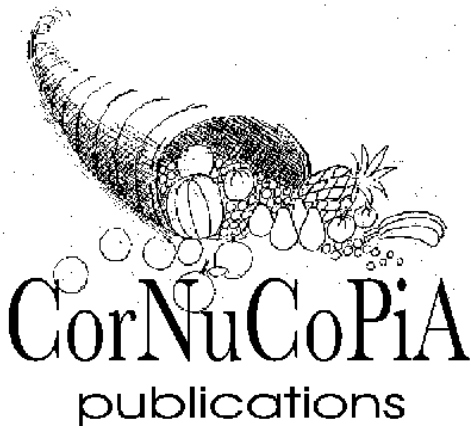
Findings of the world wide survey of
Co-Counsellors' experiences of
settling into Co-Counselling

29 July 1999

**Produced by
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This Trilogy consists of:

- Case Studies, £2.50
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- Report of the Conference in Scotland, August 1999

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or the art of being in charge of yourself and not controlling other people

by JanPieter Hoogma & Teresa Tinklin

This short version provides an introduction to the Rescue Triangle. It forms the first two sections of a longer publication, which we are still writing.

The longer version will also have chapters on the Rescue Triangle in Co-Counselling sessions and in socialisation, liberating yourself from the Rescue Triangle and on how to teach the Rescue Triangle. If you would like to be informed when the full publication is available, please email

teresa.tinklin@ed.ac.uk or contact JanPieter Hoogma at the address below.

One copy of the Rescue Triangle costs £1.50.

Packs of 10 are available to teachers who would like to give this as a handout on Fundamentals, at a cost of £10 + £2 post and packing (UK).

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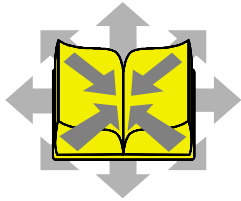
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You can read more about ‘How can we support new Co-Counsellors to settle into Co-Counselling?’ and other CornuCopiA Publications on the internet at the CornuCopiA website. Its address is www.coco-home.demon.co.uk

Preface



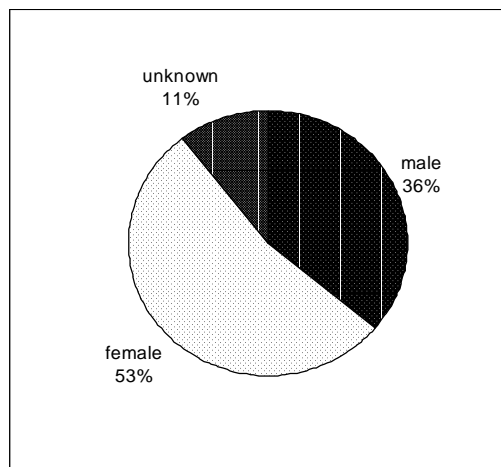
In 1999, while organising CCI Europe in Scotland, we decided to set up an international pre-meeting to focus on the theme ‘How can new Co-Counsellors be supported to settle into Co-Counselling?’ As any teacher of Co-Counselling will know, not everyone who does Fundamentals carries on with Co-Counselling afterwards. We know that different communities have different practices. We wanted to talk about this with Co-Counsellors from around the world to share their different viewpoints and experiences and hopefully to learn from each other and expand our ideas on this theme.

To support the discussion at the meeting we wanted to gather information about as many people’s actual experiences of settling in as possible: to give us some real facts about what people had found difficult and what they had found supportive. So we sent out a questionnaire – to newsletters, communities, and over the internet.

Almost 100 Co-Counsellors responded. This reports provides a summary of what they said.

JanPieter Hoogma & Teresa Tinklin

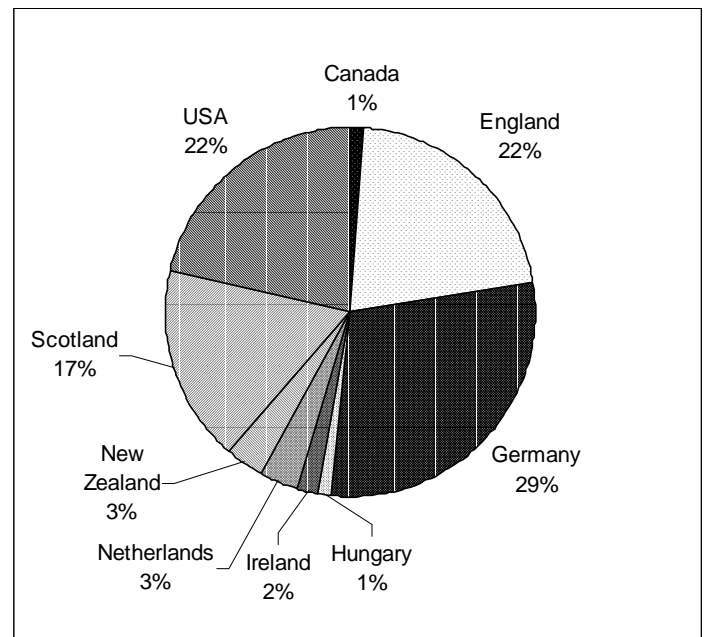
1. Who responded?



