Improving Mental Wellbeing in Cambridgeshire

by Providing Counselling Services

Report from Jeremy Barnett, Chair of Trustees

As we approach the 30th Anniversary of the founding of Cogwheel next year, I am pleased to report that Cogwheel has achieved a new milestone - being formally accredited by the British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP). This has been achieved because of the consistent standard of the counselling maintained by our counselling team with the active support of our Head of Counselling and Supervisors. Cogwheel is the only accredited counselling service in Cambridgeshire. To have this recognition, from BACP, of the quality of our work to reduce the mental wellbeing challenges in the Cambridgeshire community is a testament to the experience accumulated over the last 30 years.

The demand for counselling continues to be high. One worrying trend identified over the last 18 months has been a steady increase in the levels of distress measured in the people approaching us for counselling. As reflected in the counselling outcomes statistics for 2016 (page 5), the counselling provided to our clients results in a significant fall in their distress levels.

In 2016 we said farewell to Marla Prudom, our Head of Counselling since 2012, on her retirement. We appointed Esther McNeill in her place. Esther’s report on her management of the counselling team is on page 2.

In 2017, we welcomed Lis Silver as a new trustee. Lis has significant experience as a trustee and school governor. She also provides HR advice to Jimmy’s Night Shelter in Cambridge.

I would like to thank all of our individual supporters and grant makers for their continued, dedicated financial help to Cogwheel. It is greatly appreciated. My thanks to all of the Cogwheel team: counsellors, supervisors, management and support staff. All of your work is appreciated especially by our clients. Many thanks to our Trustee team, Ruth Adams, David Farrer, Chris Palmer, Lis Silver and Nigel Walter.

We look forward to celebrating the 30th anniversary of Cogwheel’s foundation next year. Details of the associated events will be available nearer the time.
Review from Esther McNeil, Head of Counselling

Over the last two years the Cogwheel Trust has continued to provide an affordable service throughout Cambridgeshire to adults and children who wish to benefit from talking and creative therapies. In 2016 we provided counselling to almost 700 people across our centres in Cambridge, Sawston and Ely, as well as in 15 schools across the area. Owing to the diversity of skills and expertise amongst our team of more than 40 therapists, we have been able to deliver a service which responds to the needs of each individual client.

As a counsellor with Cogwheel myself since 2010, I was delighted to take over the role of Head of Counselling in July 2016 as my predecessor, Marla Prudom, moved on to pastures new. I am very proud to be leading a talented team of qualified and trainee practitioners comprising counsellors, psychologists, cognitive behavioural and play therapists.

Clients reach out to us from all areas of the community, however six out of ten are referred via their GP or other NHS services. Whilst statutory mental health services have benefitted from an increase in financial support over the last two years, resources continue to be overstretched and unable to meet the needs of all those seeking help. This is demonstrated by the stark increase in the number of clients meeting the “severe” category of distress when they are first seen at Cogwheel. We work closely with local NHS services and other specialist agencies to make sure that clients access the most appropriate care, whether that be with Cogwheel or elsewhere.

Clients contact Cogwheel for support with a great range of issues including relationship difficulties, bereavement and loss, physical health problems, work stress, and issues around sexuality and gender. However, the majority of clients – nearly 60% in 2016 – presented predominantly with anxiety and depression. Our own outcome measures support those of national research into the efficacy of talking therapies for these common mental health conditions, by demonstrating that a majority of clients reported feeling emotionally healthy or having low levels of distress by the end of their time with Cogwheel.

Whilst most of the work we deliver at Cogwheel is with individual clients, we also run occasional group projects in response to the needs of the community. In 2016 we teamed up with Emmaus Cambridge, a homelessness charity, to deliver a six-week wellbeing course to Emmaus companions. Further plans for group work include a guided self-help group at Sawston Medical Practice, where our team of counsellors has expanded to meet the greatly increased demand in this area of Cambridgeshire.
2016 also saw a significant increase in our children’s work at our Cambridge centre. However, the sudden closure of Sawston and Linton Schools Locality in the summer of this year resulted in the ending of a six-year contract which secured the delivery of a counselling service to 15 schools across the region. Whilst this was disappointing, we are hopeful that we will be able to build on the valuable relationships we have with schools in the cluster and continue to provide a service. Awareness of the importance of high-quality mental health support for children and young people has never been greater, and Cogwheel’s team of highly-qualified children’s therapists are experienced in working with some of the most complex and deep-rooted childhood difficulties. Our outcome measures have consistently shown that counselling and play therapy improves behaviour, relationships with self and others, and decreases levels of anxiety and depression in young people; as well as alleviating pressure on teachers.

