



COUNSELLING



Affordable counselling for all the community

ANNUAL REPORT

April 2024 – March 2025

Presented to the Board of Trustees at the AGM 26th April 2025

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Counselling at AFC
Annual Report for the AGM
26th April 2025

Introduction from the Chair

Counselling at AFC has now been up and running for over 3 years and the credit goes to such a dedicated and amazing team of Trustees and counsellors.

The highlights of the year for me are:

- Cliniko, set up and maintained by our awesome Trustee and counsellor, Toby. This has made a tremendous difference in the day to day running of the charity and has allowed counsellors to check if online paying clients are up to date with payments.
- A £500 generous donation from Mrs. Payne in June which came at an opportune time.
- Our successful Marketing campaign to raise awareness in our catchment area which was headed and run by Toby and Pat (Trustee and Community Outreach Officer). Thanks to all the trustees who spent time delivering postcards.
- The new charity postcards which were organised by Gill (Trustee and Safeguarding Officer) and Toby and funded from an anonymous generous giver.

We had a quiet spell in the summer which instigated the successful marketing campaign which is ongoing, client enquiries have increased, and we are almost full to capacity.

The following, extensive report written by Toby, shows how successful our charity is at changing people's lives for the better. My favourite quote is "The counsellors work beautifully as a team having regular meetings and in between meetings as necessary"; the support for each other shows in the fantastic work they do.

Jo, our CBT counsellor, took some needed time out over the summer, it was a relief to see her back and well rested in September. We are now set up to take on a placement counsellor, thanks to our trustee's input, preparing for interviews and setting up a system for line management and supervision. We need to wait for enough client enquiries to make this viable.

We interviewed a counsellor after they enquired about joining our team, this was a great learning process for us that ended with Jane (Trustee), taking on an extra morning, which gives us more time to offer for clients.

Group sessions were offered last summer with little interest, next time we will have a better marketing campaign to raise awareness.

The following report was achieved by Toby's hard work and dedication to the charity, amalgamating the year's statistics and feedback. Thankyou Toby.

Sadly one of our Trustees, Gill has given notice of a year (thankyou Gill, for the long notice) and our grateful thanks for all that you have done and do towards the charity.

I have retired as a counsellor which gives me more time to dedicate to my other roles for the charity. I pray the next year will see us grow and flourish. Thankyou team for your continued dedication.

Financial Report

The income and expenditure have stayed fairly consistent, with a fall of clients over the summer, income in April 24 was £400.67 with £468.80 expenses compared to March 25; income £672.33, expenses £531.01. The main income is client donations and expenditure is mainly counsellor invoices and annual membership fees. We had a very generous donation in June 2024 of £500 from Mrs Payne which was very timely and gratefully received. The balance was £2005.15 in April24 and £2830.98 at the end of March25. The balance has increased which allows us to support low-cost clients.

