



# Annual Report 2021



## ARC Team

### Management Committee

Nancy Quinnell *Chair*  
Ann Stainton *Secretary*  
Dick Crowther *Treasurer*  
Shelagh Flowers  
Katharine Hadfield  
Graham Howe  
David Hare

### Staff

Paul Cassidy *Co-ordinator*  
Alexia Bylett *Clinical Co-ordinator*  
Julia Wiles *Admin and Finance Lead*  
Ioana Lupas *Admin*  
Grace Pattenden *Admin*  
Bren MacLachlan *Admin*

### Counselling Supervisors

Chris Allen  
Claire Basil  
Vanessa Bunting-Palmer  
Maria Facey  
Janet Gunn  
Heidi Jolliffe  
Lyn Rhodes  
Sandra Waters



## Chair's Report, March 2021

Last year's report began with the words:

***“We are living through unprecedented times, both in our daily lives and in the world of counselling, due to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.”***

Never in my wildest dreams did I think that we would still be in this predicament.

I am going to carry on by saying a very big thank you to Paul, Alexia, the office staff and counsellors for the wonderful way that they have continued to run this service so admirably, despite the additional challenges that they have all had to face: these being Zoom counselling training, lateral flow testing for staff working face-to-face, and the immense infection control measures.

It is with sadness that we have to say goodbye to our Clinical Co-ordinator Alexia Bylett, who is leaving us after 17 years of service. She has helped and supported ARC in so many ways, not least of all by helping to raise standards and implement quality training, along with supervision, making us a far more professional and respected organisation. Alexia has also helped ARC to gain accreditation with BACP. We will all fondly remember the training experiences in the coastal town of Bournemouth, which she organised, as well as all the Safeguarding Training. Even through these tough times, she has worked tirelessly to ensure that all counsellors carried out Zoom training on how to be an online counsellor.

Paul and I conducted Zoom interviews for a new Clinical Co-ordinator to replace Alexia earlier this month and we are delighted to inform you that Vanessa Bunting-Palmer was appointed. She is currently working alongside Alexia to ensure a smooth transition.

With the easing of the lockdown restrictions it is anticipated that there will be a surge in demand for our services, with the commensurate rise with issues involving emotional/mental health, including bereavement, social anxiety, eating disorders and depression. Anxiety over employment will no doubt remain an issue.

My sincere gratitude must also be conveyed to the Management Committee that has continued to meet regularly on Zoom, ensuring that ARC can play its part in the provision of an invaluable Counselling Service to the people of Wokingham and its surrounding areas.

**Nancy Quinnell**

**Chair**



## Co-ordinator's Report, 2021

This is a very different report to anything I have written in the past 20 years of working at ARC. Our staff members have had to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances, and have done so with professionalism and commitment.

### ARC closed down

The pandemic initially closed our all operations, while we looked at moving everything online: our office team moved to working through our website, keeping in contact with existing clients and booking online sessions for those seeking help. Thank goodness for Zoom!

### Training and making ARC COVID-safe

All our counsellors undertook an extensive 80 hours of online training in how to work online and over the telephone, keeping therapy as safe and effective as possible.

We then made changes to our Wokingham offices to make the rooms COVID-safe for staff and clients, and we continued to support some of the most vulnerable young clients in their schools. Updating risk assessments on a weekly basis and responding to the ever-changing situation was a challenge that all our team took part in.

### Focus on safe service provision and supporting counsellors

The last lockdown after Christmas has been the most difficult for ARC, with team members unable to work and one furloughed. This meant we had to focus on service provision, with our priority on the safety of staff and clients.

Thankfully, in February, we were able to start providing lateral flow testing for staff working face-to-face, and the first of the counsellors have had their vaccinations under the government's social care workers banner.

Because of the demands of ensuring a safe and effective service provision during challenging times, we have had to put on hold our newly purchased client management system, as well as the required NHS data submission, part of our funding agreement with the CCG.



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However, a great achievement we have managed to complete is the reaccreditation process with the BACP, our governing body.

huge **THANK YOU** must go out to all involved in this intensive piece of work.