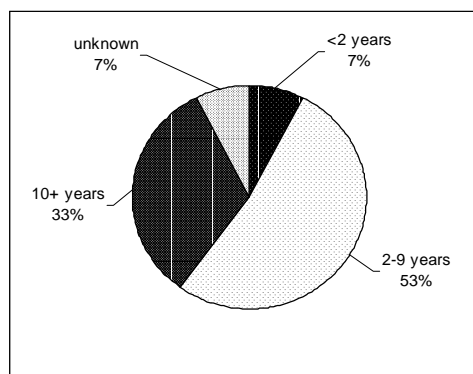
First of all, let's get a picture of who responded.

The pie chart on the left shows that we heard from more females than males.

The one below shows that they were an international group.



Length of time since Fundamentals



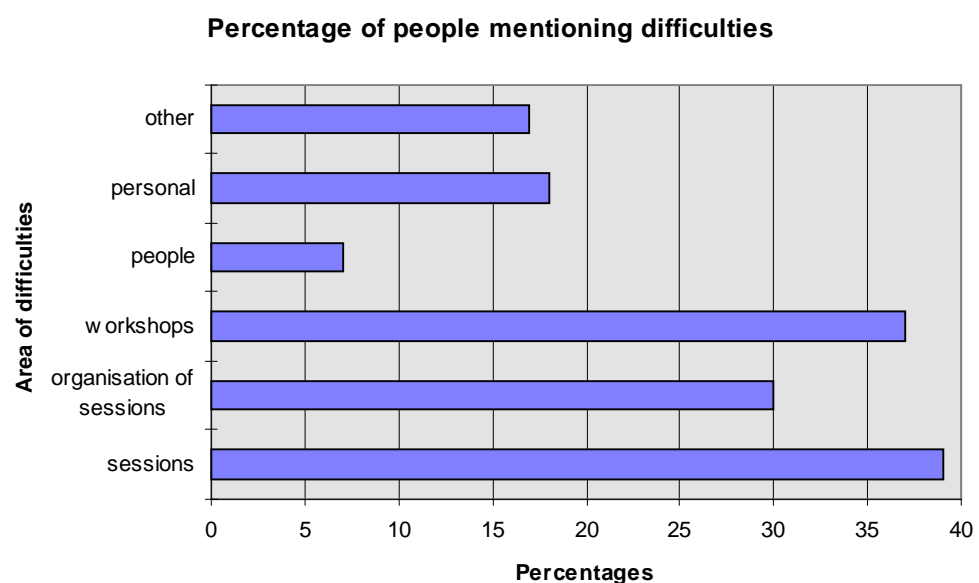
They were generally a very experienced group. Most had been in Co-Counselling for at least 2 years, some for more than 10 years. 20% of them were current teachers and a further 10% were either training to teach or had been teachers in the past. A total of six respondents had experience of RC.

Asking key figures to get people to fill in questionnaires seemed to be the most effective way of getting responses and this contributed to the high response rates from the USA and Germany.

2. What did people find difficult?

Only one person stated that they had had no difficulty in settling in. The rest mentioned various difficulties that they had faced, including finding partners, being in the counsellor or the client role, their own fears or patterns and getting to grips with the Co-Counselling culture. The one mentioned by the largest number of people (one-third) was difficulty in the client role. It is interesting to note that this had been a particular problem for the German Co-Counsellors (over 80% of them stated this as a problem). The other two difficulties mentioned by reasonably large numbers of people were finding partners and overcoming personal fears and patterns which were hindering them from settling in.

Below we group the difficulties people had experienced into 6 areas: difficulties with sessions, organising sessions, workshops, people, personal qualities and other difficulties, in order to describe in more detail the kinds of things that people actually said.



We also asked them what difficulties other people they knew had experienced and they mentioned the same kinds of things that they themselves had experienced. Some of these quotes are included below as well.

1. Session skills

Four out of ten people stated that they had had difficulties with some aspect of sessions. We have grouped these into three areas: client role, counsellor role and difficulties believing in Co-Counselling.

Difficulties in the client role

The particular difficulties experienced by people in the client role centred around getting in touch with and expressing feelings, feeling exposed, trusting the counsellor and feeling unskilled. Here are some examples of what people actually said.

Feelings: 'To reach my feelings in the first place..' 'To reach my feelings, allow them and express them.'