We do not yet have the client numbers to take on a student placement

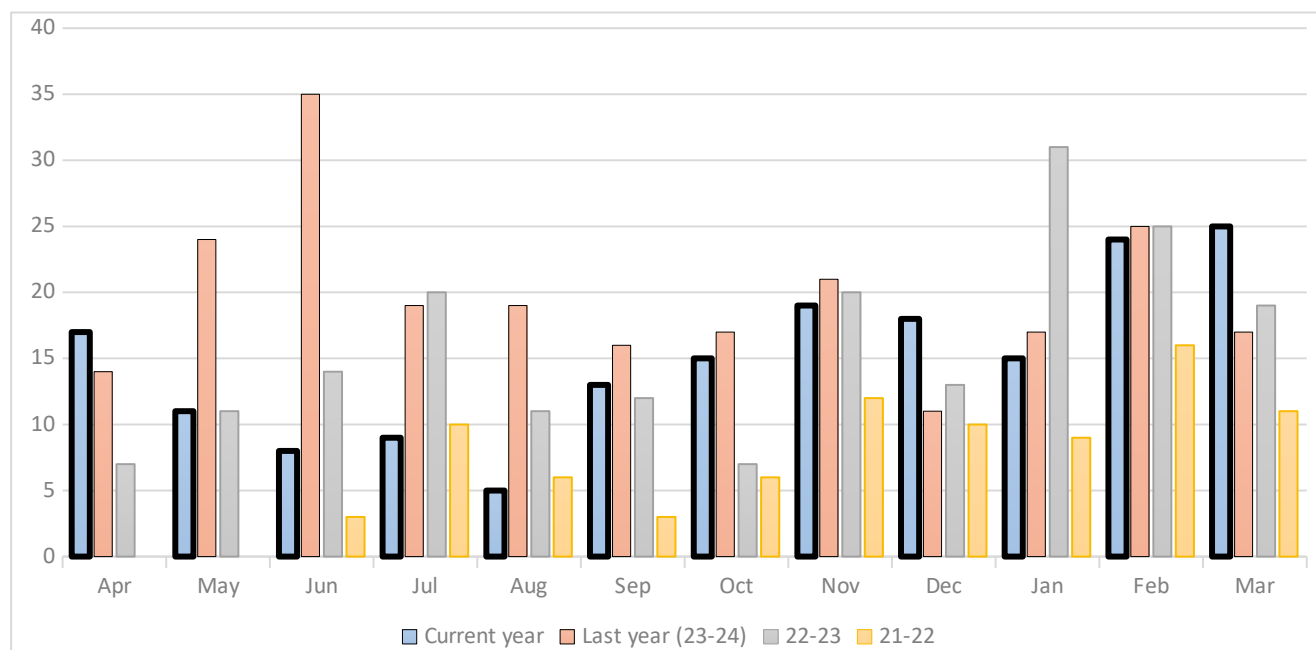
Summary Apr24-Mar25				
Summary			Bank balance	
Income	£5,081.36		Balance b/f	£2,073.28
			Surplus	£757.70
Expenditure	£4323.66			
Surplus	£757.70		Balance c/f	£2,830.98

Data Review

Data covers the Period from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

	Current Year (Apr 24-25)	Apr 23-24	Apr 22-23	Apr 21-22
Number of individual clients seen	24	24	21	9
Number of new clients (including returning)	16	19	18	9
Number of scheduled sessions	204	270	217	96
Number of delivered sessions	179	234	190	86
Number of cancellations	24	28	20	9
Number of DNAs (Did Not Attend)	11	8	6	1
Average Sessions Attended (for completed clients)	10.4	10.8	11.5	9.7

Figure 1: Number of session per month



General findings

- The number of sessions delivered to clients has decreased compared to last year by 55. The number of clients seen in this year has remained the same. The number of new clients starting this year is down from last year and also includes some clients returning to the service.
- Despite the decrease in sessions delivered, there has also been an increase in the number of cancellations and DNAs, which represent 17.2% of sessions (last year 13.3%). This is a large increase and perhaps reflects the increased complexity of client presenting issues. Most cancellations were in April, October and November, and most DNAs were in May.
- The average number of sessions completed by clients has fallen again compared to the previous year, but by a smaller amount. A few clients completed only a few sessions (between 2 and 4) and this has affected the average. Only one client this year had an extended number of sessions. 71% of clients completed at least 12 sessions, which is an increase from last year.
- For 8 months the number of sessions were lower this year compared to the previous year. The biggest drop was seen in the period of May to August with 64 fewer sessions being delivered. This period reflects a time when one of the counsellors was on a break, as well as the summer holiday. This year, at least two clients chose to delay starting their sessions until after the summer break due to childcare issues. After this period, session numbers rose steadily until November. There was a drop in December, but this was not as big as last year's. The start of 2025 also saw a rise in

the number of sessions delivered to levels equal to or exceeding those of previous years by March. This perhaps reflects the success of the marketing push at the end of January which resulted in several new clients starting.