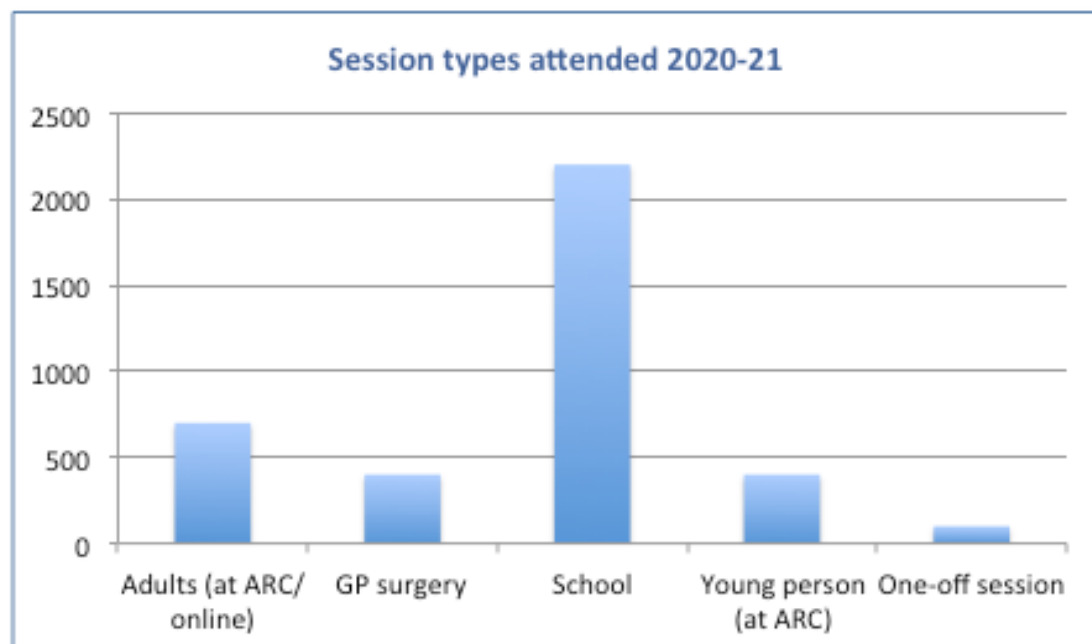
## Service use and main issues

Another consequence of the pandemic was a reduction in demand for our services, with many reasons for this, including lack of suitable IT and services users being unable to find a safe and confidential space to participate in counselling.

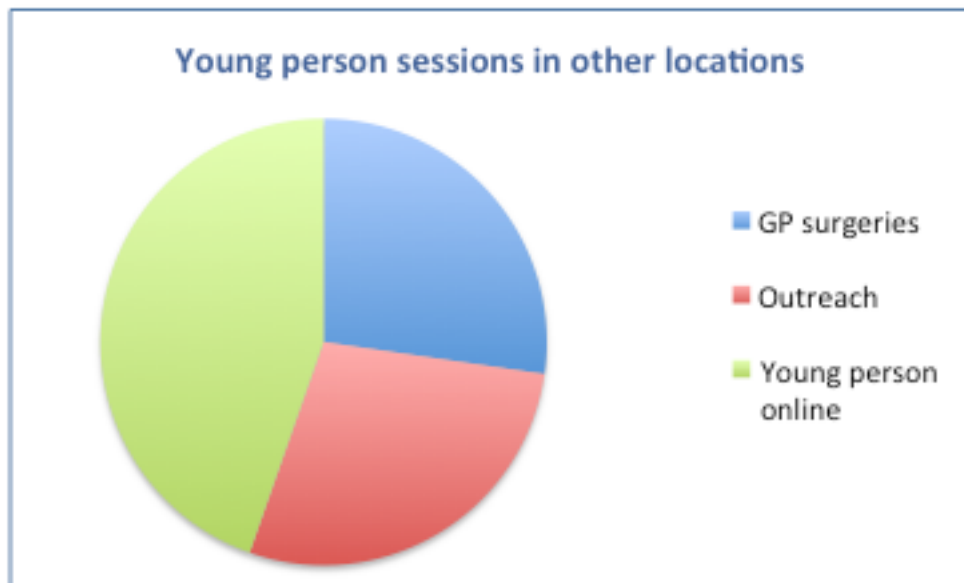
Another consequence was a change in the main stresses that young people were previously seeking help for including reductions in anxiety around going to school, friendships, academic stresses, exams and bullying.

### *Sessions attended*

Overall, **3,800** sessions were attended in 2020-21. Over half of these were school sessions, as can be seen below.

