

# My psychotherapy career: How media work helps my private practice

With John-Paul Davies

Jenna:

Hello and welcome to My Psychotherapy Career, a podcast where we explore the different therapeutic settings our members work in, and how they came into their career. I'm Jenna Rachid, the Digital Engagement Officer at UKCP. Our host Helen Willingham is the Head of Content and Engagement at UKCP, overseeing all our communications to members and the public as well as our policy and research work. In this episode, Helen speaks to UKCP psychotherapist John-Paul Davies. John-Paul is a writer, contributing to blogs and articles. He is also a published author. His book, *Finding a Balanced Connection*, seeks to offer self-help advice to individuals seeking to build wellbeing from within. Helen seeks to find out what led John-Paul to set up his private practice after a career as a lawyer.

Helen:

So, thank you John-Paul for joining today. My first question is, why did you decide to set up in private practice?

John-Paul:

My previous career was as a solicitor, so I was working within a big organisation, a big city law firm at the time. And I think one of the reasons for going into therapy and training as a psychotherapist was, of course, an interest in that subject. But there was also the thing about working for myself and being much more in control of what I did on a day-to-day basis. So, what led me into the training as well was I was in therapy. So obviously, I've had experience for a number of years of somebody in private practice, so I could see what it was like. I'd had a child, as well, so looking for a career, and a way of working, I suppose fitted with a family life too, better than working within a large law firm. So, I mean, it's since having trained and being around more in the therapy world that actually I can see, in terms of where people are employed, you know, all those different opportunities. But I think I came into it with private practice in mind.

Helen:

And was there something specific? I know you mentioned about kind of work-life balance, but was there anything specific that appealed to you about private practice in itself?

John-Paul:

Well, it wouldn't be the flexibility, it would be choosing hours. I know that in terms of, you know, from my point of view, I'm primary income earner in the house. So, seeing a particular number of clients was necessary, and that, if you're looking at transitioning into going into private practice, I think it's really something to hold in mind. Particularly coming from something which I did, say law, you know, there is an income level and private health insurance and all those things. So, I wanted something that was flexible, and also, you know, particularly, or mainly doing something that I loved and enjoyed and was interested in. And private practice gave me that model. I mean, there are things of course, that come with setting up a business, you know, running all those things yourself, getting clients.

You know, if you have two clients at the beginning and one leaves that can be dealing with the anxiety of those kinds of situations, which you wouldn't have necessarily working in a big law firm as a lawyer. But I think it was the model that fitted most for me with the lifestyle that I imagined I wanted.

Helen:

And you made a point there about setting up and getting clients. How did you begin that process? And how did you start to get clients to your practice?

John-Paul:

Well, I started my private practice in my third year at CCPE (Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education), where I trained. We were allowed to do that then, even though we hadn't qualified. So, it's a four-year course and in the third year I was able to do that. I set it up with a colleague actually, which was nice: being able to do the website and things together, and think about the marketing and things together. So initially, the college restricted the amount that you're able to charge an hour, what I was able to do, or I had to charge a sort of low rate - understandably, completely, understandably, because you're still training - a low rate for the therapy. So, I started doing a Google AdWords campaign. So, the sponsored ads on Google, so somebody Googled low-cost therapists, then my name and the name of this other person will come up. So, a number of clients came through that. And then also CCPE, where I trained, they also have a counselling service there. So, tutors who assessed people when they came in would refer anybody who wanted low-cost therapy.

Helen:

You mentioned making use of Google AdWords and kind of reaching people in different ways. And another way that you do that is now you're an author, and you've done quite a lot of media work as well with newspapers and further podcasts as well. And what prompted you to get into that side of things?

John-Paul:

Well, I wrote a book, self-published it in 2019, but of course, you want people to read it, and as many people as possible to read it. So, I employed at that point - just for a two-week campaign - a PR company, because I had very little expertise in social media, actually, at that time in selling the book. So, they set up interviews on radio, and also approached a few journalists and asked them whether they needed somebody to contribute to an article. And there are a number of things that came out of that. And I sort of continued with those journalists' contacts afterwards. So, Healthy For Men, for example, I got an introduction through that PR company. And then the journalist that I spoke to came back every time they had to write an article and has done ever since on a sort of psychological or wellbeing matter. So that's continued, which has been great, and I love it. It's a great complement to the client work, I find, you know, it's another way to reach people, it's a different way to reach people and lots of people. Perhaps some people that wouldn't be able to come into therapy or wouldn't come into therapy, it's a way of reaching them, as I say, through contributing to articles, and people reading that. And also, doing podcasts is another great thing I find, which I really enjoy.

