GAPS Annual General Meeting 2017
Friday 24th November 2017

CHAIR’S REPORT

I have been the Chair of GAPS since January 2014 when I agreed to take over the role from Pamela Trevithick, who resigned from the Board of Trustees in order to become the GAPS Coordinator, and who now delivers an annual programme of workshops for GAPS. The following is a summary of the main activities of GAPS since the last AGM on the 9th November 2016.

1. Administration of GAPS

(a) The GAPS office, Bristol

During 2017 the GAPS office in Clifton, Bristol was closed and replaced by a virtual office within a social enterprise facility in the Easton area of the city. The freelance, self-employed staff work largely from home-offices. The Administrator and Accounts Officer is Stephen Marsden who has been in post since 2015. After a period supporting and shadowing Pam Trevithick, Hannah Pepper was appointed as the Development Worker in May 2017 and reports to Trustees, we are delighted with her appointment. Pam has continued to support GAPS during this transition, but decided to resign to focus on her political work and writing. Pam will continue to be involved in GAPS, running workshops and taking part in other events.

(b) Board of Trustees

Since the last AGM, the Trustees have met five times on the following dates:

1. Saturday 21st January 2017
2. Saturday 6th May 2017
3. Saturday 8th July 2017
4. Saturday 7th October 2017
5. Thursday 23rd November 2017

The Board remains an active one. For example, this year Trustees were involved in the National Conference Subgroup, the Clare Winnicott Award Subgroup, Staff and Trustee Recruitment Subgroups and supporting the workshops. In addition Trustees continue to take on deputy/shadowing roles within the Board, such as a Deputy Chair, and the Treasurer’s role is still being shadowed in order to provide support to our current Treasurer and develop skills within the Board to support GAPS in the future. Trustees have attended Conferences this year and continue to support and promote GAPS within their fields of employment and networks. We regularly have majority attendance at Trustee meetings which ensures that work moves forward. An exciting addition to the Trustee calendar this year has been our Revisioning Day, held on 23rd November 2017. For the first time the Board has come together to consider the larger purpose of GAPS and the role we would like the organisation to play within the social work landscape. The fruits from this day will feed into how we plan our programme of events in 2018 and beyond, as well as how we position ourselves as a voice for social workers and the profession, and a refuge in these demanding times for practitioners.

(c) Website

I am delighted to report that with appointment of Hannah Pepper as Development Worker, and with the hard work of Stephen Marsden, Pam Trevithick, together with the support of the
Board, in September 2017 GAPS launched its new website which was created by web development studio, Atomic Smash. The new site structure offers greater opportunities for live content and interaction with members and readers which is planned to develop during 2018.

Members’ electronic access to the electronic Journal of Social Work continues to be through secure login to the GAPS website. The site contains news of events, shared articles, papers and presentations, as well as profiles of the Trustees and Staff. Many of the photographs used on the site are from recent GAPS workshops.

(d) Membership
The membership of GAPS currently stands at 191 with 23 new members and 24 members leaving since January 2017. This figure has been steady throughout the year, but interest is annually generated by the National Conference, our fourth being held in Cardiff this year. There remains a strong concentration of members in the south west, particularly in Bristol. Our international membership and membership in other parts of the UK is low. The 2015 National Conference in York did attract some members from the north of England but not a significant increase to the geographical diversity of our membership, which we hope to improve by locating or workshops and National Conferences in varying parts of the UK.

2. Organising events

(a) Day workshops
Our first day workshop was held in Bristol on the 19th September 2012 and since then, we have run over 16-day workshops in total. Since the last AGM in November 2016, GAPS has run 3 workshops. Pam ran the first workshop in Swansea in March. This workshop was so much in demand that it was significantly overbooked, and subsequently it was agreed that this workshop should be repeated in June, which it was. Juliet Koprowska and Ray Haddock ran our third workshop (their second for GAPS), this time in London, on Systems-Centered® Theory and Practice. A fourth workshop was scheduled to take place in Bristol in September but has had to be put back to February 2018 due to other developments and changes taking place in GAPS over 2017-8. The themes of 2017 workshops have continued broadly as use of self and the relationship in social work, together with the Systems-Centred® material.

The workshop evaluation forms that participants complete are consistently positive and form a basis for our plans over the coming year. Offering day workshops will continue in 2018.

(b) Clare Winnicott Award (CWA) for students and practitioners 2017
This year saw very few applications for these two awards. We do not fully understand the reasons behind this low take-up except that it has become increasingly difficult to publicise these awards within social work, particularly with the closure of the JUCSWEC email link to social work training courses. Another factor may relate to the low morale in some sectors of social work. We are hoping that the changes introduced to our website, together with a greater use of twitter and Facebook over the coming year, will ensure a better take-up in 2018.