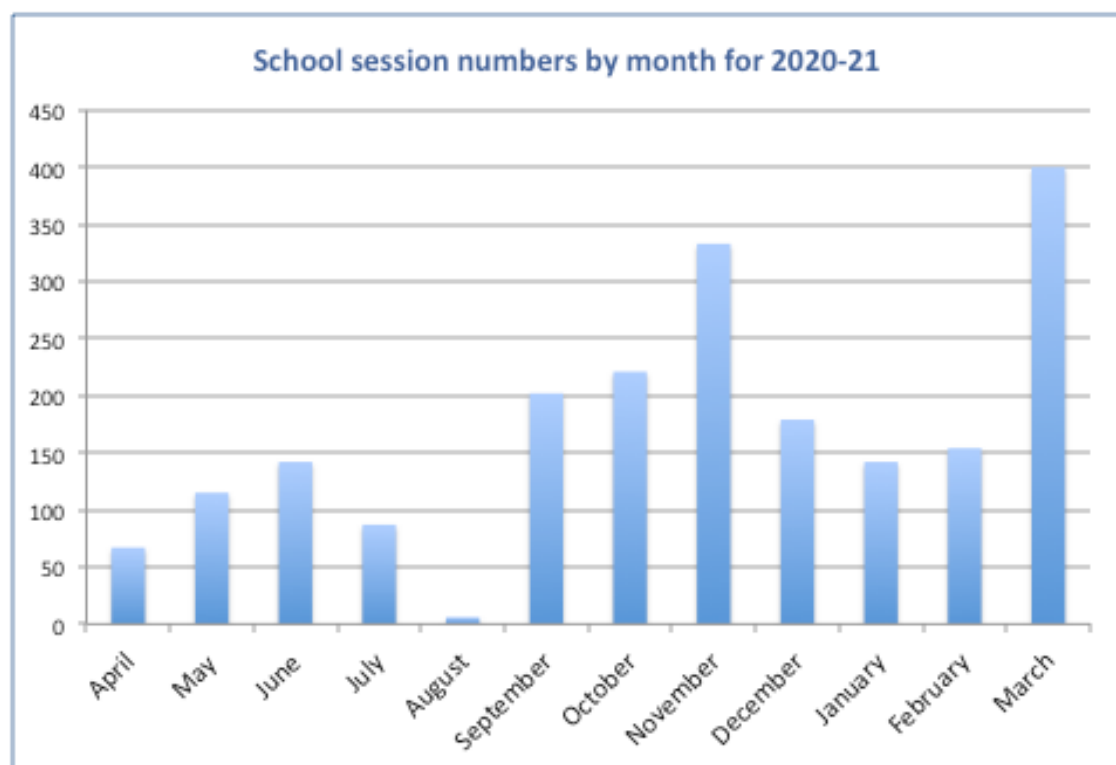


Of the above figures, young person session numbers for locations other than school are as below – with 208 at GP surgeries, 214 outreach sessions and 340 young people choosing to work online with counsellors.



When considering school session numbers, the below chart shows the attendance levels for the period soon after the first lockdown, when many young people were no longer able to attend school.

During the periods after lockdowns eased and/or when schools reopened after holidays, there was an influx of more young people seeking counselling – in June 2020, September to November 2020, and in March 2021. We would anticipate this increase in session numbers to continue, as lockdown eases and client self-isolation reduces as COVID cases reduce.



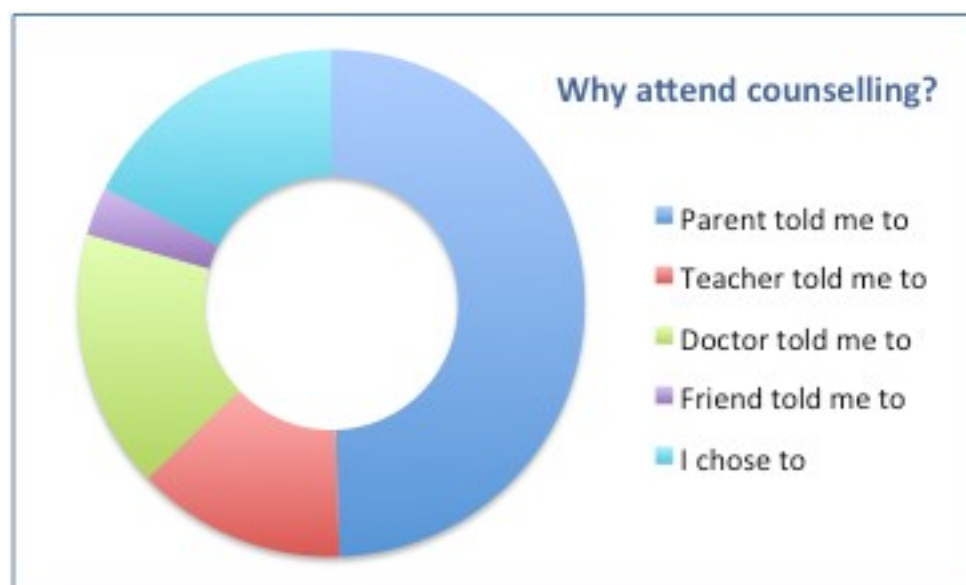
## ***Demographics and main presenting issues***

### *Young people demographics*

The majority of young people attending sessions lived in Wokingham or Woodley, though some young people came from Twyford, Winnersh, Reading, Crowthorne, Bracknell and Finchampstead.

Around two thirds of young people were female and one third was male. Around 88% were white British, almost 10% Asian or Asian British and the remainder classified as mixed or multiple ethnicities.