Helen:

Have you got any advice that you would give to someone who is thinking about exploring more media work?

John-Paul:

Yes, I would say, you know, there's the practical ways of doing it, you know, getting into contact with journalists. UKCP, you know, have spokespeople. I mean, advice wise, I would say, you know, people generally can want things quite quickly, so it will need to fit with whatever else is happening in your life. And, of course, you know, you need to enjoy it. I, initially, perhaps didn't as much, you know, in some ways I was doing it to promote the book at the beginning. But when you sort of get into it, and then realise the impact it can have.

If I look at the podcast that I did with Guardian journalist Annalisa, you know, that was via UKCP, she does a sort of agony aunt column in The Guardian, and she gets, via UKCP, you know, psychotherapist, to provide input on that. And through that, she asked me to go on to one of the podcasts and that and it did really well, her podcast series, you know, covered various different subjects. And through that came new clients who'd heard the podcast. I would really suggest that people try it and see what it feels like.

Helen:

That's great advice, John-Paul. And I think if you've got that want to do it, then there are those different opportunities available and I guess, once you're in, then more and more opportunities become available to do different things. And it might be that actually, writing a comment or quote for print article isn't quite the right thing, but working on a podcast might be.

John-Paul:

There are so many people, so many different websites, you know, newspapers, magazines, podcasts now. And I think in terms of emotional wellbeing, psychological issues, mental health is so high up the agenda for people that there are lots of opportunities. I mean there's a lot of people probably that want to do it, but there are lots of opportunities. And as I say, it can make a really significant difference. You know, lots of younger clients who are on Instagram, scrolling through, and some of the things that they see and read, you know, are very helpful, and that is how they will connect with somebody and potentially find a therapist. So again, there are people that I know that don't even have a website and have very successful practices and would never want to do the media stuff. But personally, I think it's a very helpful way. Everything feeds into each other, I find, and it makes, as I say, for a very balanced day for me, in terms of working as a therapist.

Helen:

What advice would you give to someone who's thinking about setting up in private practice?

John-Paul:

I would say there is the practical issue of, you know, transitioning from training into starting a practice, which means usually a drop in income for somebody, particularly if they are the primary income earner, for example. So, thinking about that as soon as possible, how that's going to be possible, practically. I would say in terms of people around and local therapists, you know, there might be a tendency to think of other therapists as competition, but I would very much say that treating other therapists you know, as a community is a very helpful thing to do. Of course, if somebody is looking for a therapist, and there's you or another person's website comes up, they're choosing one or the other. But you know, I meet some local therapists here monthly, it's incredibly helpful to meet with them. Being a psychotherapist in private practice, being able to talk to another therapist about what that brings up. Looking at the Coronavirus, switching over to Zoom, those things, it's a very particular way of working and being which can be really understood by other therapists. I think it's really important to have that community and if there isn't one locally, I would suggest, you know, contacting other people who work in private practice and you know, talk to them about what it's like and what their journey is like. There's also the referrals, that practical side of things. So, if a particular client chooses to go to the other person, for example, you know, if their partner wants to come and see a therapist or their child, and there's a conflict potentially there, then we can all refer to each other. You know, in Cobham High Street there are eight therapists and since I've been working, and that's ten years, no one has stopped.

Helen:

And how did you get involved locally? Was that a kind of established group that you managed to find? How was that set up?

John-Paul:

Yes, there is. There's a group locally, I'm in Cobham in Surrey, and there's the Surrey Counselling and Psychotherapy Initiative, which originally, I think about 30 counsellors and therapists, but it's now been up to 50. They're reorganising it at the moment, but they meet every month, and they do CPD. So, somebody does some training within the group for CPD, and then also, of course, we have coffee with people and speak to them about how things are going. And then out of that, I also see, you know, a small number of people who literally work, you know, 100 yards from me. And I would say, if that isn't something that's in your area, you know, that's something at any stage in your training that you could think about putting together. My experiences is as different as therapists can be, they are a lovely group of people to be around and all, you know, really supportive I found.

Helen

One of the questions that we ask everybody in this podcast is what does being a UKCP member mean to you?

