

President's Report to the AGM

15.5.2019

Delta Beausejour Hotel, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada



Dear Members of the executive council,

This is the last time I am addressing you as your president within an AGM. It has, already been quite a long road and now it has come to its natural end.

Therefore in this address I shall looking at the transition IAC has been through during the last 7 years and will offer some insights into how IAC may continue to evolve during the next few years.

Welcoming you all to Moncton and Canada gives me a very good feeling. Both Canada and CCPA have been very close to IAC. Indeed we all fondly remember the great conference we had in Victoria where we also had the first official historical Associations Round Table. This conference in Moncton also happened because the agreed venue for our 2019 conference, New Zealand, declined at a very late hour and CCPA volunteered to help IAC in the very short time that was available. I am therefore very grateful to CCPA for having, once again, been a true friend of IAC and to have provided us with a venue like this. I would like

IAC to think about contingency plans when these things happen as IAC cannot allow itself to be put in situations where it needs to find a different venue at the 11th hour. The 2020 conference has long been awarded to Kuching and this will happen in August next year and I am sure it will prove to be one of IACs most memorable conferences. We also have invites from Samoa and Uruguay and interest from Italy for our forthcoming conferences. Malta also would like to be considered for a future conference.

So let us come to see what this presidency may have meant for IAC. As a former history teacher I know that time will need to pass before an objective assessment can be done. So I will limit myself to what I consider to be the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities that IAC has acquired over the past few years..

Whichever way you look at it IAC is completely different to what it was in 2012. My dream has always been for IAC to become THE International Association

for Counselling. We are not there yet. But we have the name, we have the history and we have the profile. We also have the logo. We have the goodwill. These are undoubtedly our precious assets. We only need to make good use of them.

IAC is also blessed with top notch counselling leaders, practitioners, trainers and researchers. Again these are assets and I would like to say that we need to make good use of the vast array of talent that IAC members have. But for IAC to be THE International Association for Counselling it also needs to become the global leader in all aspects of the profession. Time and time again I have been asked, as President, for IAC to give direction, to provide a sense of belonging, of qualification levels and of standards of basic competencies. We have started this but we are way off. However if we want to become The International Association for Counselling we will need to address the wishes and aspirations of our members and this seems to be one big vacuum that IAC can respond to.

In this light I believe that the first steps have been taken. We are now offering association membership, and have been engaging with associations in many ways answering to their needs and requirements. The certification of the international aspects of courses has proven to be sought after, and even though this is a very limited development, it just shows how much need there is for some kind of international certification. I believe that the next step in certification should be the identification of basic counselling competencies and their certification in counselling courses. This certification of competencies is most sought after internationally and this has been asked of us by associations across the globe.

The new set of bye-laws, approved in Rome but still needing to be ratified at this AGM will hopefully give us a good tool for governance. The bye- laws address some lacunae which were present in our old statutes and make sure that IAC is not blocked or frozen in some of its aspects. Eg When our President Elect

resigned we were left without one. And we need to thank Bill Borgen for having had the courage to step in as Acting President Elect without having any statutory structure to support him. Hopefully once the byelaws are ratified this issue will not be an issue any more.

We also need governance and succession to be tackled when officers, EC members and Round Table Leaders pass away, resign or become incapacitated and the new byelaws do. The establishment of elections in 2014 and the guaranteed place for every region in 2016

were first steps to assure good representation from the different regions. The second step can now be the establishment of regional bodies led by the regional reps to make sure that the different representations are working well and are addressing regional issues and organizing regional events. Another step could be the identification of country representatives so that all counsellors feel that they belong to the IAC family and that IAC is their natural home. Still another development could be the granting of more

representation and dialogue to the associations round table. These developments may seem run of the mill and commonsensical but let me tell you that to be achieved they required blood, sweat and tears.

The establishment of the associations round table has proven that it is an excellent opportunity for all associations to partake in a forum where discussion, cross-fertilization, teaching and learning can take place. I would suggest that this round table like all other round tables could be given their governance structure and its leaders to work on strategic plans to take this forward. I also think it could become the lace and forum to which associations can turn to ask for help, give help, collaborate and share. This is one area with a lot of possibilities. Work establishing regional representations can be taken forward as well with the regional reps coordinating work for that particular regions through country representatives.

This counts for all the other roundtables as well including the Research, Ethics, Practitioners,

Students, Peace and Social Justice, Indigenous and Projects. These should now move into strategic planning and entice better representation and participation by members.