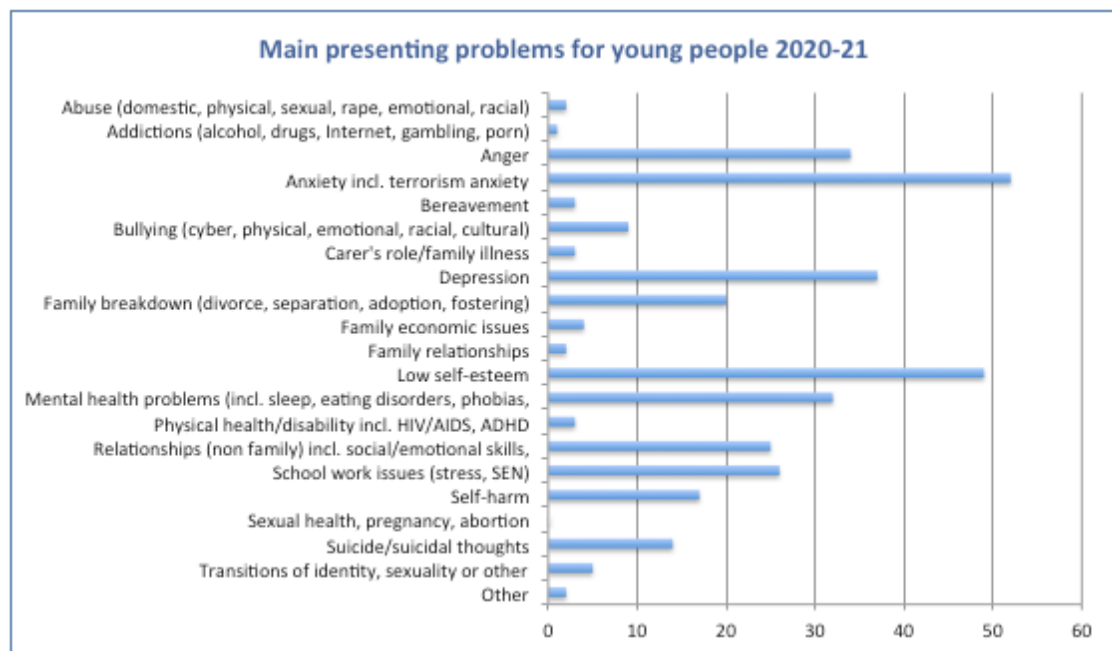
Of young people attending almost half were asked to by a parent; and 17% chose to attend themselves. Of the remainder, 16% were told to attend by their doctor, 13% by their teacher and 3% by a friend. Just under a quarter had previously received counselling.



As seen in the graph below, the main issues for young people this year were around anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, anger and mental health problems, with comparable numbers to last year.

School-related issues were comparably unsurprisingly lower than for the previous year, presumably due to many young people being absent for a significant proportion of school over the last year.