Feeling unskilled: 'Feeling unskilled at being self-directive.' 'Not knowing how to discharge' 'Remembering and understanding the techniques as a client'

Exposure: 'Fear around my deepest wounds being exposed....' 'Exposing personal difficulties in a group.'

Trusting the counsellor: 'To give others such deep insight into myself' 'Trusting strangers in a Co-Counselling session'

Difficulties as counsellor

In the counsellor role, people had found it difficult to hear and witness other people's session material, to get used to keeping that material confidential and feeling competent in the role.

'It is difficult to hear so much difficult and burdening stuff from others.'

'To be able to be witness to others' often strong feelings.'

'Remembering and understanding the techniques and the interventions as a counsellor. Difficulty with wanting to "help". Not feeling competent in the counsellor role.'

'The need to separate the information passed in the CoCo session from subsequent (or previous) interaction with the CoCo partner.'

Doubts about the value of Co-Counselling

Some people had had doubts in the beginning about how Co-Counselling worked or about whether it worked.

'Certain doubts about the value of Co-Counselling in the long term though it is invaluable in the short term.'

'Co-Counselling did not feel powerful enough.'

'Sometimes there were doubts when after the Co-Counselling I didn't feel better but even worse'

'I felt my work wasn't progressing'

2. Organising sessions & finding partners

Three out of ten people said they had experienced difficulties organising sessions and finding partners. The sorts of things they said were:

'I still find it too difficult to approach anyone for a session who I haven't already met.'

'Phoning up someone from the list ...I chose someone not on the phone so I could write to them.'

'Getting in touch with other Co-Counsellors in my area.'

'I longed for friends, I longed to pour my heart out, I longed for support, I longed for intimacy, yet CoCo seemed mostly to teach me autonomy, self-responsibility and made me feel that my loneliness was solely pathological.'

3. Workshops

Over one third had experienced difficulties associated with workshops. These included practical difficulties, such as finding time to go or travel arrangements, and difficulty getting used to the Co-Counselling culture, in particular validations.

'That everyone else appeared to know each other and were always hugging each other. It felt very exclusive to a newcomer.'

'Letting myself hear a validation.' 'Validating'

'Difficulty with "I" statements.'

'Co-Counselling has a strong (lower to) middle class atmosphere - working class people have been known to feel alienated'

4. People

Only a few people mentioned difficulties with other people's behaviour (7%). These were the kinds of comments they made.

'The wild behaviour of the Co-Counsellors at Laurieston.'

'The many rude people. I feel some Co-Counsellors think being rude is assertive.'

'On my first residential someone took their clothes off, just like that!'

'Weird new age people.'

5. Personal Aspects

Two out of ten people said their difficulties were to do with their own fears, patterns or distress.

'I was in so much personal distress that the concepts were difficult for me to grasp'

'My fears of rejection, my vulnerability.'

'Overcoming my fear in order to just attend', 'Overcoming anxiety of being visible'

'anxiety about getting it right', 'Feelings of 'doing it wrong' all these years!'

6 What else was experienced as difficult?

Two out of ten people also mentioned other difficulties that did not fit into any of the other categories. These included interpersonal conflict, difficulties making the transition into the network and particular difficult experiences.

'When my Co-Counselling partner and I came into conflict'

'At my first peer group, someone used an intervention shockingly out of step with what I'd learnt'

'I experienced major distress over having mistakes corrected harshly, or inappropriately.'

'Some traumatised by Fundamentals and needed therapy after'

'Working independently afterwards to cope with missing the intensive atmosphere of the basic workshop.'

'Not becoming friends with my Co-Counsellors'

'For some people (Including to some extent myself) the experience of the Fundamentals provides such a change in how they view themselves and their lives that they don't feel the need at the point of completing Fundamentals to use Co-Counselling ongoingly. I think that needs to be acknowledged and respected.'

Thinking about leaving

About one quarter of people said they had felt like leaving at some point and a small number had left, but then come back. Of course, our questionnaire did not reach the large number of people who have left Co-Counselling over the years and not come back, so we cannot learn from their views and experiences. We asked those who had felt like leaving to say what had helped them to stay. The answer given by the largest group of people (about one quarter) was that what had kept them going was that Co-Counselling works and that they believed in it.

'KNOWING the value of the process, wanting it in my life', 'It was exactly what I needed.'

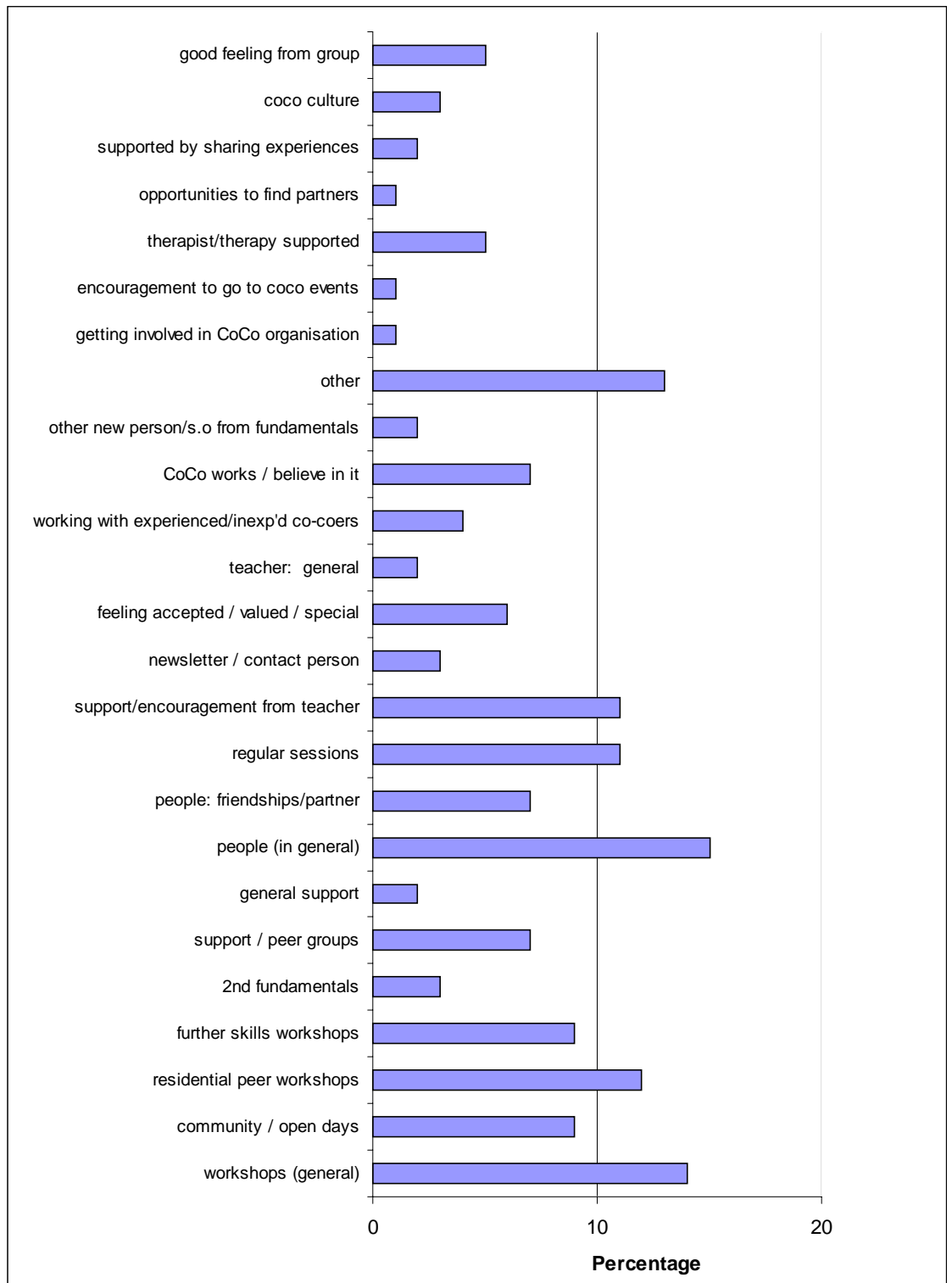
'I stayed because of my transformational experience'

'Experiencing the release that regular Co-Counselling brought'

'Through intensive five day work in one Co-Counselling course I broke down barriers'

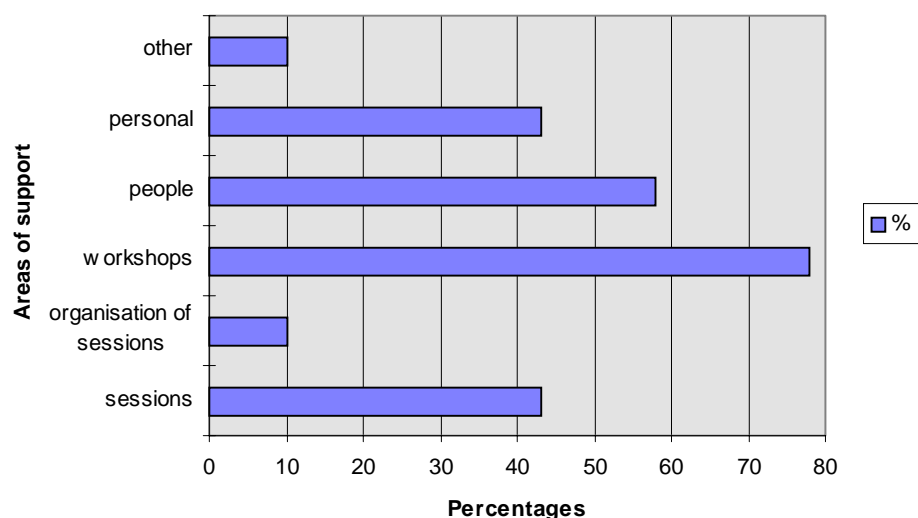
3. What did people experience as helpful?