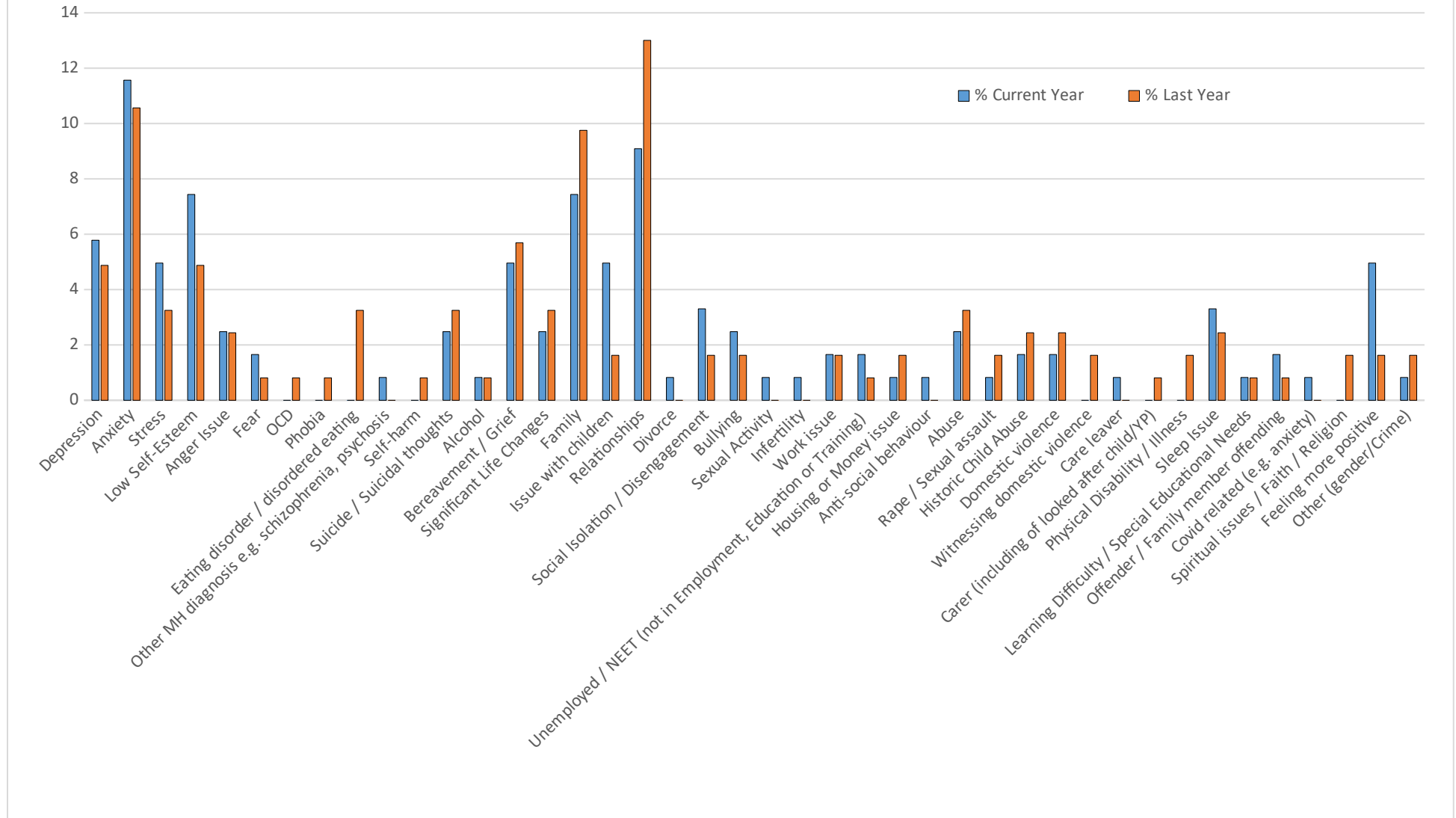
- No couples were seen this year. There were several enquiries by couples, but the limited counsellor availability did not match theirs. The group sessions were advertised but there was no interest and so it did not run. Hopefully, the group may go ahead this year with improved advertising.