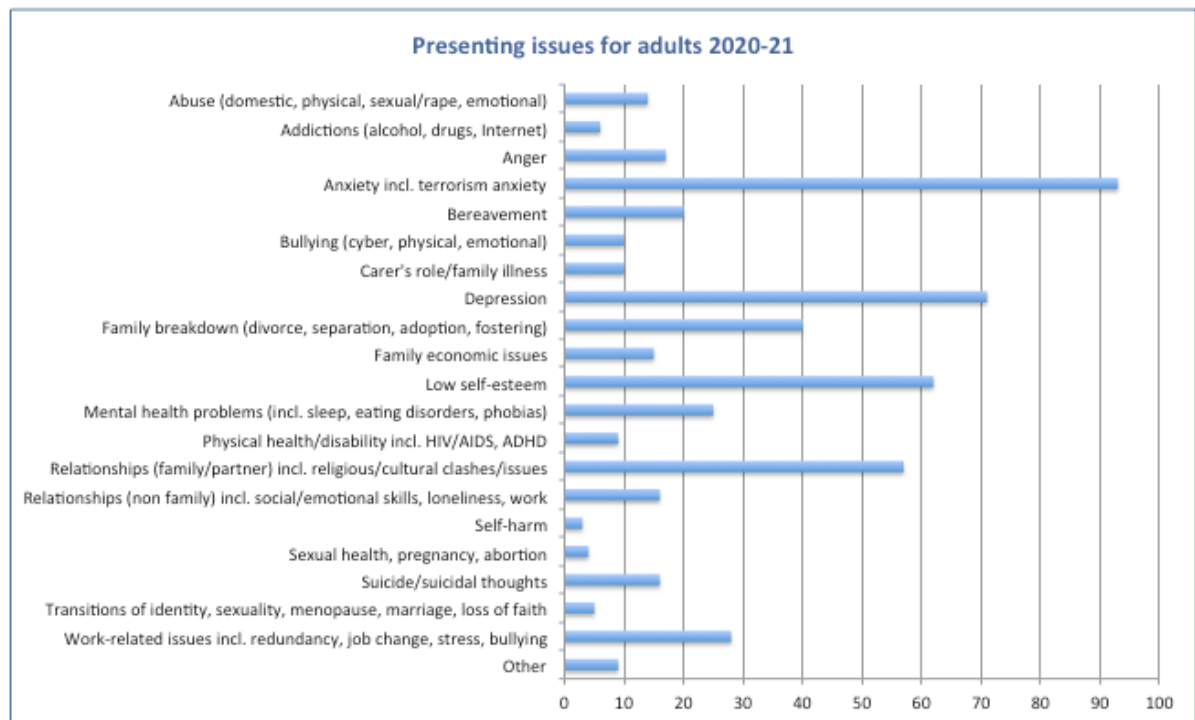


### Adult demographics

For adults attending the Wokingham site (or attending online or telephone counselling), as with young people, around two thirds were female and one third male. Around 83% were white British, almost 3% Asian or Asian British (both lower figures than for young people), 3% Afro-Caribbean, and 6% in a new categorisation of European. The remainder classified as 'other'. In terms of age, 24% were 18-25 years old, 78% were over 25 years, and 20% were uncategorised.

As seen in the graph below, the main issue for adults this year was anxiety, almost double on last year. Other issues that doubled from last year include depression, low self-esteem, family relationship issues and family breakdown. Work-related issues and mental health challenges also increased from last year. It is clear that the impact of the Pandemic, the numerous lockdowns, and the uncertainties and anxieties of the last year, have had severe impacts on relationships, family cohesiveness and mental health in adults.

The only issues to see a decrease were non-family relationships (potentially because there was significantly less interaction with those outside the family) and family economic issues.



### ***Improvement levels for adults and young people***

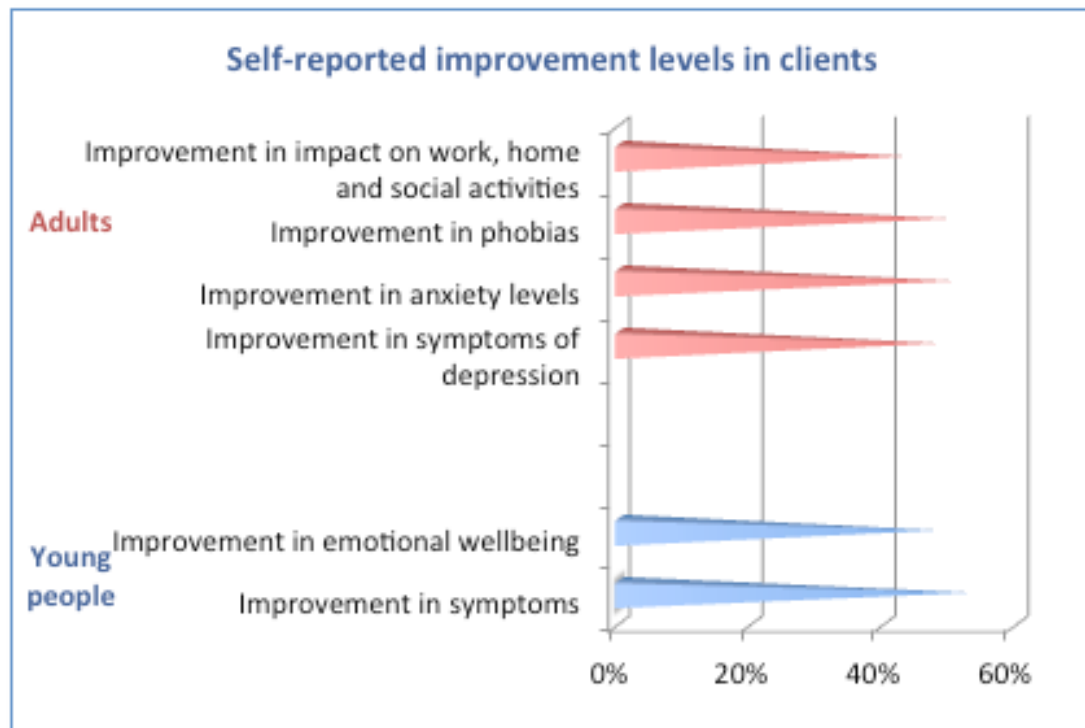
There were significant improvements self-reported by both adults and young people.

Adults reported a:

- 50% improvement in symptoms of anxiety and phobias
- 48% improvement in the impact of their difficulties on work, home and social activities
- 43% improvement in symptoms of depression

Young people reported a:

- 53% improvement of symptoms since attending counselling
- 48% improvement in emotional wellbeing.



