

## Counselors' Q & A: Can People Really Change?

Thoughts from therapists Joanne Basillios, Caroline McGuire, and Mary Browne

We've all heard a lot in recent months about the issue of change. When it comes to people, though, can anyone really change? More specifically to PPI, can people change or be changed through the process of therapy?

As a matter of fact, all of us do change, and we change throughout our lifetimes. Often we change in response to changing circumstances, and we do so sometimes without even being aware of the process as it is taking place. Sometimes we're overwhelmed by the challenges that changes bring. But whether they are positive or negative, big or small, quickly completed or painfully drawn out, circumstantial changes present opportunities for personal growth—personal change for the better.

In his book, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, William Bridges describes the process we go through as we deal with transitions in our lives. As Bridges states, change moves us from "endings," through the "neutral zone," and into the "new beginning," a process that is often anxiety producing and not as easily defined as we would like.

Therapists are often called "agents of change," and as such they journey with their clients through this complex process. They help clients make sense of the over-

whelming emotions that often accompany transitions. They observe the coping patterns the client has learned in childhood—patterns that may no longer be effective. And therapists act as guides in helping clients discover their way to the "new beginning."

In many ways, a good therapist assumes the role of a coach. That role is not to participate in the "game" but to sit outside it, to discern the bigger picture, and to give instruction for success from this larger, objective perspective. A keen understanding of the past, an accurate perception of the present, and a clear vision of the future are the helpful tools the therapist hones and trains a client to apply in his or her life.

All in all, a skilled therapist facilitates a client's journey toward self-discovery to make sense of the challenges and changes life brings, and ultimately toward constructive personal change for productive, fulfilling living.

So the answer is "Yes!" Not only can people change, they do it all the time, whether intending to or not. The question is, do they change for the better? We at PPI strive to help people do just that through a holistic approach that recognizes the many facets—emotional, physical, and spiritual—of human well-being.

For more answers on the issue of change, see the interview by Elizabeth Peters with PPI therapists at [www.ppi-online.org](http://www.ppi-online.org).

**To receive Perspectives online instead of through the mail, call or email PPI and provide us with your email address.**

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## Location, Location, Location!

*A Word from the Executive Director*  
Randall Hoedeman, Ph.D.

In my first director's note, I wrote about *who* we are at the Pittsburgh Pastoral Institute (PPI)—namely, southwestern Pennsylvania's oldest and largest interfaith counseling and psychotherapy center. This note introduces some of our thirty branch offices in a total of six counties—or *where* we are.

We at PPI view our work first and foremost as an honored privilege and sacred responsibility to provide the best, most hospitable, and most accessible counseling and educational services we can. Consequently, any description of PPI's "size" is not done boastfully but with gratitude for the opportunities that have come our way to help a growing number of persons—and with the satisfaction of knowing that the effectiveness of our services has spawned that growth.

PPI began forty-four years ago in the Shadyside area of Pittsburgh, and most of our offices are located in Allegheny County. In an effort to respond to increasing requests for our services, we have branched out into an additional five counties: Armstrong, Fayette, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland. Here I want to introduce PPI's branches in outlying counties.

The local ministerium in Leechburg, **Armstrong County**, have worked together to secure counseling services in their community through PPI. Sandy Walter, M.S.W., has been working since July to develop this site.



PPI's **Fayette County** office is located at the Central Christian Church in Uniontown. Tracey Lee, M.S./NCC, LPC, is the primary therapist at that site. A highly experienced therapist, Tracey works with a variety of therapeutic approaches on a wide range of issues.



Our **Lawrence County** office, located in Northminster Presbyterian Church in New Castle, is the oldest of the outlying branches. Our primary therapist there is Joanne Wilson, M.A., a licensed professional counselor experienced in working with individuals, couples, and families on a wide array of issues and concerns. Jim Hines, M.Div., recently retired from service in this office.

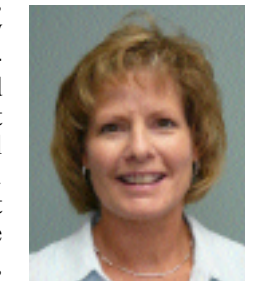


Our newest branch office, through a partnership with Compassion Connection, is located at the Central Assembly of God Church in **Washington, PA**. Debbie Elmore, M.A., is the primary therapist at this rapidly growing office, which is already looking to add another therapist.