Echoing what I said before I would also suggest that another round table should be established and this should be the Competencies and Standards Round Table with the objective of identifying universal competencies and standards and be able to move slowly into new certification.

The most significant decision taken during these seven years, was the decision to engage a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Our CEO was engaged on a consultancy basis as IAC's finances were not at a level where we could meet all obligations required of an employer. When we are able to finance the CEO employment, and the employment of a small number of other staff, we will do that. We are not there yet but are making progress. We require funds and increased income for a host of important strategic and

operational aspects of IAC. We need to be more creative when it comes to fundraising and income and we are working on a strategic financial plan for the coming years. Any ideas or assistance that our members, or member associations can give, or suggest, will be very gratefully received. I would like to thank our CEO, Naoise Kelly for all his work and for his love of the association. To have a CEO working in a risky situation like this. Naoise has been a loyal CEO and has managed to introduce many new initiatives.

Midway through writing this report, my dear father Emmanuel died. I am finishing this report whilst organizing his funeral.

I would like to say that if there was anything positive during my presidency, I would like to dedicate it to his memory. If counselling means love for life, meeting one's responsibilities, working on limitations, being honest, congruent, loyal, making

one's life one of service he embodied them all. As we as a family try to live and make sense of life without his gentle and secure presence, we all realize what an indelible mark he has left in us. It is the hallmark of the legacy that we need to leave as counselors and human beings. I am thankful for having had a father who was a friend and a gentle mentor, who taught me to always be humble and to be wary of arrogance and of people who project themselves as superior beings. "Never for one moment think you are better than any other" he used to tell me. Those words accompanied me through my academic, professional and personal life and I sincerely hope they will accompany me till the end of my days.

My Experience as President

I would like to start by saying that it is such a privilege to serve as president of this association. It is an association with huge margins of improvement

and its motivation to be of service to humanity is the greatest mission of all.

I would like to make it clear however that this IAC is completely different to the one I became president of in 2012. The amount of work that is now being generated would not have been possible within the 2012 structure, and even now with a fully functioning Officers Group and a full-time CEO we are struggling to keep up. So whoever will be my successor will need to commit much more time to IAC as it grows and develops as THE International Association for Counselling. Thus the new President will need to tackle the new things introduced during the past years and build on them.

Besides being IAC President and HOD of the Department of Counselling at my university during the past few months I was tending to both my parents' needs. My mother was hospitalized for 4 months in critical circumstances late last year and my father alas passed away only one month after she

returned home. I have found it increasingly difficult to keep up with my personal, professional and academic commitments and be president of IAC as well.

I am saying this because it is important for all the officers and especially for the president to understand that the IAC presidency is much more than presiding over Council meetings and AGMs. I think that as a council we need to take a step forward in our commitment. John and Blythe, who constructed the Role descriptions for all IAC EC members have tried to identify the minimum amount of time commitments for EC members. Hopefully the persons who will stand for election this year will give consideration to the amount of time that is expected as well as to other considerations including conflicts of loyalty and interest and dual roles.

I would like to say that there were some good times and some difficult times. Like in any organization being the president meant being the recipient of criticism- which is normal and I accept that. There

was also some undermining which I got to know about which luckily was very limited and which was tackled silently as I feel that reason does not need force. Because I know what all this has meant to be I have a pledge to make:

In my new role as Immediate Past President I promise to support the person who will succeed me loyally and wholeheartedly. I will put myself completely at the disposition of the new president. Being president is a hard and lonely job because the president is the voice and face of IAC but the President is also the recipient of any criticism and negativity leveled at the association. So I am urging all of us to give all our support to the new president as the support, or lack of it is something that leaves its mark on any in that role.

IAC and Research

One area where I believe we can do much more is the area of research and hopefully during the next few months we will move into a new era where IAC research is concerned. The Mapping is but one example of how things can be done but we certainly need more opportunities and IAC can certainly benefit from a better organized research arm.

Finance

Finances remain an area of great challenge and we often struggle to meet our operating costs. Our income levels are gradually improving, but so are our expenses. We need to continue to work to generate funds to be able to sustain the new IAC with its projects, outreach, conference organization, liaison with UN agencies and other associations. And all of this means that we need to generate more funding and to think of ways in which we can generate more revenue. Again your support through sponsorship of projects, or any other area of work that is of interest to you, would be most

welcome. Please do contact Blythe Shepard directly if you believe you can help.