### ***Perception of counselling by young people***

Overall, young people found the service easy to approach and safe; and found it easy to speak to their counsellor, who enabled them to feel listened to. The vast majority felt understood and safe.

Around three fifths definitely felt they benefitted from attended counselling, with the majority feeling it was probably a good thing to have done so. Half would recommend counselling to a friend, with the other half possibly recommending counselling.

There was a small proportion that felt less sure of their experiences, and one respondent felt unsafe and unheard, and that counselling had been of no benefit. Although it may be that this client wasn't ready or willing to attend counselling, it may be useful, going forward, to identify more about what ARC could do to improve the service for the small proportion of clients that feel this way.

### ***Young people's self-reported thoughts around counselling***

#### ***Why attended counselling?***

Young people reported that they had attended counselling for reasons such as anxiety, depression, mental health, feeling sad all the time, low self-esteem, "bad" or intrusive thoughts, struggling to cope with sensory sensitivities, and individual changes to home circumstances. A minority of young people attended because their friends or family "made" them.

#### ***Benefits of counselling***

Many young people reported great benefits to having attended counselling. This included being able to cope better; lower levels of

stress, anxiety or depression; higher levels of confidence and happiness; feeling calmer, feeling less angry, and feeling more able to manage big emotions. Specific comments that show how clients have felt about counselling include:

- *"I have been more open."*
- *"My ability to understand my process and reason out my thoughts to make choices [has improved]."*
- *"I try to view things from a different prospective [sic] before letting them get to me."*

### Overall experience of counselling

While one young person felt that counselling wasn't for them, and another felt it was ok, but wouldn't do it again, the majority of young people found the overall experience really helpful to them. Below are some of the words that were used to describe how they felt.



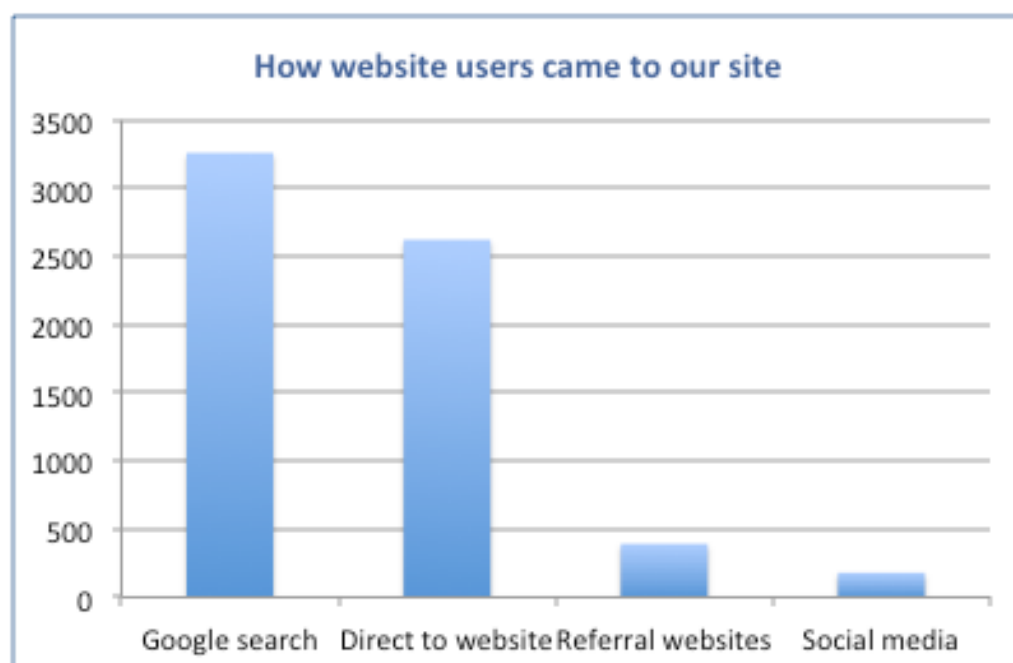
It is clear that ARC and its counsellors have had a vital support role in the lives of many young people and adults over the last year. This is demonstrated in the statistics and the self-reported comments from young people.

### **Website traffic report**

From 1st March 2020 to 1st March 2021 there was a total of 6,298 visitors to the website undertaking 8,831 sessions on the website. The vast majority accessed our website either through a desktop computer (3,083) or a mobile phone (3,081). A small proportion of service users accessed our website through a tablet (179).



Most people came to our site via Google search or directly to our website. There was also a small proportion of visitors that came through referral websites and social media. There were 485 visits in total to the online payment page.