People mentioned many different things that had helped them to settle in. The answers given were very varied. People had been supported by other people, their teachers, the availability of workshops, open days, peer groups, having regular sessions, by feeling accepted and the Co-Counselling culture more generally.



We group the answers given into the same 6 categories as for difficulties. Again, we occasionally include their views on what had helped other people to settle in.

Percentages of how people felt supported



1. Sessions

Having regular sessions, working with experienced Co-Counsellors or teachers, and having a buddy were mentioned by 43% as ways in which sessions had helped them to settle in. Getting therapy was also mentioned as supportive, which is particularly available in Munster, Germany where Co-Counselling is based around a Co-Counselling therapy centre.

Having regular sessions

‘What helped me to stay was moving swiftly from Fundamentals to further skills and regular sessions.’

‘Regular Co-Counselling’, ‘My Co-Counselling partner. We motivated each other’

Working with experienced Co-Counsellors/Teachers

‘Very supportive helpers on the course who stayed in touch after the course ended’

‘...having occasional sessions with experienced co-cos.’ ‘I like it that a few experienced Co-Counsellors are included in a new group in order to support’

Buddying linking old + new Co-Counsellors

‘Having a 'buddy' helped a lot.’

A Co-Counsellor providing an example or role model

‘Got to watch workshop people counsel in front of the group. Picked up lots of ideas that way.’

Sessions & therapy

‘At the same time I was in therapy and here was encouraged patiently again and again’

‘The combination with psychotherapy and regular Co-Counselling’

‘My therapist. We did Co-Counselling in the therapy sessions’

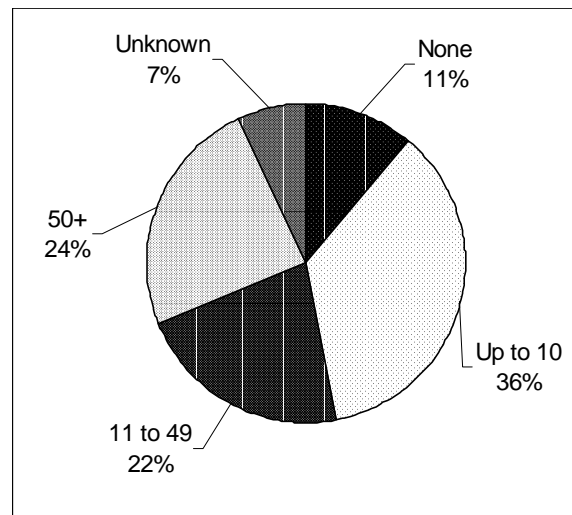
‘I came to Co-Counselling via one to one therapy’

2. Finding partners & organising sessions

10% mentioned things that had been supportive around finding partners and organising sessions. These included the availability of opportunities to meet partners, newsletters and contact lists, and the availability of rooms for Co-Counselling.

Not surprisingly, organising sessions was a more acute problem for people with few Co-Counsellors within easy reach of where they lived. The following diagram shows that almost half had either no Co-Counsellors in easy reach or only a small number, while the other half had significant numbers available.

No of Co-Counsellors within easy reach



Some examples of what people actually said follow.

Opportunities available to find partners

‘Knowing that there were Community Days; phone sessions and people around to get in contact with if I needed it.’

‘In our teaching we provide time for Fundamentals participants to arrange sessions with each other in the weeks after the Fundamentals so the notion of using it afterwards is strongly implanted.’

Observations about newsletters & contact persons

‘The quarterly community days and the newsletter helped to keep me connected’

‘I got copies of the Newsletter while still in class. These were important.’

Special events for new Co-Counsellors

‘we organise once or twice a year a special evening ‘meeting new members’’

‘Inviting all participants from Fundamentals of a year for a Co-Counselling day; worked out well.’

‘A second level course that involved (ideally) some of the same Fundamentals group, and some other, perhaps more experienced people.’

Rooms available for sessions

‘Haus Kloppenburg makes rooms available for one- to one sessions where people for a small fee can work as loudly as they want. The house functions also as a contact centre for people who are looking around for a session partner.’