The issues being brought by clients (Figure 2), show similar trends to the previous year. The range of issues is roughly the same. These are the top 7 issues presented, this year taking into account joint frequency of presentation (those in brackets are from last year):

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Anxiety | (Relationship issues) |
| 2. Relationship issues | (Anxiety) |
| 3. Low self-esteem / Family | (Family) |
| 4. Depression | (Bereavement) |
| 5. Stress/Bereavement/Children/More positive | (Depression / Low self-esteem) |
| 6. Social Isolation /Sleep issue | (Stress/ ED/ Suicide/Abuse/Life changes) |
| 7. Anger / Suicide / Life changes / Bullying / Abuse | (Anger/ Historic CA/ DA/ Sleep...) |

The issues raised by clients are similar to the previous two years. “Family” and “anxiety, and “relationship issues” remain high. “Depression” and “stress” have risen. There have been suicidal clients in the service this year, but as an issue, it has not been as prevalent. Some other notable rises include “sleep issues”, “children” and social isolation. “Feeling more positive” has also reappeared on list which is encouraging and perhaps reflects that clients are completing sufficient sessions to experience the benefits of counselling. A review of the issue codes was carried out to see if any could be removed. It was decided that some might need rewording (which will be discussed in a counsellor meeting), but almost all of them have been covered by at least one client over the past three years. Interestingly some issues which went, like “covid” and “infertility”, have returned. Others like “phobias”, “spiritual issues and “disordered eating” have not appeared. I think that recording a wide range of presenting issues reflects the diverse client population that we provide the service to in a community setting, which is different from more focussed or specialised services.

Figure 2: Client Issues



Outcome Measures

At the beginning, middle and end of the set of sessions, clients complete a range of outcome measure forms. Sometimes the scores will increase in the middle sessions, but this often reflects the fact that issues are being processed. The following measures are completed:

CORE 10 – measuring general wellbeing, functioning, problems and risk. A score of 10/40 is the clinical cut off for the general population. Scores between 5 and 10 are considered “low” level issues and below 5 is “healthy”.

PHQ9 – Used to measure depression symptomology

GAD7 – Used to look at anxiety symptomology

The data in the following table is based on 13 clients who completed a start and end set of forms. Two clients were excluded from the analysis as they only completed forms at the start or start and middle.

	RANGE AT START	RANGE AT END	MEAN START	MEAN END	MEAN CHANGE
CORE (/40)	13-37	0-22	20.7 (Moderate)	7.5 (Low)	- 13.2
PHQ9 (/27)	4-22	0-18	12.8 (Moderate)	5.2 (Mild)	- 7.7
GAD7 (/21)	1-19	0-15	12.2 (Moderate)	4.7 (Just Mild)	- 7.5

	MEDIAN START		MEDIAN END	MEDIAN CHANGE
CORE (/40)	21 (Mod/Severe)		6 (Low)	- 14
PHQ9 (/27)	13 (Moderate)		4 (Mild)	- 8
GAD7 (/21)	14 (Moderate)		3 (None)	- 7

	CURRENT MEAN CHANGE (23-24)	PREVIOUS MEAN CHANGE (22/23)	CURRENT MEDIAN CHANGE (23-24)	PREVIOUS MEDIAN CHANGE (22-23)
CORE (/40)	-13.2	-10.8	- 14	-14
PHQ9 (/27)	-7.7	-7.3	- 8	-4.5
GAD7 (/21)	-7.5	-8.2	- 7	-7.5

- It can be seen from the data that for all measures the counselling reduces the scores. For the CORE forms a change of 5 points is considered clinically significant.
- The changes in the CORE and PHQ9 values are higher this year than last year. Changes, although significant, are slightly lower for the GAD7 scores. The reason for this is unclear.
- Clients are coming in on average with Moderate difficulties and symptomology and mostly leaving with, on average, no issues beyond those of the general population.

- It should be noted that the ranges of scores reaches 'Severe' levels on all scores, as in the previous year. Upper scores are again slightly higher this year compared to last year. The range for CORE scores is lowered to moderate levels, while for PHQ9 and GAD7 they are lowered to moderate/severe. This might reflect that clients are coming in with more severe issues and so despite reductions in scores they are still experiencing moderate symptomology. This is to be expected with the short term work offered by the service.

Counsellor Reviews

The summary includes the views of all three of the contracted counsellors in the service.