### ***Most popular website pages***

Finally, the most popular pages on our website (in order) are:

- Youth Counselling
- Adult Counselling
- Get in Touch

- About
- Volunteering

We can see that we still have people wishing to volunteer with us, which is important in terms of what the future holds for ARC. It is also good to see that the main usage of our website has been to find out more about counselling sessions or to get in touch with us, which is, after all, our purpose.

### **What does the future hold?**

Going forward, we know that once the current lockdown eases, we will be dealing with a backlog of demand for face-to-face counselling as well as coming to terms with the issues the pandemic has had on clients' emotional and mental health, including bereavement, social anxiety, eating disorders and depression. Our services will be in more demand than ever before.

With that in mind, we have taken the decision to increase our counselling team through virtual interviews, and carried out induction and safeguarding training.

### **Finally, with thanks to...**

My thanks go to the Management Committee for their time and support, again via many online meetings; a huge thank you to all our team for all their help in ensuring that ARC continues to support the local community; and thanks to our partners for their generous help in continuing to fund us through difficult times.

**Paul Cassidy**  
**Co-ordinator**

## **Clinical Co-ordinator's Report**

Here we are, a year on from the start of the Pandemic that has taken us all by storm.

What I am very proud to say is that through hard work and the willingness to adapt to change, ARC has managed to grow into the present environment and, in many ways, move forward through these challenging times.

As Clinical Co-ordinator, I have been able to be part of the team, and also able stand back and observe how the various internal teams have managed through some very challenging times.

We have managed to survive as we have maintained our priorities as an agency, in that the service of clients remains paramount. We have also managed to go beyond this and to thrive.

### **Survival**

We have been able to:

- Maintain communications with our accrediting body, to stay on top of research and regulations.
- Research alternative methods of working with clients through various media.
- Provide ongoing support and supervision to all our counsellors and staff:
  - o Supervisors have continued to run online groups for counsellors who have chosen to take a break through this time.
  - o The Co-ordinator, the admin team and I have continued to meet via Zoom every Monday as usual, as well as working more flexibly through the week, as required.
  - o We have also offered whole agency Zoom meetings, provided online training in place of our annual event in Bournemouth, and kept everyone up-to-date on a regular basis.
- Link with other agencies to share information where helpful.
- Recommend training in working online, so that counsellors have been able to keep the standard of their counselling work at the highest level possible.

### **Thriving**

I am proud to say that as well as keeping the agency alive, we have also taken steps to move forward. This has included:

- Working through the reaccreditation process that was due for its five-year renewal during this time.
- Conducting a recruitment drive to maintain the level of counsellors that will be needed, going forward to deal with the



after-effects of this global trauma, as well as the on-going difficulties that our community will have experienced at an individual level.

Finally, it is with sadness that I bid a personal farewell to ARC. After 17 years, it is time for me to move on. I leave the Agency with pride and fond memories. It has been a privilege to be part of its growth over the years.

There is opportunity now for the new clinical lead, Vanessa Bunting-Palmer, to bring renewed energy and vision into the role, and I am confident that the Agency will go from strength to strength.

My final words are ones of thanks:

- To Paul, my right-hand man for all those years – he is the very heart of ARC.
- The admin team, who are the most dedicated individuals, and have worked so hard especially through this very difficult year.
- The team of supervisors, without whom my job would not have been possible.
- The counsellors, past and present, who have created the community we have all shared in.

THANK  
YOU!

**Alexia Bylett**  
**Clinical Co-ordinator**

## **Counsellors' Experiences of Working During the Pandemic**

For many counsellors, this last year has been an enormous learning curve. A lot of work has gone into re-training staff in how to work remotely, including learning about the theory and practice of telephone and video counselling.

There have been many challenges for both staff and clients: family commitments and conducting sessions from home; changing practices for those counsellors and clients continuing to work face-to-face or moving to remote work; some clients preferring to wait for counsellors who could not work face-to-face for a time; and all the additional anxieties and fears that the Pandemic brought up for many people on both sides of the counselling relationship.

Below are the experiences of some of ARC's counsellors during the last year.

### **Laura, Trainee Counsellor**

*"I started at ARC at the beginning of last year, however due to the pandemic I couldn't start with clients until September. This was hugely frustrating as I really wanted to start with clients; to make a difference to people's lives and obviously to start my 100 hours.*

*"I was lucky that once I started with clients, ARC was able to stay open, which was ideal for me as I wanted to stay working face-to-face. I have felt supported, and have also found the supervision that is provided to be of great importance and invaluable. I have learnt so much working at ARC."*

### **Davi, Counsellor**

*"Adapting our work to the pandemic presented a great challenge at the start - ensuring we had adequate training to work online and necessary processes in place to work ethically and safely, especially given the vulnerability of our client base and lack of physical access to safeguarding, if required.*