‘I found it very helpful that there were rooms on offer in Haus Kloppenburg’

3. Workshops/open days/peer groups

78% mentioned that they had found workshops, open days or peer groups helpful in settling in. One quarter said that these kinds of events had been particularly important to them. Several different types of workshop were mentioned including further skills, residential workshops and second Fundamentals.

What people got from workshops

Workshops were seen as places where new Co-Counsellors could learn skills, make contacts and have life-changing experiences.

‘I have experienced them as very intensive and as a real watershed to changing my life, in the social area as well as the creative’

‘contacts, the opportunities for growth. the sense of community; the possibilities for hard work.’

‘learnt more about the culture, learnt and practised my skills’

‘I feel that workshops focusing on specific skills and topics / themes are essential.’

Culture of Co-Counselling workshops

Several people made positive statements about the culture of Co-Counselling workshops.

‘I think the culture of validation and Co-Counselling skills promote connection (more than fitting in).’

‘Finding that there was no ‘party line’ I was free and encouraged to think my own thoughts stand up for myself and that no-one was going to ‘make me’. In fact that I was consistently shown opportunities to express myself SAFELY!’

People appreciated feeling **accepted and valued** at workshops and appreciated the atmosphere of the groups.

‘Feeling special, seen, acknowledged’ ‘The warm, welcoming supportive culture of validation. The safety to be in my pain’ ‘Being allowed, being just me’ ‘I felt accepted and welcomed as me, myself - not because of my background, job, age. etc.’ ‘the lovely atmosphere in the Co-Counselling courses’.

Community /open days

17% of people mentioned the importance of community days or open days.

‘I think the most important thing is regular, well-attended open Co-Counselling days of a general nature (I.e. not tied to a subject or additional technique etc.) and that it would help if child care could be offered at these.’

2nd Fundamentals

This was mentioned by 5% of people as helpful in settling in.

Support or ongoing peer groups

Support groups or ongoing peer groups were also considered important by some people in helping them to settle in, although how they operated was important, and some mentioned encountering difficulties.

‘Support groups - tend to keep people going.’

‘I have found belonging to a Support Group one of the best developments in CCiS for me. It gives a secure base in which to work, continuity and high level of trust and confidentiality.’

'From my own Co-Counselling group very important was the regularity, the ability to trust each other, the agreement before the sessions (contracts?) and the discussion of disturbances in the groups'

Availability of Co-Counselling workshops

When asked about the availability of events in their areas, over half said there was an ongoing open peer or support group available locally. The following table shows the availability of other kinds of Co-Counselling events to the people responding to the survey. Fewer than half had things happening regularly in their areas, although the majority did have access to residential workshops more than once a year.

Availability of Co-Counselling events (percentages)

	Monthly or more often	Few per year	Yearly or less often	None	No answer
Open Co-Counselling days	43	4	2	16	34
Day workshops	5	21	2	21	39
Residential workshops	1	67	0	13	29

4. People

When asked, over half the respondents agreed that someone in particular had helped them to settle in. These included teachers, other Co-Counsellors and therapists, who had given support by encouraging them to go to Co-Counselling events or workshops, having sessions with them, providing a role model or accepting and valuing them. In addition, people had felt supported by the other members of their Fundamentals group. Here are some examples of what they said.

'The other members of my first Fundamentals...We could talk about being new and uncertain, and we could co-counsel about it.'

'the ongoing concern of my teachers, it was important for my settling in that there was an assumption that ... doing Fundamentals was the start of long-term involvement and definitely not an end in itself.'

A minority of others said that they had not been supported by anyone in particular and expressed dissatisfaction with that.

'No-one else gave a damn unless I did further skills or big issues.'

'I felt my teacher was unsupportive in that she didn't seem to care if we met again or not'

People in general

15% made positive comments about the people they had met through Co-Counselling.

'Like-minded people.' 'Welcoming, wonderful people.' 'Connections with people' 'Meeting people who are Co-Counsellors with a sense of humour and assertive while at the same time empathic with others.' 'The unconditional acceptance of each participant felt supportive to me'