All tasks have been completed by the counsellors, except for one needing to check that their DBS is up to date, and two needing to update their safeguarding training. These actions should be completed by the end of April. Counsellors saw a reduced number of clients this year, decreasing from 7 to 9 last year to 5 to 7 this year. This means that on average counsellors saw between 1 and 3 clients a week.

All the counsellors are enjoying the work. It is hard at times, but with support and team work it's very rewarding. There was disappointment that the client numbers have dropped this year but with a hope that we can renew the push to raise our visibility in the community.

Achievements

All three counsellors felt they had done well in areas of their work this year including; finding ways to work with more complex clients in a boundaried way that allowed focus on certain aspects of presentation, and signposting and referring clients to appropriate support. They benefited from an improved telephone assessment, allowing easy allocation and greater clarity in first sessions. There was also increased confidence in recognising client's needs around returning to sessions after a break, acknowledgement of self-care needs when taking a break as a counsellor, good use of the sub-committee when querying low cost and/or returnees, and learning to use Cliniko effectively.

Issues

Counsellors mentioned the drop in client numbers this year, making it challenging to maintain motivation as this leaves them with some big gaps in their diaries. This has improved in the second half of the year. There have been challenges in holding boundaries with clients not following cancellation and booking procedures. Issues arose with fees, and the increase in baseline seems to have resolved most of these. Counsellors are finding it hard to get clients to return feedback forms and would like trustees to consider ideas on this.

Parking has again improved with only a couple of incidences when it was challenging. There have been some issues with the card reader which may be down to Wi-Fi, so one way round this has been to take payment first, thereby not making the next client late.

Support

The counselling team all feel well supported in their roles this year, from each other, the trustees, sub-committees and from the Church staff – many of whom now have a greater understanding of what the counsellors do and what they need in order to fulfil their roles. Everyone's care was very much appreciated when counsellors took a break but were kept in the loop and still supported. Trustees work on marketing to up the client numbers was much appreciated. It's clear the counsellors work beautifully as a team, both in regular meetings and between meetings if necessary.

Goals

The objectives mentioned this year included; delivery of group sessions and workshops, exploring further use of Cliniko, maintaining current roles effectively, and taking on fuller client loads if demand improves.

Training

Counsellors are all happy to source their own training and are aware of their obligation to do so. There was nothing specific that counsellors felt they all required as a group.

Improvements

With regards to trustees, counsellors would generally like them to continue to do what they are doing, with a focus on increasing client numbers. Specifically, to arrange meetings to monitor efficient and effective use of finances, continue to help marketing and advertising our counselling provision to the community and to find local resources who can refer to us, and who we can refer and signpost clients to.

Counsellors identified the following ways that service could be enhanced:

- Utilising marketing to follow up on contact from colleges to provide a placement to students, when client numbers increase.
- Approaching businesses to increase client footfall.
- Utilising the new link with Community Action Dacorum to get additional support and raise awareness.
- Links to schools might also increase our community presence.
- There may need to be more clarity around us not being a Christian counselling service as this could be off-putting to some potential clients.

Trustee Reviews

All trustees took part in the review process. All actions were up to date, except for one trustee who had ongoing actions to be resolved by the AGM.

The board has functioned well as a team, sharing tasks and making active contributions. As a result, there have been no major issues to address. Trustees felt supported by the regular team meetings that keep all involved and up to date. The team is felt to be easily accessible. The board works in a collaborative way which feels supportive. Sadly, a trustee has identified that they intend to step down from their role at next year's AGM. Until then, the board continues to be productive, effective and supportive in its current form.

Trustees felt they have been able to conduct their roles well, especially in the following ways:

- Checking policies and providing feedback
- Jointly organising and distributing the new publicity postcards
- Attending and contributing in meetings
- Providing support to counsellors with safeguarding issues
- Setting up the Cliniko service management software
- Researching NCPS membership and maintaining readiness to join
- Researching fundraising opportunities
- Paying invoices promptly
- Attending safeguarding training
- Keeping client payments updated on Cliniko
- Effectively using the sub-committee for low cost clients, which has been very useful

Some areas were identified as potentially being improved:

- Establishing effective links with the Safeguarding Officer at ACF (role is currently not filled)
- Having the team respond to emails more quickly
- Having a meeting of the fundraising sub-committee to decide on a direction of action
- Consider how we might use the businesses around us for clients, advertising. Services or workshops
- Attend more meetings face to face
- Complete counsellor reviews earlier
- Continue work towards taking on a placement counsellor

In respect to goals for the team in the next year several were identified, including:

- Keeping up to date with safeguarding training and issues
- Establishing a link with the Safeguarding Officer of AFC when appointed and continue to work effectively with the deputy in the meantime
- Ensure the continued smooth running of Cliniko
- Secure additional funding
- Provide accurate and timely information, as needed
- Continue the marketing campaign in the local community and use contacts within AFC to do this

- Explore new areas of marketing and promoting the service

The situation with the current lack of a permanent Safeguarding Lead at AFC means that the Chair of Trustees, who is also the deputy Safeguarding Lead for AFC is completing intermediate and advanced training this year as is appropriate for working with children and vulnerable adults at AFC.

Trustees identified there was a need for safeguarding training and a link has now been provided to a suitable course. There is also a potential need for training for some trustees on marketing and fundraising to make the most of the successful marketing drive.

In terms of further training for trustees, several areas were mentioned including, Linking Lives, safeguarding, marketing and fundraising. A few trustees have also completed training which might be beneficial. A meeting with an outside person who can provide assistance with aspects of accounting within the service will also be of use, and this is in the process of being arranged. A request has also been made for more referral pathways for clients so that a “database” can be collected based on trustee local knowledge.

There have been few issues this year. Lack of time was highlighted as an understandable obstacle. A minor issue with the Charity Commission registration was resolved, but has highlighted the need for backups of files and documents to be available for trustees. It was acknowledged that despite a readiness in the service to expand and grow there was a drop-off in client enquiries. The marketing effort undertaken has delivered an increased number of enquiries. It is hoped that with maintaining focus on this the credibility and reputation of the service will grow to allow us to reach local businesses to expand the provision. It might be possible to assign small projects to trustees with regards to marketing, referrals, businesses, fundraising and other areas to allow for more growth.

Actions Taken Since the Reviews

Following previous reviews and this one, the following actions have been taken which address some of the issues raised:

- The major piece of work which was done was marketing drive at the end of January. This has been successful, as at least two clients have come into the service based on the new marketing materials.
- A large stock of new, high quality postcards have been designed and produced for use in a variety of different settings.
- Postcards have been placed across the catchment area in locations including GP surgeries, libraries, shops, cafes, community centres, schools, the hospital and churches. This was possible through the hard work and energy of the whole trustee team.
- The service has now joined Community Action Dacorum which will provide opportunities to market the service to their team of volunteers, as well as potentially use their premises to distribute materials and advertise their different media outlets (e.g. radio and social media).

- Conversations were also had with the local homeless charity DENS and the Liberty Tea Room about how they could support the service in the future.
- The team visited a local school to discuss and market the service. Hopefully, further school links can be formed in the future to provide counselling for staff and parents.
- The new role of Community Outreach Officer on the trustee team has been useful in allowing the person in the role to use their talents and knowledge to be a cornerstone of the marketing effort.
- Members of the team were present at an Open House event at the newly constructed Hightown Housing flats behind AFC. This allowed us to be seen and have material distributed to members of the local community. A conversation was had with staff from Hightown and this needs to be followed up in the near future as this might represent a fruitful partnership.
- The group sessions were advertised, however, there was no uptake. This was potentially due to late marketing. There was a lot learnt from this experience which informed the later, whole service marketing drive. The group sessions are now written and can be delivered when the counsellors have the time.
- The service was contacted by a counsellor to join the team. This allowed us to formulate an interview structure. It was decided that due to low client numbers it was not appropriate to take on a new counsellor at this time
- Although the service did not join the NCPS this year, the materials needed are ready for when this would benefit the service.
- A student counsellor was not taken on this year, however, a full interview process has now been discussed and established. Colleges have expressed an interest in us running a placement. Things would be able to be put in place quickly when client numbers reach an appropriate level.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is at the core of the work undertaken by the team of Counsellors, and Safeguarding is a standing item at all Trustee meetings. The counsellors are individually responsible for attending Safeguarding training and this is recorded on their annual reviews. They are appropriately trained to maintain the safety of their clients, themselves and others using the building.

