## Using the program with students

My belief is that the solution-focused approach has distinct advantages in working with a student client population, and it is particularly suitable for delivery via a computer program. The proof of the pudding is of course in the eating: visit www.waysforward.com for a free demonstration copy.

A word of caution though – most counsellors who look over the program are initially rather unimpressed! At first glance the program can appear too simplistic, too repetitive. But when they give the program to clients to try, many clients find it very helpful. This seems to be a phenomenon of computer-based counselling programs in general – I gather the same is true with computer CBT. So I would encourage anyone keen to assess the program to actually try it out with a number of clients, and see what they have to say. ■

*Jonathan Hales is a BACP senior accredited counsellor who worked for 10 years in youth counselling services and at an FE college, before going freelance as a counsellor and supervisor. He trained in solution-focused brief therapy about 10 years ago and for the past few years has worked with a small team developing self-help counselling software using solution-focused ideas and methods.*

### References

1 King R, Bambling M, Lloyd C, Gomurra R, Smith S, Reid W, Wegner K. The motives and experiences of young people who choose the internet instead of face to face or telephone counselling. Counselling and Psychotherapy Research. 2006;6(3).

2 Reynolds D, Stiles W, Grohol J. An investigation of session impact and alliance in internet based psychotherapy: preliminary results. Counselling and Psychotherapy Research. 2006;6(3).

3 de Shazer S. Keys to solutions in brief therapy. London: WW Norton; 1985.

4 de Shazer S. Clues: investigating solutions in brief therapy. London: WW Norton; 1988.

5 George E, Iveson C, Ratner H. From problem to solution: brief therapy with individuals and families (2nd ed). London: Brief Therapy Press; 1999.

6 Stokes A. Review. Counselling at Work. 2006;52:40.

7 Schofield S. Review. Counselling Children and Young People. Spring 2006;28-29.

8 Vivian S. University of Dundee. Private communication.

9 Hales J. Person centred counselling and solution focused therapy. Counselling. 1999;10(3).

10 Hales J. Feeling and meaning in client centred therapy. Counselling. 1989;67.

11 Hawthorn W. Behaviour Support Service, Bristol City Council. Private communication.

12 Unpublished research study Sheffield Children's NHS Trust. 2006.

13 Ben Hayes B. Educational psychologist, Kent. Private communication.

# Internet
# – for good

The pioneering *Students Against D* been awarded BACP's first annual in Counselling and Psychotherapy. **Meyer** discusses the importance of cultural revolution that has create 'blogrings' and online suicide pacts

The internet is one of those iconic forms of technology, like telephones and television, that has had the power to bring about a cultural revolution. For the western younger generation, for whom it has always existed, the internet is not simply a fascinating 'bonus' technology – its existence and potential is embedded in their consciousness and their expectations about how they conduct their lives. The challenge to those who work with young people, including counsellors, is how to meet and participate in this cultural revolution, evolving methods and approaches to maintain relevance within the cultural landscape of future generations.

Of course, counselling and psychotherapy does already have a presence on the internet. However, the dominant use made of the medium currently seems to be based on a view of the technology simply as an alternative means of communication replicating established communication forms. Thus, there are many websites providing brief information directing users to face-to-face counselling services ('directory' function); or replicating leaflets and

### Suicide sites

Without very much persistence, you can find sites that list suicide 'recipes': exhaustive lists of methods, dosages, level of certainty of death, time taken to die, specific side effects, how much pain/suffering is involved, plus how to get hold of the necessary equipment, how to make sure you are not 'rescued', and so on. Even more concerning are the forums and chat rooms where vulnerable people, instead of being offered support and positive suggestions, can be egged on to carry out their suicide threats or where people can make suicide pacts with anonymous strangers. There was some media attention recently when PAPYRUS UK called for the government to ban these sites, though the technicalities of this are difficult.

# power
## or ill

*epression* website has
Award for Innovation
Site developer **Denise**
getting to grips with the
d anorexia-promoting

brochures ('written information' function); and pioneering and innovative work has been done to develop e-counselling services ('telephone' function).

