

## LIFE MAP WORK

Our life is very much like a map, with main arterial roads catering to high volumes of traffic moving at great speed, with highly congested dual carriageways, busy urban streets and long winding infrequently used country lanes. The similarity does not end there; acres of rural landscape and parks with their well-kept scenic views are all equally representative of different aspects of our lives. So too are the densely populated, unhealthy urban districts deprived of many essential resources. Noble, elegant, and ancient landmarks represent a different side to our nature, the side of us that has great depth, patience, creativity and beauty, which is filled with mystery and magic. All this and more makes the analogy of a map a good one.

Our past and all its different components hold so much of the explanation to who we are today. Our moods, attitudes and values are all by-products of the past; influenced and carved out by those who were significant in our lives, i.e., our parents, our schooling, our peers, as well as by people who seemed to have no significance and yet even their mark has been left in some way. Every event great and small has had its say in our design and construction. Sadly, significant amounts of our life experience when examined has clearly proved to be unhelpful, even damaging and as a result parts of us lay badly wounded whilst other parts have been left barely functioning, we need to attend to these inner wounds and that which we would rather not face in ourselves. The more we run away from the truth about ourselves the more the parts of our personality that are self-limiting and destructive remain hidden, doing untold damage in the process.

To produce a life map is quite simple, and it can be done in a variety of ways, which allows the individual to be as creative as they wish. Probably the most straightforward method is to write an autobiographical account of one's life in segments of about 5 or even 10 years... incorporating all that is remembered e.g., individuals, events, special occasions etc. It is also helpful to include those memories that do not seem particularly important, because it is surprising to discover how many seemingly unimportant occurrences have actually been 'cobbled together by our subconscious and have contributed to who we are today.

Writing an account of one's life is in itself very therapeutic and offers a valuable discharge of thoughts and feelings, it is the beginning of looking at oneself and provides the personal development process with a main road into those areas of one's life that have hitherto been unexplored, or were inaccessible, or denied. This process is not about 'living-in the past', it is about understanding the past and then limiting the negative influences it still has on our lives, in order that we can live more fully in the present.

The next stage in the process is to share the contents of your life map with the counsellor/therapist. This further extends its therapeutic value, as there is no substitute for talking through one's experience in a sensitive and supportive environment. Confronting oneself with another offers many challenges but it brings many rewards. As you face your shame, fear and inadequacies, you are able to be gradually liberated from the shackles of the past. Life map work is a journey into the known and unknown with an ally, someone who is on your side and is not there to criticise, mock or condemn you, someone who is there to help you honestly face yourself and understand what has brought you to this point in your life, and more importantly help you to see what can be done about it. It is time to recognise that "you" are the key to all that you are looking for and that you need look no further for the antidote to your pain and sadness. The problem and the solution live in the same place.