



PCHEI 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

May 25-27, 2026
Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone

Beyond Talk: Creative Approaches to Counselling
and Psychological Support for University Students.

Letter From the Chairperson

A Chara,

Welcome to the 2026 PCHEI conference! So much has happened this year. Our Autumn and Spring and trainings have filled the CPD logs and were incredibly thought provoking. We explored the impact of coercive control; prevention work with adults who have harmed or are at risk of harming others; and our big regional event of 2026: Our Complicated Relationship with Food & Body (Cork). We continue to grow and develop since last year's initiatives, and look forward further engagement as we close off the year. PCHEI and its members continue to roll out informative workshops, key skills for staff and students, and supporting our HEIs as embedded services at the heart of supports.

This years conference really is action packed. You will see that we are facilitating more creative approaches, building on our skills to work in our ever-changing landscape and for students with varying needs. We will dive into music, creative writing, and narrative interventions; Lego, masks, nesting dolls, podcasts, and more.

I hope to see you at coffee/online/lunch/gala/dinner, or at one of the many workshops this year. Whether you are new, in person, or online, we are excited to connect with you, sharing ideas, opportunities, collaborations, and friendship, as we celebrate yet another year of supporting our students, clinicians, and communities.

Dr Seán O'Connell
PCHEI Chairperson



Ticket Prices

Ticket Type	Audience	Price (€)	What's Included
Two Day In-Person (Monday/Tuesday)	Member	€300	Keynote speakers, Workshops, refreshments, lunches, Gala Dinner and networking session - 12 CPD Credits
Two Day In-Person (Monday/Tuesday)	Non-Member	€350	Keynote speakers, Workshops, refreshments, lunches, Gala Dinner and networking session - 12 CPD Credits
3-Day In-Person (Monday/Tuesday & Wednesday AM)	Member	€385	All sessions, lunches, breaks, Gala Dinner, and PCHEI AGM
Online Day 1 Only	Member	€150	Live-streamed Day 1 workshop & Keynote Speaker tailored to our online audience - 6 CPD Credits
Online Day 1 Only	Non-Member	€185	Live-streamed Day 1 workshop & Keynote Speaker tailored to our online audience - 6 CPD Credits

Accommodation

Accommodation is not included in the ticket price.

You can book directly with the Hodson Bay Hotel using the PCHEI conference rate:

- €123 single B&B per night
- €135 twin B&B per night

To avail of these rates, please contact the hotel before April 25th 2026:

reservations@hodsonbay.ie

Event Highlights & Important Information

Workshop Selection - Day 2

You will be invited closer to the event date to select the workshops you wish to participate in on Day 2. Workshop places will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, so we encourage you to book early to secure your preferred sessions. You will receive an email notification with full details on when and how to make your selections in early May.

Gala Dinner & Networking Evening

Our Gala dinner promises to be a memorable networking opportunity for all delegates. This relaxed and engaging evening is designed to help you connect with peers, share ideas, and build lasting professional relationships.

The dress code is business casual. Guests are encouraged to come prepared for an enjoyable evening of conversation, connection, and a touch of fun - with a chance to win a spot prize!

We look forward to welcoming you to an inspiring and rewarding experience.

Timeline

DAY 1 Online / Hybrid Focus

- 10:00 – 10:15 ● Welcome / Opening Remarks by PCHEI Chairperson
- 10:15 - 11:15 ●
 - Keynotes: Kevin O'Byrne In Person - Curious Not Critical: Integration of Creative Therapies
 - Pauline Andrew Online - Holding the Hidden Self: Nesting Dolls as a Therapeutic Tool
- 11:15 - 11:30 ● Morning Break (15min)
- 11:30 - 13:00 ●
 - Keynotes: Kevin O'Byrne In Person – Curious Not Critical: Integration of Creative Therapies
 - Pauline Andrew Online – Holding the Hidden Self: Nesting Dolls as a Therapeutic Tool
- 13:00 - 14:15 ● Lunch
- 14:15 – 15:35 ● (80 min block)
 - University of Limerick – Podcast Workshop (HYBRID)
 - Rachel Karantayer – The Art of Becoming: Supporting Student Self-Esteem Through Creative Practice (ONLINE)
- 15:35 – 15:45 ● Afternoon Break
- 15:45 – 16:45 ● (60 min block)
Dr. Pearl Brock – Why It's Always OK to Talk to a Teapot, Story, Symbol, and Psychological Safety in Narrative Healing (HYBRID)
- 19:30 – 20:00 ● Networking Drinks Reception
- 20:00 – 23:00 ● Gala Dinner