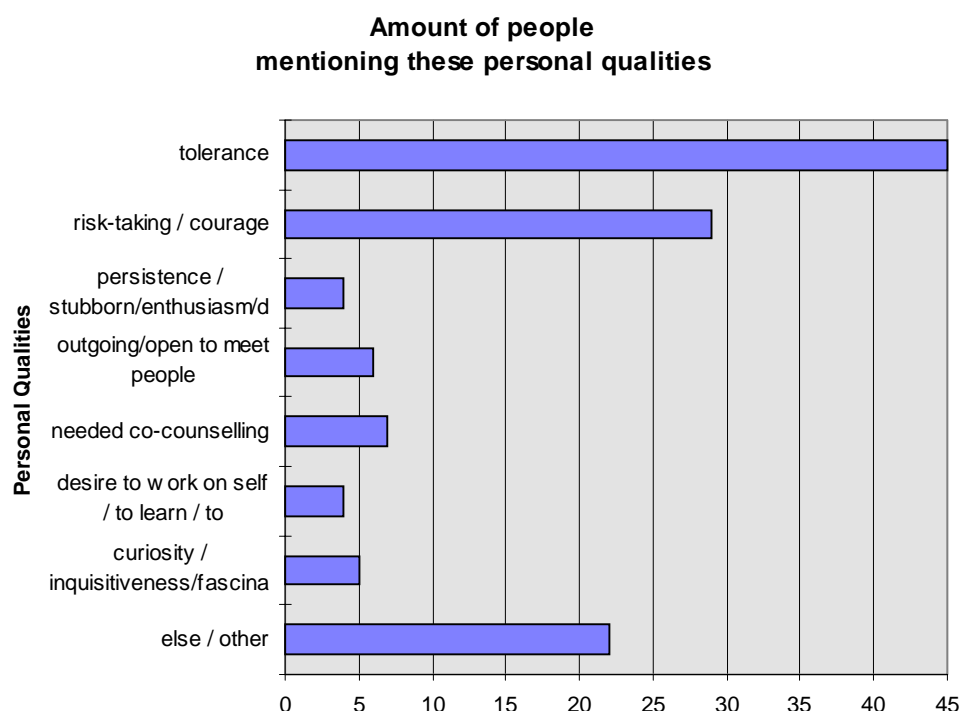
Fitting in with other people

However, over half said they had felt positive about the people they had met through Co-Counselling, one third had had mixed feelings, only 2 people had had negative feelings. The majority (60%) had felt they could fit in with the people they met easily enough, although this was more true of women than men (women: 68%, men: 47%). Only 15% had found the people they met difficult to fit in with, the rest did not answer the question. For those who had felt they could fit in with the people they met, this factor had been important in helping them to settle in.

5. Their own personal qualities

When asked to what extent their personal qualities helped them to settle in, 43% said that their own personal qualities had been really important. An additional 22% mentioned personal qualities in answer to several of the other questions.

Qualities that had particularly helped included persistence, a desire to work on oneself, curiosity, openness to meeting people and courage.



Curiosity: 'I was fascinated by it immediately.' 'Willing to give new things a go'

Persistence: 'I was self directed, tenacious, wanted to learn' 'I was determined to 'get it''

Desire to work on self: 'commitment to growth' 'The wish to be in charge of my own life' 'I think it was the wish and will to change something. The "suffering pressure" was very great.'

Openness to meeting people: 'I can easily talk and make contact with other people.'

Courage: 'Bravery' 'Courage and willingness are qualities I bring to any personal growth experience'

6. What else did people find helpful?

10% mentioned other things that they had found supportive. These included sharing others' experiences, getting involved in Co-Counselling organisation, feeling in charge of their sessions, empowerment, the availability of venues and a sense of community.

Sharing was helpful because it helped people realise that others were having similar experiences to them. 'Co-Counselling weekends were helpful because of the exchange of experiences with other Co-Counsellors' 'Realising that others were nervous and overwhelmed too'

Getting involved in Co-Counselling organisation: 'Getting to know as much about Co-Co as possible by working on the newsletter and reading past newsletters from other areas.'

'I found myself more at home when I began to participate on committees in preparation for CCI USA and on the Community Committee'

Feeling in charge: 'The freedom to go as far as I want.' 'The value of setting my own time.'

Empowerment: 'I asked for and received assurance that I would not be persuaded to do anything I didn't want to do'

Venues: 'The sheltered space (Haus Kloppenburg)' 'friendly regular meeting venue.'

Sense of community: 'I was able to really see the "community" of Co-Counselling' 'A sense of community - a network of mutual support.'

Other comments: 'The hope to change, the hope of a new life' 'Reliability of the Co-Counselling partner.'

'In retrospect I feel that it is vital as a Co-Counsellor to ensure that one has the time and energy to commit to maintaining some form of networking and support e.g. workshops or peer groups. In other words to take responsibility for creating a holding structure for yourself.'

'My introduction into Co-Counselling was very helpful: a well written article about Co-Counselling and a good, informative talk without sales tricks about whether Co-Counselling would be appropriate for me or not.' (Summary of a quote in German)

4. Supporting others

60% said they had tried to support other new Co-Counsellors to settle in by having sessions with them, encouraging them along to Co-Counselling events, providing special events for new Co-Counsellors, running workshops or open days or being involved in the newsletter or organisation of Co-Counselling in the area.