Over the coming months we aim to broaden our reach even further across the community, in order to help all those who could benefit from counselling to access Cogwheel’s services. Whilst our data shows that our client demographic continues to be diverse, we know that there is always more that we can do to improve accessibility. In 2016 just 34% of our clients were men, which is broadly reflective of the gender split nationally in terms of people seeking help. Our aim is to reduce the stigma which is still unfortunately attached to asking for help, and which has a particularly dangerous impact on men. This is evidenced in the stark statistic that eight out of ten people who die from suicide are men. We will be looking closely at what we can do as an organisation to help dismantle the barriers that are faced by those needing psychological support. This is challenging but vital work, and I look forward to reporting on our progress in a years’ time.

**Schools’ work**

Cogwheel provides a children’s counselling service to both primary and secondary schools within Cambridgeshire. The counsellors go into schools and provide therapy for children within their school day. Counselling gives children a space to talk and play through whatever is on their mind. The weekly sessions provide a safe, confidential time for the children to explore their feelings through techniques such as painting, drawing, sand therapy and role play.

The counsellor provides a holistic approach, including both the parents/carers and teachers in the process. The children come to therapy for a variety of reasons ranging from family issues, such as parental separation, to school issues, such as bullying. These issues can have different effects on children and may present themselves in school as behavioural problems in the classroom. At times, young people may need extra support when things are difficult.

Counsellors in schools provide a valuable service where children can explore their fears and anxieties. Cogwheel counsellors evaluate the children's progress by using evaluation questionnaires, and it is a real joy to see a child gradually regain their confidence so that they can thrive in their relationships and their education.
Fundraising

Along with many grant proposals and fund applications we have also taken Cogwheel fundraising out into the community this year.

In August a sterling team of counsellors took part in the annual Chariots of Fire relay race. We raised £1767 through sponsorship and all ended the event fitter than when we signed up!

In November we had the opportunity to raise awareness and donations at Tesco Milton. The manager that day was incredibly supportive, even printing off an extra 600 flyers when we very rapidly used up the 100 we had expected to need! It was a cold day, but we raised £288 and had many interesting conversations about Cogwheel.

Cogwheel was one of the charities supported this year by the biannual Histon and Impington Open Gardens, which took place on a beautiful sunny Sunday in June. The amazing weather brought visitors out in force: there were over 8000 garden visits and our volunteers were kept busy manning the gate on one of the gardens. We were very grateful to receive £1400 as our share of the proceeds.

In 2017 we invited a number of churches to get involved with a Cogwheel Sunday, to think about mental wellness in their community and raise money for Cogwheel. This raised £3000 this year and we hope to include more churches in the future.

We have been selected as one of their three charities by a group of local Coop shops. This gives us a share of the 1% fund collected from member’s own-brand purchases. Please help by becoming a Coop member, and voting for Cogwheel as the recipient of your 1%. Any Coop member in the country can choose Cogwheel, so please encourage friends and family to support us.
Counselling outcomes

Clients fill out a detailed questionnaire at the start and end of counselling to gauge their mental distress at the time.

In 2016 the percentage of clients who come with moderately-severe and severe distress rose to more than double what it was in 2015. Despite this dramatic increase in the severity of symptoms, our outcomes were very similar to those in 2015.

Volunteering Opportunities

There are several ways you can become involved in the work at Cogwheel:

- We currently have vacancies for volunteer counsellors who are qualified or in at least the third year of training.
- We often need help with fundraising events that we organise, and are always happy to help with any you might be involved in.
- We are looking for people to help us raise our profile on social media.
One Man’s Testimony

It may sound like a cliché, but Cogwheel saved my life. I cannot praise their service enough. