

PACFA History Interview: Jim Crawley

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Interviewer: Nigel Polak

Interviewee: Jim Crawley

Introduction

Nigel Polak: Hello and welcome, Jim Crawley.

I'm speaking as the current President of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia, PACFA, in 2024, and I'm joined by PACFA's inaugural President, Jim Crawley, who first held the role from 1999.

Before we begin, let's acknowledge Country. I'm speaking from Gumbaynggirr Country on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales, and Jim is joining us from Perth. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Thank you so much for being here, Jim.

Early Life and Entry Into the Profession

Nigel Polak: Could we begin with your earlier life and career and how you came into counselling and psychotherapy?

Jim Crawley: As people can probably tell from my voice, I'm English. I grew up in a fairly ordinary middle-class English family, although I later realised how profoundly my family had been shaped by World War II.

I was born in 1944, right at the end of the war. My mother's family experienced significant loss. Two of her brothers were killed within weeks of each other and her father died shortly afterwards. My father served throughout the war in the British Army and saw a great deal of action, although he never spoke about it.

Today we would probably say he was affected by PTSD. He became a very quiet and contained person.

I grew up mostly in Portsmouth in the south of England, which at that time was very much a naval city. I attended a cadet corps school and the expected career path for me was the Royal Navy.

At the end of Year 12, I was preparing to apply to officer training at Dartmouth when one of my teachers asked me whether I really wanted to spend my life sitting on a ship hoping there wouldn't be a war.

He suggested I go to university first.

That changed everything.

I spent a year working in a factory before university, which turned out to be a very valuable experience. I then studied sociology, although I probably devoted more time to student politics than to studying.

After university, I entered an Anglican theological college intending to become a priest. However, I became disappointed with the quality of pastoral care training.

At the same time, I had the opportunity to observe ward rounds in a newly opened psychiatric unit at a hospital. I found that fascinating.

At the end of my first year at theological college, someone suggested I should "go and do social work for a year to get it out of my system". It ended up taking me 35 years to return.

I became a trainee social worker in East London and later worked in a clinic for people struggling with heroin addiction. I loved that work.

It also forced me to learn how to sit with people and speak with them. I had almost no formal counselling training at that point, so I learned largely through practice and supervision.

I later completed postgraduate psychiatric social work training at the London School of Economics and worked in child psychiatry.

It was during that period that family therapy first appeared on the horizon.

Family Therapy, Group Work and Australia

Jim Crawley: Family therapy was still very new at the time.

I remember persuading a consultant psychiatrist to see an entire family together rather than separating them, which was the standard approach.

During that session, two teenage boys got into a fist fight while we sat there trying to remain non-directive.

Afterwards, we looked at each other and both said simultaneously, "Why didn't you do something?"

That was part of the learning process.

I also became deeply interested in group work and group dynamics. During my years in London, I participated in a twice-weekly psychoanalytic group for two years.

I had intended to train as a group psychoanalyst, but by then I had met and married an Australian and we moved to Australia instead.

I took up an academic position in Melbourne at what was then Preston Institute of Technology, later Philip Institute and eventually RMIT University.

I was there for ten years.

It was an exciting time because the institution was new and we had considerable freedom in developing curriculum and teaching methods.

Video recording was just beginning to be used in training, and we incorporated a great deal of experiential learning.

At the same time, I continued practising family and couples therapy and became increasingly involved in the family therapy movement in Australia.

Eventually I decided against pursuing senior university management roles because I realised I wanted to keep teaching and practising rather than becoming an administrator.

Instead, I became Director of the Marriage Guidance Council of Western Australia, later Relationships Australia WA.

Those six years were difficult because the organisation transitioned from relying largely on volunteer counsellors to employing professionally qualified practitioners.

Later, I entered private practice and trained further as a psychotherapist within self psychology and object relations traditions.

I also lectured part-time at Edith Cowan University, which established Western Australia's first tertiary counselling course.

That course later became a Master's in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

I retired from private practice around 15 years ago and eventually completed the circle by returning to theology and becoming an Anglican priest.

The Origins of PACFA

Nigel Polak: You were there right from the beginning of the coming together of counselling and psychotherapy organisations in Australia. How did that begin?

Jim Crawley: In 1996, Hugh Craig and Ruth Stury from the University of New England convened a meeting in Armidale.

At the time, counselling was rapidly expanding in Australia. More and more training programs were emerging, but there was no common standard for training, ethics or professional identity.

There was also concern that essentially anyone could call themselves a counsellor.

Hugh and Ruth invited around 30 people from different counselling and psychotherapy training programs around Australia.

I attended with my colleague Jan Grant from Edith Cowan University.

Initially I expected it would simply be an opportunity to catch up with colleagues, but it became something much more significant.

It was an incredibly rich and exciting meeting.

People from very different therapeutic traditions discovered common ground.

I remember having conversations over dinner with practitioners whose approaches seemed entirely different from my own, only to discover we shared many interests and values.

The meeting lasted three days and involved extensive small-group discussion and collaborative reflection.

At the end, we agreed to meet again the following year with a larger group.

We also formed a steering committee called the Standing Committee of Educators and Trainers in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

One of the tasks we undertook was trying to define counselling and psychotherapy and explore where they overlapped and where they differed.

Building a National Federation

Jim Crawley: The 1997 meeting was even larger and equally lively.

There was extensive discussion about ethics, training standards, supervision and the possibility of creating a recognised professional register.

One metaphor that emerged repeatedly was the idea of an umbrella.

We needed some kind of umbrella organisation that could bring together the many different associations and traditions while allowing them to retain their own identities.