DAY 2 – In-Person Workshops + Afternoon Keynote & Pannel Discussion

- 09:45 – 10:45 ● Opening of Day 2 / In-Person Workshops (60 mins)
 - NCAD: Seoidin O'Sullivan / Dr. Dominic Thorpe – Playful Possibilities
 - Dr. Sarah Haywood – Neurodivergent Art Workshop
- 10:45 – 11:00 ● Morning Break (15 mins)
- 11:00 – 12:30 ● Second Workshop Block (80 mins)
 - Dr. Rachel Hoare – Creative Pathways to Connection: Supporting Refugee Students through Expressive Arts
 - Dr. Briony Supple, Dr. Zelda Di Blasi: Building Resilience: Overcoming Stress Mindset through LEGO® Serious Play®
- 12:30 – 13:45 ● Lunch
- 13:45 – 15:45 ● Afternoon Keynote (2 hours)
 - Simon Forsythe – Writing and Journaling for Creative Counselling Work with Students
- 14:45 – 15:00 ● Afternoon Break *In Room* (15 Mins)
- 15:55 – 16:30 ● Panel Session: 'Beyond Good Ideas: Demonstrating Impact in Creative Student Counselling.'
Creative approaches are increasingly used in university counselling, but a key challenge is showing that they genuinely make a difference for students. This session will explore how services can move beyond innovative (good) ideas to demonstrate meaningful impact through thoughtful evaluation and evidence. Our panellists will share practical strategies for capturing outcomes, communicating value within institutions, and strengthening the case for creative practice in student counselling.
- 16:45 ● Conference Closing Statement
Dr Seán O'Connell, PCHEI Chairperson

DAY ONE - Monday May 25th

Kevin O'Byrne

Keynote in person Speaker

Kevin is a creative psychotherapist, professional musician and clinical supervisor in training. Outside of managing his own Dublin city practice, he works closely on productions for the Irish film and music industries providing bespoke psychological support and consultancy.

Through the ethos 'Curious Not Critical' Kevin blends the rigour of modern psychotherapy with creative art therapy modalities, moving beyond verbal discourse to create an intersubjective space that privileges meaning and affirms identity.

As a college counsellor, Kevin currently holds a post in Dundalk Institute of Technology where he used various approaches to meet the diverse needs inherent in third level settings.

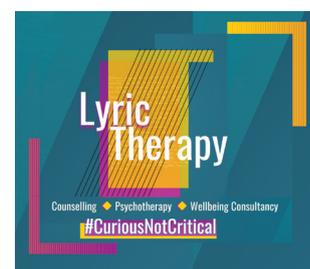


Workshop Overview

This workshop will be a blend of theoretical and practical 'workshop' approaches to equip participants with fundamental but highly practical tools to augment and deepen talk therapy by consciously drawing on creative techniques.

This will include:

- The philosophy & science of the creative act
- Practitioners relationship with creative practice
- Creative practice & managing blocks
- Creative technique: Music, Art & Oblique approaches
- Integration of creative approaches to our own approach



Pauline Andrew

Online Keynote Speaker

Director of PA Counselling; Training (PACT) and of Deep Release Counselling Training, Pauline taught Diploma courses in Therapeutic Counselling and Supervision for many years. She also wrote and taught the L5 Certificate in Integrating Creative Interventions in Counselling. (All CPCAB).

Pauline has written 3 Creative Guides to Working with the Inner Child, Blocked Anger and Nesting Dolls. Her cartoon-illustrated counselling cards, "Roles Played in Families", "Core Needs in Families", "Roles Played in Anger", "Roles Played in Groups" and "Understanding Attachment" are hugely popular around the UK and in an increasing number of other countries.

She is also closely involved in the production of the pact-resources-online web apps, enabling counsellors to work with the cards and other creative tools online. Pauline lives in Norfolk with her husband Chris, where they share 3 children and 5 grandchildren.



Overview of Presentation

Pauline will share how nesting dolls provide a powerful creative way of enabling clients to access emotions. Using a range of colourful character dolls, she demonstrates how the different layers help explore parts of the self, and can take clients down to deeper levels of feeling, remembering and experiencing.

DAY ONE - Monday May 25th

Rachel Karantayer

Art Therapy Workshop : ONLINE

Rachel Karantayer is a Psychotherapist and Art Therapist based in Toronto. With experience spanning the University of Toronto, Baycrest Hospital, and community organizations, she specializes in trauma-informed, art-based approaches that support emotional literacy, self-esteem, and accessible mental health care. Her work blends meditation, creative expression, and reflective practice to help students and communities reconnect with their strengths, stories, and sense of possibility.



Workshop Overview

This 80-minute creative workshop equips mental health professionals with trauma-informed, art-based strategies to support student self-esteem, emotional regulation, and reflective capacity. Through grounding meditation, mixed-media artmaking, and guided writing, practitioners learn an accessible framework that helps students celebrate resilience, redefine success beyond academics, and build personalized tools for coping. The workshop offers a practical, embodied creative modality, grounded in real-world facilitation experience within university and clinical settings. Give your brain a moment to destress through creativity!

University of Limerick

Podcast Workshop

Reflection on Sections aims to discuss the development and ideas behind 'Real Life at UL', a podcast by the UL counselling team. Employing short sections of each podcast to date, members of the team will reflect on this project and what it was like to come up with the idea and sit in a recording studio for the first time.



Dr. Pearl Brock

HYBRID WORKSHOP

Dr Pearl Brock is a consultant clinical psychotherapist, senior lecturer, and clinical director of Think Well Psychotherapy Clinic in Mullingar. A Jungian and psychodynamic practitioner with over twenty years of experience, she has worked across community, forensic, and specialist settings. Her doctoral research at the Global Centre for Advanced Studies explores fairytale writing as a path to individuation, integrating Jungian theory, narrative inquiry, and creative practice.



Workshop Overview

This interactive session introduces a creative and research-based approach to emotional exploration through the writing of personal fairytales. The method is grounded in Jungian psychology and has been developed by Dr Pearl Brock through years of clinical practice and doctoral research involving client participation and reflective analysis. The title "Why It's Always OK to Talk to a Teapot" expresses the central concept of the work. It recognises that imagination provides a safe and contained space where emotions can be expressed freely and indirectly. The teapot becomes a metaphor for containment and permission, symbolising warmth, safety, and emotional holding. Drawing on Jung's understanding of archetypes, the collective unconscious, and the transformative role of symbol, the session shows how creative writing can bridge conscious awareness and deeper layers of psyche. Writing a fairytale allows difficult experience to be approached through image and story rather than analysis, creating both distance and insight. This approach has proven especially effective with those who find direct emotional expression challenging. Participants will experience the method through a brief writing exercise and guided reflection, alongside discussion of theory, practice examples, and ways to integrate the approach professionally.

DAY TWO - Tuesday May 26th

Seoidín O’Sullivan

In person workshops: NCAD Movement Workshop

Seoidín O’Sullivan is an artist, educator, and interdisciplinary researcher whose collaborative projects bring communities together to protect and enhance their ecological commons. Her art projects have been exhibited nationally and internationally and she has received a number of Arts Council Awards and art residencies. At the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, she co-leads the postgraduate Diploma in Art and Ecology and teaches Sustainable Exhibition Making with the Creative Futures Academy. She also lectures in Critical Cultures and First Year Studies. Her teaching work emphasises embodied practice, experiential learning, collective making, and critical engagement with place.



Dr. Dominic Thorpe

Dr. Dominic Thorpe is an Irish visual artist whose work frequently engages with complex areas of trauma, human rights and social justice. In 2022 he was awarded a PhD for research on perpetrator trauma representation within performance art from Ireland. He has shown extensively in Ireland and internationally, including at the Tasmanian Museum and Gallery, the Bangkok Cultural Centre, the Michaela Stock Gallery Vienna and the Crawford Gallery Cork. As a curator and writer he regularly engages with and supports the practices of artists at the inclusive art studio in KCAT Arts Centre Kilkenny. He currently teaches in the School of Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design Dublin.



Workshop Overview

Playful Possibilities is an elective designed for first-year Fine Art students as they begin their studio practice. Developed in response to student anxiety, self-consciousness, and the lingering effects of isolation after Covid, the course offers an embodied, playful approach to learning in shared studio spaces. Through movement, improvisation, and playful exercises, students are encouraged to let go of perfectionism, take creative risks, and reconnect with the body as a source of knowledge and confidence. Play is used as a serious pedagogical tool—supporting experimentation, reframing failure, and fostering connection, resilience, and creative flow.

This will be a 20 minute talk on the elective followed by a 40 minute experiential workshop

DAY TWO - Tuesday May 26th

Dr Sarah Haywood

In person workshops: Neurodivergent Art Workshop

Dr Sarah Haywood (she/her) is a practising art therapist, supervisor, trainer and writer. She has been facilitating teaching and training for adult learners for over 25 years, including university education at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. She graduated from the Art Therapy programme at Queen Margaret University (QMU, Edinburgh) in 2010 and was awarded the 2012 British Association of Art Therapists' (BAAT) Student Essay Prize. Her writing has appeared in a range of publications including the International Journal of Art Therapy (IJAT), and the BACP's Children, Young People and Families journal. She is currently the lead associate editor for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at IJAT, programme leader for BAAT's specialist diploma in art therapy supervision, and a lecturer at QMU, teaching on the MSc Art Psychotherapy and related programmes.