**Founded in 1964, PPI is the oldest and largest interfaith counseling agency in Pittsburgh.**

In **Westmoreland County** PPI has offices in Irwin, at Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church; Latrobe, at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church; and Greensburg, at First Evangelical Lutheran Church. One of our newest therapists, Laurie Madine, M.S.W., covers all these offices, where Laurie recently joined



Gayle Clark, M.S.W. Gayle is retiring from three years of service at our Westmoreland County offices at the end of November.

A description of the twenty-five branch offices in Allegheny county will be covered in the next newsletter. But you don't have to wait. **You can log on to our website at [ppi-online.org](http://ppi-online.org)** for a full listing of these locations, or call Marty Smith, Referral Coordinator, at 412-661-1239 (or our toll-free number, 1-877-661-9623), ext. 16, for information and appointments. All initial registrations and appointments are handled through our main office at the numbers above.

The rapid growth of our branch offices is an example of the way in which the increasing need and demand for PPI's services intersects with the privilege of being our area's oldest and largest interfaith counseling center.

Our most important message is this:

**When the need arises, there is a warm, welcoming, and convenient place at PPI for all.**

## Perspectives

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**"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."**

Psalm 34:18

## Silent Samaritan Luncheon

On Friday, October 24th, PPI held its "Thank You" Luncheon for Silent Samaritans—women of strength helping women of need through quiet contributions.

Honorary chair at this year's luncheon was Ms. Connie Cibrone, CEO of Allegheny General Hospital. Our speaker, Charles Geyer Jr., M.D., addressed the group on "Good News



from the Front Lines of the War on Breast Cancer," in which he outlined advancements in breast cancer detection and treatment. Ms. Jo Ann Esposito, a patient of Dr. Geyer's who accompanied him at the luncheon, shared her story with the group. Dr. Geyer answered questions following these presentations.

On behalf of all the female clients who benefit from your generous contributions, thank you. We look forward to seeing you at next year's luncheon event.

## Community Building Campaign—Approaching Halfway to Home!

PPI's first newsletter reported on the early stages of our five-year, \$1,500,000 Community Building Campaign, with its three main components:

(1) Capital funding for the purchase and maintenance of our main office building in Shadyside;

(2) Funding to increase our clinical and administrative capacity and efficiency, particularly through the purchase and installation of an electronic medical records (EMR) system; and

(3) Funding for program expansion.

The cornerstone of the campaign has consisted in goal number (1)—raising \$500,000 for the purchase and ongoing maintenance of our main office property in Shadyside, the wonderful old Victorian house we have rented for several decades and pictured here. Its warm and welcoming atmosphere has been much appreciated by clients and staff alike and has served admirably as the vital hub around which all of our growth and outreach have revolved.

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the board, staff, and friends of PPI, we were able to meet and exceed our goal by raising \$509,000. We are



grateful for major gifts received from the Hillman Foundation, the Richard King Mellon Foundation, and another generous donor. As a result, we have purchased, repaired, and upgraded the property and have established an ongoing maintenance fund to ensure its affordability for decades to come.

**Because of this success, we are now focused on stage two of the campaign—**particularly on the purchase, installation, and maintenance of an electronic medical records (EMR) system. Our fundraising goal for this aspect of the campaign is \$225,000.

The installation of an EMR system is now our highest priority for a number of reasons. First, no single purchase or invest-

ment will do more to enhance PPI's overall efficiency and effectiveness. Compared to our current, handwritten paper charts, an EMR system will:

- ♦ Save considerable time, expense, and administrative overhead;
- ♦ Enhance quality assurance, in that electronic records are easier to manage, keep legible, and keep secure;
- ♦ Increase access to registration and treatment information and thereby more effectively coordinate our treatment teams, the communication between our therapists and psychiatrists, and our 24/7 response-time;
- ♦ Facilitate communication and coordination of care with other providers;
- ♦ Improve communication with insurance companies;
- ♦ Facilitate communication between our main office and our numerous branch offices;
- ♦ Enhance billing efficiency and effectiveness; and
- ♦ Facilitate our annual state-licensing review and periodic insurance-company audits.