The counsellors are all aware of the Safeguarding Policy and procedures at Adeyfield Free Church and how to report any observed Safeguarding concerns. It is of concern that at the present time Safeguarding is being overseen by the Deputy Safeguarding Officer as the Lead Safeguarding Officer has left the church. Hopefully there will be another volunteer from within the church to take over the lead role. The only Synod Safeguarding Training on offer is in central London in early March. It is hoped that online training will be offered soon and that will be available for the new volunteer. The church has agreed that anyone volunteering to work with children has to have evidence of advanced safeguarding training.

The Safeguarding Trustee has completed level 2 and level 3 Safeguarding training and additional training in the issue of modern slavery and the role of the Designated Lead Person for Safeguarding.

Community Outreach

In terms of marketing, a very comprehensive post code list was produced for each trustee, which we were asked to start covering in January. I believe Gill has completed all her list. The other trustees still have some left to be completed.

There are very smart new Counselling at AFC postcards. In general they were well received in most locations, apart from doctor's surgeries. They sparked several interesting conversations in some areas e.g. dentists, funeral directors and schools.

The Chair made a particularly good link with Andrew Masters (a member of the local church community), visiting a couple of schools.

Of course, this work is ongoing; always looking for new opportunities to post and give the cards away.

Client Feedback

We received only 4 feedback forms this year, which is a decrease from the 7 last year. All have provided consent for use of comments in reports.

For the first section of the form all clients agree with the following statements:

- I got the information I needed
- I got the support I needed
- I felt my concerns were understood
- I felt comfortable with the way in which the counselling was provided
- The environment was safe and welcoming
- I valued the centre's service
- The support was sensitive to my needs and situation

All bar one client rated the venue and location as Excellent. The other client rated it Good. The room was described as quiet, private, comfortable and with minimal noise and distraction most of the time. The building was described as accessible, spacious and tidy. The provision of parking was a positive attribute. The staff and people using the building were mentioned as being respectful and polite. The café for meeting people and the "great" children's facilities were also mentioned.

All clients agreed with the following statements:

- I have a better understanding of my situation and I know what I can do about it
- I understand more about how my circumstances have affected me
- I have been able to make decisions about my future
- I have been able to access any other support I need (one client this was not applicable)

Figure 3 shows that all clients agreed that positive qualities developed after counselling. The majority agree that things are better for them. The fact that there was no disagreements amongst those responding is a positive result showing the benefits of counselling. This is however a small sample size.

Other reported benefits included:

- Being more in control of emotions and how to deal with them
- Feeling more confident and having some self-belief and self-worth
- Understanding why they feel the way they do about themselves
- Extending self-care, holistic health and emotional process; in and out of session
- Allowing different thoughts and behaviours in different situations
- Not beating themselves about their choices
- Making decisions about their life