John-Paul:

Well, I like the fact that there is this sort of central body who has a code of ethics. So, I like the fact there is the central kind of organising body that sets down, I guess, guidance, standards, those kinds of things. I'm glad there is that body within the profession, considering of course, you know, how significant it is in terms of the impact it can have on people's lives, and the role it can play in people's lives. So, the New Psychotherapist magazine coming through, I really like, you know, lots of interesting articles. And again, it's being part of a wider body, part of a wider community. I like those things working in private practice, you know, I'm looking for ways, I suppose to also feel part of something bigger. When you come out of a training institution, where you are part of something bigger, part of the community. You know, I then worked CCPE and saw clients from there, but now I see clients entirely at home. So, it's also nice to be part of that bigger thing, having a sense of that. From a very personal point of view, UKCP and people at UKCP have been really supportive. As well as an organisation, to me personally, they've been really, really helpful in supporting me through and growing this journey into the sort of media work as well.

Helen:

It's great to hear and we always like working with members and being able to provide that support. So, it's good to hear. And now I'm going to ask you a few questions about training. So, ask you to think back. Reflecting now, is there anything you wish you knew before you entered into psychotherapeutic training?

John-Paul:

Yeah, I think I would say I did, I think probably partway through the course, a couple of years in, maybe got a bit disillusioned in terms of what I was learning, because some things really touched me, resonated with me, and I've absolutely used and still do with clients. One thing that I would absolutely say is really, the training is incredibly helpful things on it, that, as I say, were absolutely necessary, and I still use now. It really is a gateway in some ways into being able to as well find your own voice.

I would encourage people not to be put off perhaps by the more academic aspects of it, that once you qualify, you can really find your voice and what touches you and the things that you love, and that you think help you and that you believe are going to help other people and go out to the world with that.

Helen:

And what advice would you give to someone considering training?

John-Paul:

I think from a practical point of view, there is the cost of it. And as I say, depending on what you want to do afterwards, transitioning to private practice, there is that income side of things and making sure that's held in mind. As far as considering doing the training, I would, you know, suggest go for that course content, that detail of the course that really feels like it's something that you're interested in. If you're looking at setting up private practice and those things that can be a tendency I think, you know, how do I please enough people kind of thing for people to come in as clients. But what I would say is that, you know, that's quite an outward-in way of looking at things. I just think if you go to do the training that you enjoy, read around the subject, see what touches you, see what resonates with you, and then pursue that. But it's a constant journey, in terms of learning new things, as well. And, you know, we do continuing professional development, which is, of course, a requirement. But it also means hearing lots of different views, things like compassion focus therapy, you know, I didn't look at until after I'd qualified. So, it's an ongoing journey, as I say, which is, I think, a wonderful thing about the career.

Helen:

How did the training change you, do you think?

John-Paul:

Well, in all sorts of ways, I would say. I think I'm braver than I was before. So, the process of the training, some group therapy, we had lots of experiential weekends at CCPE. So, that was two days in a room with, you know, a group of other five or six people, talking about images that we produced from visualisations and those kinds of things. It really helped with my relationships with other people. So, it built my trust of other people, and of course, I was able to know myself better. So, I was able to trust myself better as well. You know, talking to other people again, over the course, you know, the communication of things was helped, I think. And when your psychological and emotional wellbeing improves, I think that has an impact on your physical wellbeing, on what I'm like as a dad, and what I'm like as a husband, as a friend, all those things. Again, I'm not holding out anything in terms of perfect at all, of course not, but it has enhanced my life. Not only do I do something that I love on a day-to-day basis, and get paid to do that, but it's absolutely, you know, in very important ways, changed how I relate to myself and other people, which has hugely improved my quality of life.

Helen:

That's amazing. And your previous point before about continuing to develop is, I think, such an important aspect to that as well. And it sounds like you're continuing to find all of these opportunities and the joy in your career as well.

John-Paul:

Yeah, completely. You know, it's a very exciting career, I think. Because also, you know, everything that I would learn that was new, it personally helps me, it personally helps my client, and my family, and my relationships with other people outside of work. So, you know, I couldn't imagine anything I would want to do more.

Jenna:

That was UKCP psychotherapist John-Paul Davies speaking to Helen Willingham, our Head of Content and Engagement. If you're interested in exploring training, then you can visit our psychotherapy training page, where you can find information on psychotherapy as a career, as well as the different training pathways available to you. Just go to [www.psychotherapy.org.uk/psychotherapy-training](http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/psychotherapy-training). All episodes of My Psychotherapy Career are available on our website [psychotherapy.org.uk](http://psychotherapy.org.uk). You can also subscribe to our channel, UKCP, on your favourite streaming platform. Do you have feedback you'd like to share with us on this episode, or any from our series? Get in touch with us at [communications@ukcp.org.uk](mailto:communications@ukcp.org.uk). Join us again next month. Till then, thank you for listening and take good care of yourselves.