May I, once again ask all of us to help IAC in our small ways. One of these is to prompt more counsellors, associations, counselling institutions and training centres to become members. Taking this up in our respective countries and institutions should not be too hard a task.

Membership

Again here we have registered a good increase but we are not yet where we want to be. Still, numbers are promising and we can expect good results, even financially, if the current trend continues for the next few years.

Representing IAC

Following the Rome Conference during the past 8 months I represented IAC in conferences in Bangalore and Chennai, Geneva, Cologne, Rome and Bologna. I also have had numerous skype meetings, telephone exchanges and email communications with various associations, chairs and officers in the counselling world.

Added to that I would like to say that travelling was covered by my own pocket or by the different associations some of which partly sponsored me to be able to attend. I say this for the sixth time to assert that it is not good for the president of IAC whoever s/he is to have to fork out this amount to do their work properly.

Associations Round Table

This year's Associations Round Table is the 6th one. It is obvious that this particular forum is much needed and that entities and associations are showing that

they need an opportunity where they can belong, discuss, teach and learn I feel that we need to support this round table to grow and to become more than an annual meeting.

Other Round Tables

These too were a success story even though it is obvious that much depends on the commitment of the chairperson and how much the chair gives life to it. It is obvious the round tables need some form of governance procedures and succession protocols and we are in the process of introducing governance protocols.

Officers Group

The Officers' Group has functioned well and has been the forum where day-to-day and urgent discussions were held and decisions taken. All executive decisions were referred to the EC but the fact that this group existed as an entity meant that things could be

tackled in the interim between executive council meetings. Obviously this entailed more meetings and more work for the officers and I would like to thank them all for their commitment over the past year. It is important that the Officers' group works with the EC and not outside of it thus perhaps creating the perception of an In Group.

The coming year(s)

It is more than obvious that we have taken decisions that will continue to impact IAC for the next few years. I look forward to an IAC which continues to grow in numbers, becomes financially stable, becomes more active in world for and becomes a voice for the voiceless more than it is now. I would also like to think that IAC becomes the natural home for all counsellors and the main international entity for counselling ethics, practice, education and research.

And finally a word of thanks

I am thankful for having been introduced to this association and for having served as its 4th President for these 7 years. IAC has given me a lot but I too feel that I have given a lot to it.

I am thankful for Gabrielle Syme and Tim Bond who gave me a lot of their time to discuss major decisions. I am thankful for the members of the Officers Group John, Blythe Bill and the Naoise the CEO. These last 3 years were a watershed and the amount of work generated bypassed what we could manage. These members gave their all to IAC and their work should be acknowledged.

I would like to thank Bill Borgen who stepped into David Paterson's shoes at very short notice. His commitment to IAC is an example to all of us.

I would also like to thank all the EC members especially those who were more committed than was

expected out of them, for their work, creativity, motivation and commitment.

I would like to thank the national associations who see in IAC the possibility of a natural home for counselling and counsellors. I have enjoyed every minute of serving as keynote speaker or speaker in every conference I was invited to.

I would also like to thank those whose unfailing support I felt. There were some bleak, difficult and challenging times and knowing that people did go out of their way to help me to feel supported made the difference.

Personal thanks

Personally, I am thankful for being born in my country, Malta where roots still run deep and where relationships are not artificial.

I am thankful for my wife Josette, herself a counselor and a great objective critic of my work as well as being my soul mate for 37 years. She too had to endure my many absences because of my involvement with IAC.

I am full of gratitude for my two children Edward and Emily. Their first involvement with IAC was in 2008 during the Malta conference when they were both schoolchildren and both served the conference. Now they are two fine young adults, my son a budding composer and acclaimed performer and musical director and my daughter who is now starting her diplomatic career by being in charge of the Israel, Palestine, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Australia and New Zealand Desks at our Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

I am thankful to both my parents, my mother Emma who taught me how to be gentle, kind and loving being the teacher that she was.

And my father Emmanuel , a quiet and shy self-made man who rose from being a lowly civil servant to becoming Director of a Government department. A virtuous person who was my best friend and mentor, and one I am forever proud to have had as a father. I will make sure that his legacy will live on.

My time has now come to leave and I will do so gracefully and with steadfast loyalty to this association and its new President.

Thank you very much to all.

Dr Dione Mifsud

President