*"On a lighter note, for me, it also needed constant communication and co-ordination within my family to make sure everybody had all the food and drink they needed from the kitchen I worked in, as we all had slightly different break and lunch times and they weren't 'allowed' downstairs while I was in session - I'm guessing you can imagine the grunts from an ever hungry teenage son about this!*

*"On the whole, I feel it has presented great opportunity and success, helping the profession find new ways to access those in need of our support. I am proud of the work I have been able to do*

*since the start of the pandemic – offering approximately 175 sessions through ARC in school, switching between wearing gloves and coats when working face-to-face in 'well ventilated' rooms to odd combinations of jogging bottoms and smart tops when working over Zoom.*

*“It has been quite an experience and a time for considerable personal and professional growth.”*

### **Nina, Accredited Counsellor**

*“Working through this pandemic has been pretty special, if I’m honest. Things have been different practically, with the masks, the cleaning, and the hand sanitising, but the main difference has been a sense of togetherness with clients – that we were in this together, working together, and all doing our best. This has felt like a very different way of working than usual, with this big shared experience that we are all living through right now, and, for many, an existential panic that we know nothing about what is coming, any illusion of certainty gone.*

*“To my great disappointment, I wasn’t able to work during the first lockdown, due to family circumstances. Then I completed the 80-hour online training course in telephone and online counselling. This was a huge achievement for me that I was able to fit in between lockdowns, when my kids returned to school.*

*“During the second and third lockdowns, I worked via telephone, and was surprised and delighted to find that it worked really well for both my clients and myself. The nature of the work changed, and different topics arose. For many of my telephone sessions, the kids were home and so I drove to an empty car park, hot water bottles and blankets in the back, and conducted my calls while (usually) staring out through rain-spattered windows. I had to be creative to make things work this year!*

*“There has been something quite precious about this last year, in terms of greater awareness of the other, that I really hope continues. I feel fortunate to have lived through this really strange period of time.”*

Finally, here is a poem from Laura, one of our counsellors, about self-harm. It gives a flavour of the importance of the work our counsellors have continued to do during the Pandemic to support those in distress.

### **Self-harm**

*Self-harm may be their will to survive,*

*The way they manage to stay alive.*

*Self-harm may be their attempt to be heard,*

*It's a way of them talking, when they can't find the words.  
They don't want to die,  
That's not their desire,  
They just want someone to feel their fire.  
They may feel rage, they may feel pain,  
When they cut and see the blood,  
It pours like the rain.  
They feel the release,  
They momentarily feel free,  
But then they look and they ask you....  
"Is this how I'll always be?"*

# ARC Wokingham

## INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT - 2020/21

### INCOME

Wokingham Borough Council	26,974.00
YMCA	1,680.00
Woodley Town Council	5,500.00
Wokingham Town Council	3,500.00
Earley Town Council	1,500.00
Primary Care Trust	37,000.00
Schools Counselling	44,247.00
Session Fees	7,866.62
Training Income	412.91
Charitable Donations	23,949.68
Gift Aid Claims	1,594.79
Other Income	888.32
JRS Grant	790.40
Bank Interest Received	20.72
<b>Total</b>	<b>155,924.44</b>

### EXPENDITURE

Schools Counselling - Contracts	32,812.00
Schools Counselling - Ad hoc	1,596.35
GP Counselling	3,358.00
YP Counselling	5,556.00
Rent & Rates	6,547.12
Printing & Stationery	2,847.15
Furniture & Equipment	5,422.48
Fundraising Costs	665.00
Victim Support	751.20
Maintenance	876.00
Woodley Outreach	3,640.80
Community Wellbeing Projects	96.00
General Expenses	2,775.96
Bank Charges, Credit Card Fees & Interest	265.30
Staff Salaries	36,556.63
Counsellors Supervision	24,145.50
Counsellors Training	3,280.20
Legal & Professional Fees	785.40
<b>Total</b>	<b>131,977.09</b>
<b>EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>23,947.35</b>

### BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2021

Brought Forward from 2019/20	73,501.69
Plus surplus income from 2020/21	23,947.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>97,449.04</b>
Represented by Current Account	37,930.81
Less outstanding cheques	-
Debtors & Prepayments	49,261.05
Deposit Account	40,002.11
Petty Cash	203.10
Creditors & Accruals	(29,948.03)
<b>Total</b>	<b>97,449.04</b>



04 May 2021

Prepared by :-

ACS Accounting

Date :- 04/05/21

Approved by :-

ARC Wokingham

Date :- 4/ May 2021.

## Acknowledgments and thank you

ARC would like to thank and express our huge gratitude to all the local companies, councils and organisations that provided the financial support for our services throughout 2020/2021 and onwards.

**Thank you!**