When asked what they felt could be offered or set up to help new Co-Counsellors to settle in, essentially, people thought that the availability of workshops, a buddying system linking old and new Co-Counsellors and special events for new people would all help. See the Table below for the other answers given.

Ways new Co-Counsellors could be supported

	% mentioning this
Availability of workshops	21
Buddying system linking old and new Co-Counsellors	20
Special events for new Co-Counsellors	15
Further skills workshops	7
Having sessions with them	7
Support them by sharing experiences with them	6
Providing opportunities to find partners	3

And, in their own words:

‘Telling people that I go to a certain weekend, so they know at least one person there.’

‘offers of help and transport at the beginning.’

‘A buddy system when they finish Fundamentals, for about a year. Their buddy can Co-Counsel with them, accompany them to local workshops, Co-Counselling gatherings and introduce them to other local Co-Counsellors.’

‘we organise once or twice a year a special evening ‘meeting new members’’

‘Meeting experienced Co-Counsellors at the end of Fundamentals’

‘A support group of their own or an additional support group, running each day? depending on demand. Facilitated by an experienced Co-Counsellor.’

‘Encourage them to participate. Hold community gatherings once a month. Send out postcards. Write personal notes on flyer.’

‘A review of theory and attitudes. Less ‘cook-book Co-Counselling’ - stereotyped counselling and culture - more humanistic and holistic outlook.’

‘Also asking people to take on roles in community.’

‘I do think personal contact is the answer - to be asked personally to attend something, or do something in the network.’

‘A dating agency for Co-Counselling partners? It can be hard to arrange them especially when a relationship doesn't automatically come from Fundamentals.’

‘a process during Fundamentals to create an individual support plan - life action.’

Appendix

Questions we asked

Please tell us first about your experience of settling into Co-Counselling.

- 1.1 What did you find difficult?
- 1.2 Did you ever feel like leaving?
- 1.3 If so, why? What helped you to stay?
- 1.4 What helped you to settle in?
- 1.5 Did anyone in particular support you? Who was it and how did they do that?
- 1.6 To what extent do you think your own personal qualities helped you settle in?
- 1.7 To what extent did external factors such as the availability of workshops in your area help you settle in?
- 1.8 How did you feel about the people you met through Co-Counselling?
- 1.9 Did you feel you could fit in with them easily enough? How important was this to you settling in?

Please tell us about other people's experiences of settling in.

- 2.1 Is there anything you can tell us about other people's experiences of settling in, either difficulties they have had or things that have helped?
- 2.2 Have you tried to support other new Co-Counsellors to settle in? What did you do? How did it work out?
- 2.3 What do you think could be offered or set up to help new Co-Counsellors settle in?

Personal details

- 3.1 How long have you been Co-Counselling?
- 3.2 Type Co-Counsellor (CCI, RC, other)
- 3.3 Are you (currently) teaching Co-Counselling?
- 3.4 What Co-Counselling area / community / network are you in?
- 3.5 Which newsletters do you subscribe to?
- 3.6 About how many Co-Counsellors are there within easy reach of where you live?

How often do the following things happen in your area?

- 4.1 Open Co-Counselling days
- 4.2 day workshops
- 4.3 residential workshops
- 4.4 on-going support groups

Contactable?

5.1 Name

5.2 Address

5.3 Country

5.4 Telephone no.

5.5 E-mail:

The concept of 'settling in'

A few people questioned the notion of 'settling in', saying that it suggests that Co-Counsellors go through a certain period at the beginning during which it is 'make or break' whether they will continue on with Co-Counselling.

'Perhaps I think this questionnaire is somewhat irrelevant. It is assuming that I did eventually settle into the network which is not true.'

'This question brings prompts the questions in me "Is there any such thing as 'settling in'", "What is settling in?" and "Do Co-Counsellors go through 'settling in?'".'

'What is a settling in period? To me it a period during which a newcomer
i) does not experience something fully because of unfamiliarity with how things work because of lack of time to become familiar or lack of knowledge of how to become familiar

ii) experiences a feeling of unfamiliarity

iii) has not made personal connections (possibly with places and ways of doing things as well as with people).'

'The theme of the Gathering suggests to me the assumption that Co-Counsellors go through a certain period which is a sort of hurdle to getting into the Co-Counselling community, and that this hurdle is something to do with the newcomer not being connected with what the community is "really" like.

And possibly that if newcomers could be got through this hurdle, then there would be lots of new Co-Counsellors in the community and that these newcomers would not drop out. Has this assumption been made? Is it part of the Gathering's task to check out whether this assumption is true (if this assumption has actually been made).'

' wenn man jeden als autonom handelndes Subjekt ernst nimmt, müsste man die Entscheidung sich vom Netzwerk zu trennen genau so hoch schätzen als die Entscheidung dabei zu bleiben.'

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