The *Students Against Depression* project sought to develop a separate niche within the internet's potential, more radically engaging with the alternative cultural space that it creates. The idea was to engage with the internet as a destination and space in its own right, one that provides modern (especially younger) users with the power to inhabit an anonymous identity/ies and to belong to a virtual community without the risk of individual engagement or relationship. This cultural space already provides frightening forms of such community in the shape of forums for discussing and planning suicides, or radically campaigning to promote anorexia as a positive lifestyle choice ('pro-ana' sites).

The *Students Against Depression* concept establishes a substantial web destination, embedded in psychotherapeutic principles, offering an alternative virtual communal space promoting a rich, multi-faceted resource for finding constructive ways forward from depression. By providing substantial self-help information alongside down-to-earth descriptions of professional services, with honest peer accounts of what has helped, as well as directly challenging cultural barriers to seeking help, the website aims to provide a

potential bridge into therapy or other services for those who might not otherwise have accessed them. Crucial to its development was the central role of 10 student consultants, who provided accounts of their own experiences of depression or suicidal thinking and commented on every aspect of the site content and design.

In its first year of existence it is estimated that the site has been consulted by over 50,000 users; it has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from site users and from university and college counsellors (who have found it a useful resource to supplement counselling). Plans are underway for a scheduled update and expansion of the interactivity potential of the site, and I hope that the Innovation in Counselling and Psychotherapy Award 2006 bestowed by BACP will serve to inspire other practitioners (and all those who work with students and young people) to engage in new and different ways with the challenge presented by the internet cultural revolution. ∎
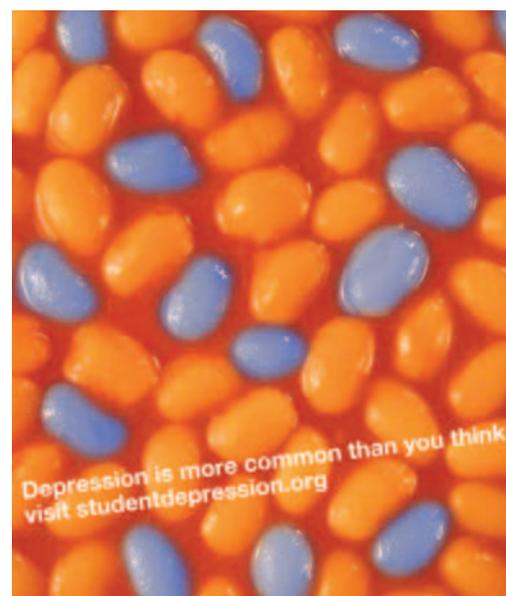
*Students Against Depression can be found at www.studentdepression.org. The development of the site was a project initiated by the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust (www.cwmt.org) in association with a committee from the HUCS (Heads of University Counselling Services) group of AUCC.*



*You can reach out to students who don't access counselling by distributing the popular baked bean posters publicising the site on your campus. Copies can be obtained by emailing admin@cwmt.org or phoning 0118 974 5216.*

### From the 'Pro Ana UK' blogring

*A blogring is like a chatroom made up of individual 'blogs' or online diaries. Members read and comment on each others' entries. The Pro Ana UK blogring has members who post their weight loss goals, the number of calories eaten that day (usually aiming for less than 1000), feelings, etc. Some members are wishing to recover from anorexia, though not to put on too much weight, but many are simply dedicated to being as thin as possible. Most diaries carry what is called 'thinspiration' – pictures of models and celebrities, such as Victoria Beckham, who are very thin.*

Example of an intro tag: 'I'm a Princess striving for Perfection. Feel free to comment on how I'm doing & view the highs & lows of my addiction to being skinny & feeling empty.'

Recent entry: 'You know when **everything** builds up and makes you think of yourself and what u look like? When people move on and you want them to come back and see you **skinnier, prettier**? Well that's me. I **WANT** I **NEED** To be Skinnier... It took Nicole [*reference to Nicole Richie, right, a common subject of 'thinspiration' pictures – Ed*] about 2 years to lose her weight. So here it is, me, pledging my heart, body, mind and soul to **ANA**. Because no matter what anyone says to me, I <u>KNOW</u> I can be <u>SKINNY</u> and **prettier** by starving. This is the beginning of **MY** two years...'

*Counsellors working with students affected by eating disorders may wish to check whether such sites are being accessed by their clients and familiarise themselves with the strong peer influence they can exert (see research on p31) – just type 'pro ana' into any search engine to find examples. See book review section of this issue for a range of resources for working with eating disorders.*