Second, health insurance companies are increasingly requiring (or offering financial incentives for) the utilization of an EMR system.

Finally, installing this capacity-building system will allow us to move on to planning and implementing other phases of our campaign—particularly, program expansion and the diversification of our funding base through expanding our annual appeal, developing a signature special event, and identifying, cultivating, and soliciting major gifts from friends of PPI.

## How You Can Help

In addition to funding from local foundations, PPI will need the help of our friends and supporters in reaching our stage-two Community Building Campaign goal: the purchase of an electronic medical records (EMR) system.

You can make a tax-deductible contribution or pledge for this \$225,000 project by contacting Julie Pasquarelli, our fiscal director, at 412-661-1239, ext. 26.

Other ways in which you can support PPI include:

- ♦ Volunteering for office help and/or groundskeeping;
- ♦ Donating office supplies, paper products (such as tissues), and printing services;
- ♦ One-time or ongoing financial contributions.

**Thanks go to Minuteman Press of Allison Park for discounting the printing cost of our newsletters.**

## PPI Info: The Basics

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## PPI Therapists Pursue Gambling Counseling Certification

Thanks to a funding grant received from Pittsburgh Presbytery's New Mission Funding, seven therapists at PPI were able to complete a thirty-hour, nationally certified training course in gambling counseling during September and October. The counselors will do additional individual and group supervisory case consultations as they complete the hours necessary to take the national certifying examination.

**What is gambling?** One definition of the disorder is "risking something you have (money or possessions) in the hope of gaining something you don't have . . . when the outcome is uncertain." In this definition, the key word is "uncertain."

Most people who gamble, just like most people who drink, can do so safely without negative consequences.

However, estimates indicate that pathological gambling is a problem for 1-2 percent of the U.S. population, and a higher percentage have problem-gambling patterns.

The course completed by PPI therapists provided in-depth information on screening tools to assess for gambling problems, and training in treatment approaches for those with problem or

pathological gambling. Topics addressed ranged from:

- ♦ subtypes of pathological gamblers, such as action versus escape gamblers;
- ♦ specific at-risk populations, such as adolescents and senior citizens;
- ♦ the progression of compulsive gambling and its impact on families; and
- ♦ the recovery process.

The course's research content was enhanced through the sharing of personal stories by problem and compulsive gamblers.

The seven PPI therapists will next distill the pertinent information learned from the course into a brief community educational program on gambling. The educational module they develop will be offered to the community particularly through our host-church facilities.

In addition, we will begin to implement the two-item clinical screen

for problem gambling. We plan to use our training both to help prevent problem gambling by raising public awareness and expanding education on the disorder, and also by providing treatment and resolution for problem gamblers.

**Let us know if we can share this program with your church or community organization.**



Instructor Jody Bechtold (far left), University of Pittsburgh/School of Social Work, trained PPI therapists in gambling counseling. Pictured here (continuing left to right) are: Jean Kolbe, M.S.W.; Brad Walters, M.Div., M.S.W.; Joanne Bassilios, R.N., M.Div., M.S.W.; Tom Nowak, M.S.W.; Pat Mary, M.A.; and Sarah Cook, M.S.W. PPI intern Amanda Rezkowski, B.A., trained with them.

## Dual-Degree Therapists

A number of PPI therapists have dual degrees—one in theology in addition to one in clinical counseling education. Five of the PPI therapists who have completed the dual-degree program by earning a master of social work (M.S.W.) from the University of Pittsburgh and a master of divinity (M.Div.) from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary are pictured below.



From left to right:

- ♦ Lesli Dahl (ordained in the Disciples of Christ denomination)
- ♦ Mary Browne (candidate for ordination in the Lutheran denomination)
- ♦ Brad Walters (ordained in the Presbyterian denomination)
- ♦ Joanne Bassilios (also a registered nurse)
- ♦ Elizabeth Peters

These therapists are developing the clergy-congregational care program with the encouragement and support of Pittsburgh Pastoral Institute and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

## Newsletter Production

Jean Kolbe  
Connie Gundry Tappy

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