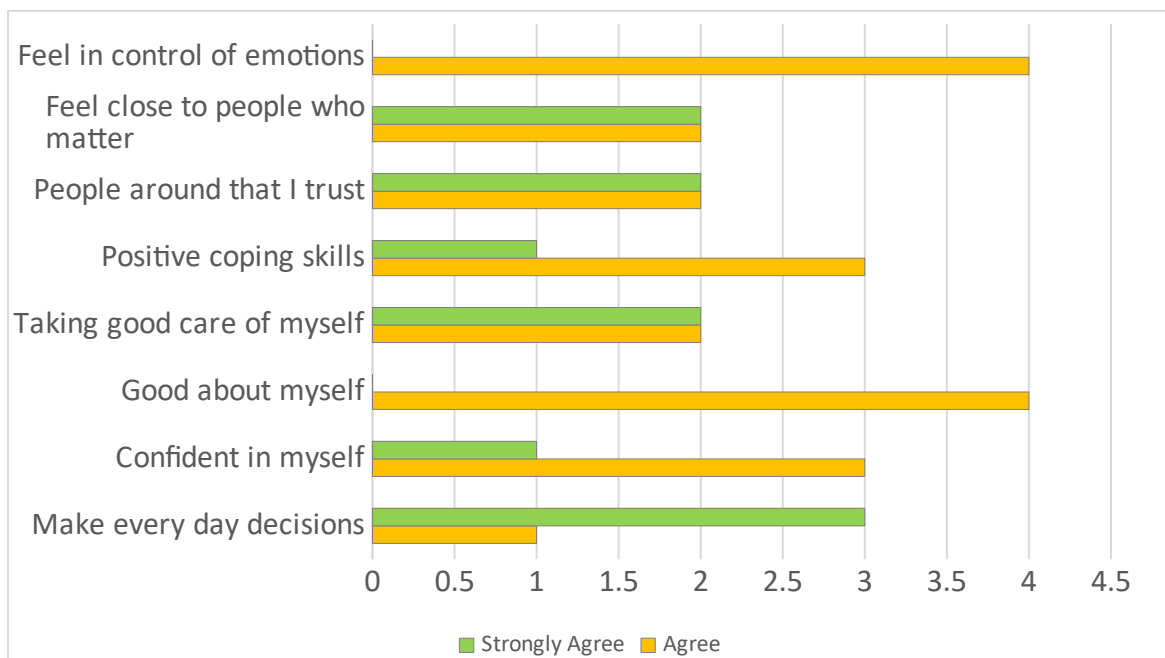


Figure 3: Changes to qualities after therapy

Selected positive comments

“My counsellor was comforting, supportive and very understanding.”

“(My counsellor) being so kind and helpful. This allowed me to feel comfortable. Which helped me to speak honestly and openly about what was troubling me”

“The counsellor, was able to offer support by providing a person-centred service which felt founded on genuine empathy, warmth and care. This as a foundation and starting point allowed us to work together with rapport and collaboration”

“It's been hugely beneficial having these sessions. I feel like I've made progress from how I was feeling to how I feel today.”

“(My counsellor) was happy to listen to my troubles and provide helpful guidance which in result has allowed me to feel more like myself. I know that I still have a long journey ahead of me, but (they) have helped get me onto a more stable path”

“Was very nervous when I first met (my counsellor), but they made me very relaxed and able to talk openly about myself. I do find this very difficult. My partner has said that I have changed and appear more confident in myself.”

“However, from the get-go (my counsellor) and the agency have brought peace of mind and ease to the process. The communication, care and organisation scaffolding the process has been to a high and consistent standard.”

“...I feel my own personal growth and experience of the service has been positive, overall. And I would have no reservations recommending (my counsellor) and Counselling at AFC to people ... in the community. Thank You!”

“(My counsellor) was welcoming and friendly. They really listened to what was being said and provided a much healthier way to view myself and how to cope with the past.”

“The support was very good. Understanding thoughtful and very helpful.”

“(Admin) was helpful and friendly in assisting the early assessment and organisation. The counsellor I worked with..., has been a pleasure to work with and consistently friendly, kind and well-organised in the process. The location, fee and having... a regular counsellor has all helped make it an all-round easier and positive experience.”

Suggested improvements

There were no specific improvements suggested by any of the clients. A couple of the clients felt that they needed more than 12 sessions, but understood that they could return to the service after a break.

Future Endeavours

With a view to further growing and improving the service offered by Counselling at AFC, the trustees will be looking at the following areas in the next 12 months:

Counselling at AFC is always looking forward to develop the service and so the following are projects and initiatives which the trustees are keen to explore over the next 12 months:

- Approaching local businesses for support with clients, marketing, fundraising and offering courses or workshops.
- Building on the successful marketing exercise by restocking postcards in the currently covered areas, as well as seeking out new areas to advertise.
- Capitalising on the new links formed with Community Action Dacorum, as well as other Hemel based organisations to raise our profile in the local community.
- Use the subcommittee to begin exploring possible funding or grant opportunities in earnest.

- Continue to develop resources to signpost clients for additional or specialised support
- Advertise the service to more parts of the community
- Continue considering a student placement for when client numbers increase to an appropriate level.
- Look again at advertising and running counselling groups later in the year.