That became the basis for PACFA.

Importantly, PACFA was conceived as a federation of organisations, not a membership-based body.

At that stage, a direct membership structure would have been perceived as threatening, particularly by smaller specialist associations.

We established several working parties focused on:

- a national register
- a code of ethics
- liaison between associations
- training standards.

There was an enormous amount of voluntary work involved.

People paid their own travel costs and attended meetings in their own time.

Looking back, the amount of work undertaken during those years was extraordinary.

There was great excitement and idealism, but also significant anxiety and conflict.

People were deeply invested in their own traditions and standards.

As chair, I often found myself managing highly charged discussions.

Fortunately, years of couples therapy had prepared me reasonably well for that.

Founding PACFA

Jim Crawley: Eventually we set a date for formally establishing PACFA.

That meeting took place at St Hilda's College at the University of Melbourne in November 1998.

About 80 people attended, representing counselling and psychotherapy associations from across Australia.

We produced a detailed discussion paper explaining the vision for PACFA and the work that had been done.

Prior to the meeting, I travelled around the country meeting with practitioners and associations to explain the proposal and encourage support.

At the Melbourne meeting, PACFA was formally established.

A national launch followed at the *Psychotherapy in Australia* conference in 1999.

I remained President for four years before stepping down and handing over to Ron Perry.

Key Contributors

Nigel Polak: Who stands out in your memory as pivotal contributors during those early years?

Jim Crawley: There were many people who made major contributions.

Ruth Stury and Hugh Crago were absolutely central in initiating the process.

Priscilla Maxwell did enormous work around the national register and standards.

Sophie Holmes led important work around ethics.

Jan Grant from Edith Cowan University was deeply involved.

Ron Perry played a significant role both in facilitation and leadership.

Mara Selvini-Palazzoli was not directly involved, but Maria Teresa Hook from Sydney made a very important contribution as a thoughtful psychoanalytic voice within discussions.

There were many others as well.

It was a remarkably experienced and committed group.

PACFA and ACA

Nigel Polak: Around the same time, the Australian Counselling Association was also developing. What do you remember about that?

Jim Crawley: ACA was definitely one of the triggers for the original discussions.

There was concern that counselling training could become very loosely defined and that people could complete relatively minimal training and immediately present themselves as counsellors.

PACFA's position was that counselling and psychotherapy required robust tertiary training, supervised practice and genuine skills development.

We believed counselling training had to involve substantial face-to-face learning, supervision and experiential work.

There was certainly tension between PACFA and ACA in those early years.

At times ACA felt like a shadow looming over PACFA.

There were attempts at communication, but relationships were not always easy.

Counselling, Psychotherapy and Professional Identity

Nigel Polak: There has always been tension between counselling and psychotherapy. What do you recall about that?

Jim Crawley: There was definitely concern from some psychodynamic and psychoanalytic psychotherapy groups that PACFA might dilute psychotherapy.

For psychotherapists, personal therapy is central to training.

When I trained, the process involved years of personal therapy, supervision and deep personal work.

Some psychotherapists felt uneasy about being grouped together with counsellors whose training requirements were less intensive.

There was concern about maintaining standards and protecting the integrity of psychotherapy.

Eventually many psychoanalytic and psychoanalytic psychotherapy organisations withdrew from PACFA.

I think that was one of the major lost opportunities.

Those traditions had been absolutely central in PACFA's formation.

PACFA's Evolution

Nigel Polak: From a distance, how have you seen PACFA evolve?

Jim Crawley: I deliberately stepped back after my presidency.

I did not want to become someone constantly telling others how things should be done.

However, looking at PACFA now, I am genuinely impressed by how much it has grown.

It has become a substantial national organisation with real structure and influence.

I was particularly encouraged when PACFA eventually transitioned to a membership-based organisation.

That would have been impossible in the late 1990s, but by the time it happened the profession had matured enough for it to work.

I also think PACFA has succeeded in becoming a recognised standards-setting body for counselling and psychotherapy.

That was always part of the original vision.

The Future of Counselling and Psychotherapy

Nigel Polak: What would you like to see for the future of counselling and psychotherapy?

Jim Crawley: I would like to see far more research into both process and outcomes.

Psychotherapy and counselling are often more difficult to research than brief behavioural approaches because they are relational, open-ended and unfold over time.

But we still need strong research if we are going to persuade governments, health systems and funding bodies of the value of what we do.

I would also like to see counselling and psychotherapy more fully integrated into mainstream health and mental health services.

That will require:

- advocacy
- credible standards
- strong public communication
- robust research evidence.

At the same time, we need to remain grounded and accessible.

We need to communicate clearly with the broader community and avoid presenting ourselves as esoteric or disconnected from ordinary life.

The Importance of the Therapist's Own Development

Jim Crawley: One encouraging development is the growing recognition among students and practitioners of the importance of personal therapy and self-awareness.

In recent years, many more counselling students openly discuss their own therapy and recognise how important personal development is for practice.

The therapist's own personhood is the main instrument in counselling and psychotherapy.

Training is not only academic.

It also involves self-understanding, reflection and emotional development.

Closing Reflections

Nigel Polak: One of the distinctive features of counselling and psychotherapy is that each practitioner is unique. Every therapeutic relationship is unique.

The individual counsellor and the individual client co-create something that cannot simply be replicated.

Jim Crawley: Yes.

Closing

Nigel Polak: Jim, thank you very much for your time today and for your contribution to PACFA and the profession over many years.

Jim Crawley: Thank you. It's been interesting to revisit all of this.