From January 2014-2016, I as the GAPS Chair was a member of the JSWP Editorial Board. In my role as the Chair of GAPS, and together with Pam and Treasurer, Nigel Elliott, we have represented GAPS and the membership on this board. In 2016, Pam resigned from the Editorial Board and I delegated my role on the Editorial Board to Trustee Gill Robinson.
The Journal remains very dynamic, with plenty of papers submitted giving the editors a healthy degree of choice. In 2016 a 30th Anniversary of the Journal was published, with articles chosen by the Board spanning the 30 years of the Journal’s life. The Journal is very well supplied with good quality papers and we look forward to more Special Issues in the future. The plan to provide mentoring and support to practitioners who wish to write for publication but who may lack confidence to do so is ongoing. The current editors are Juliet Koprowska and Gillian Ruch who will provide a more detailed report about the Journal.

3. Raising the profile of GAPS

(a) Lectures
Pam continues to lecture on the importance of relationship-based practice, and the importance of psychodynamic and systemic thinking in social work. These lectures are both an opportunity to raise the profile of GAPS and also promote our perspective in social work. GAPS Trustee and Secretary Liz Reilly, has also taken a lecturing position in the past 12 months, and she as well as all the Trustees promote the relationship-based approach, the work of GAPS and the support available to practitioners from GAPS through the course of their work. We are fortunate to have a healthy mixture of academics, activists and practitioners on the Board which not only makes for lively debate, but for broad exposure of the issues and support GAPS offers the social work community.

(b) Attendance at conferences
This year Trustees and Pam attended a variety of conferences to network with colleagues and to promote the work of GAPS and relationship-based practice, including the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) Conference, Paris attended by Pam in June 2017.

(c) 4th National Conference in Cardiff “Strengthening Relationships as Resilience”
After superbly received, first, second and third National Conferences in 2014 (on the theme of the home visit) and 2015 (on the theme of reclamation of relationship-based practice in the face of increasing managerialism), and 2016 (on the theme of scapegoating in social work) we decided to continue the momentum of an annual conference. We are very pleased to be holding our fourth National Conference in Cardiff on 24th November 2017, on the theme of relationships and resilience. Delegates will enjoy two stimulating key notes by Brigid Featherstone and Dr Ruth Allen. In keeping with the successful structure of the last three years, we aim to provide a space for thinking and being with the current issues in social work and their impact, as well as including some innovative theatre work too.

(d) Centre for Social Work Practice (CfSWP)
This year we were invited by Robyn Kempt, the new Director of CfSWP, to be part of a conference to celebrate relationship-based practice and to showcase the benefits that this approach offers. The proposal is for the conference to be jointly hosted by the CfSWP, BASW and GAPS. So far, due to other commitments and work pressures it has not yet been possible to organise a meeting to pursue this idea but we hope to work with the CfSWP and BASW over the coming year to take this initiative forward.

4. Future focus for GAPS

2016 was a challenging year in relation to staffing and some aspects of our structure as an organization which we had to give due time and consideration to. 2017 saw some important
steps forward in relation to those challenges, and it is hoped that both our Board of Trustees and our employed staff are entering a new phase of stability, which is already showing exciting results in the form of our new website. We remain proud of our lectures, workshops, upcoming national conference and the Journal. Our continued focus for 2018 will be to continue to expand our membership across the UK and the world, and continue to deliver a high quality programme of events for practitioners, and provide a space for social workers to be heard and nourished in these most challenging times.

With Hannah Pepper now in post we plan to meaningfully explore how GAPS can make better use of social media to engage in a current, national and international debate about key issues in social work. We are already making better use of the website to communicate with members and provide a forum whereby GAPS can give a view and engage in discussion about key issues in social work, and we hope to build on this in 2018. Another workshop schedule delivered by Pam, as well as other workshop facilitators from within and outside of GAPS membership will be offered in the year to come. We will also decide on the theme and location for the next National Conference. Our workshop schedule for 2018 is still being planned, and comments from our 2017 workshops and this year’s National Conference will help inform topic and location choices.

4. Acknowledgments

In my fourth year as Chair I would like to acknowledge the ongoing support I have had from Pam, Stephen, Hannah and the Board of Trustees in this role, and in particular Trustees who hold roles on the Board. The consistently high-quality reports and management of the finances of GAPS by our long standing and skilled Treasurer, Nigel Elliott, is pivotal to the functioning of both the organisation and the Board, and I extend huge gratitude to Nigel for his diligence in the role and commitment to GAPS. Our close knit and collaborative team remain a hard-working, innovative and committed group to continuing the innovation and development of GAPS and supporting social workers. I thank too, Hannah Pepper, for the enthusiasm and energy she has brought to the Development Worker role, and the progress she has made in it in a short time.

After four years of this hugely rewarding role that I have had the privilege to hold as Chair of GAPS, I have come to the decision that it is the right time for me to step down as Chair. GAPS is a thriving organisation, with exciting possibilities ahead which require the support and attention from a Chair who is able to offer the role more resources than I am able to at this time. It has not been an easy decision to come to, but it is the right one for GAPS, and if I am re-elected as a Trustee I hope to continue to support this valuable organisation in its important key objectives of supporting those in our social work profession. The membership should not be concerned about instability within the structure of GAPS or the Board during the transition period between Chairs. Our Board is experienced, enthusiastic and well established, meaning the in-coming Chair will not only be supported by me in this role, but also by the Board and our established employees.

Thank you for your membership and I look forward to another energetic and nourishing year for GAPS in 2018.

Gemma Bond
Chair of GAPS
24th November 2017