Workshop Overview

This workshop will introduce the fundamentals of art therapy, and explore how creative processes can support therapeutic work. Participants will be invited to try out some simple creative activities that draw on the power of image and imagination. We will explore key considerations for introducing creative approaches to our practice, particularly in relation to the limits of our professional capacity; how do we use creative approaches safely in therapy when we're not formally trained as arts therapists? All are welcome - no prior experience or expertise in using art materials is required!

Dr Rachel Hoare

Creative Pathways to Connection: Supporting Refugee Students through Expressive Arts

Dr Rachel Hoare is Director of the Centre for Forced Migration Studies at Trinity College Dublin's School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies, where she has been a fulltime academic since 1996. Her recent book, *Psychological Support for Refugee Adolescents: An Expressive Arts Approach to Wellbeing and Trauma Recovery* (Routledge, 2025), bridges neuroscience, trauma theory, and creative interventions to provide practical guidance for professionals working with displaced young people.



Rachel is an accredited expressive arts psychotherapist who has been working with unaccompanied minors through Tusla (Irish Child and Family Agency) for nearly a decade, and serves as faculty at the Children's Therapy Centre in Mullingar. Her research is grounded in the lived experiences of people navigating forced migration, exploring how young people rebuild identity, belonging, and wellbeing in the aftermath of displacement and trauma. She has worked extensively with Spirasi, Ireland's National Centre for Survivors of Torture, researching how creative expression within befriending programmes can facilitate healing and connection for torture survivors.

Workshop Overview

This interactive workshop introduces counsellors and psychotherapists in higher education to trauma-informed creative approaches for supporting refugee students. Participants will explore how expressive arts techniques can facilitate connection and self-expression when verbal communication may be challenging due to trauma, language barriers, or cultural differences. Following a brief contextual overview of the specific needs and strengths of refugee students in university settings, participants will engage in a guided 'inside-outside mask' activity designed to be adaptable for one-to-one counselling or group work. The workshop emphasises practical, accessible approaches that can be integrated into existing support services, with attention to ethical considerations and the importance of safety and choice in trauma-informed practice.

DAY TWO - Tuesday May 26th

LEGO WORKSHOP

Workshop Overview

Building Resilience: Overcoming Stress Mindset through LEGO® Serious Play®

This interactive, hands-on workshop introduces higher-education counsellors to LEGO® Serious Play® (LSP) as a creative way to help students externalise stress, shift stress mindsets, and strengthen resilience. Through quick build–share–reflect activities, participants will experience how metaphor, play, and co-regulation can create psychological safety and meaningful insight. Practical guidance will be offered on integrating LSP into brief or group sessions.

Participants will:

- Experience LSP techniques that help students reframe stress and build resilience
- Understand the psychological principles behind LSP (metaphor, embodied cognition, narrative reframing)
- Take away simple example prompts and ideas for integrating LSP elements into short, time-limited sessions

Dr Briony Supple

Dr Briony Supple is a Senior Lecturer in Learning and Teaching Enhancement at University College Cork and Director of the Masters in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. A certified LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator and Pro Trainer, she has delivered workshops internationally across education and corporate contexts. Her work focuses on creativity, play and learner-centred approaches to teaching, learning and professional development.



Dr Zelda Di Blasi

Dr Zelda Di Blasi is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Applied Psychology at University College Cork and Founder and Director of the MA in Applied Psychology (Positive and Coaching Psychology). A certified LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator, she integrates playful and experiential methods into teaching, coaching, and professional development to support reflection, resilience, and meaningful dialogue. Her teaching and research span positive psychology, health psychology, and coaching psychology, with a particular interest in how creative methods can deepen insight, connection, and wellbeing.



Simon Forsyth

Keynote Speaker

Simon Forsyth is an IACP-accredited psychotherapist, facilitator, educator, and advocate of therapeutic writing and journaling. His extensive training in the areas of writing and creativity includes a Practitioner Certificate in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes from Metanoia Institute London, Journal to the Self instructor training from Kathleen Adams' Center for Journal Therapy, and creativity coaching trainings with Dr Eric Maisel. In addition to independently run groups, Simon has delivered therapeutic and life writing workshops with PCI College, SpunOut, Big Smoke Writing Factory, Are Kids for Me?, and the Irish Family Planning Association. He offers sessions in Dublin and online through his private practice, Nozomi Counselling & Psychotherapy, with a particular link to creative, neurodivergent, and LGBTQ+ folks. He writes and journals regularly for his own creativity and reflection.

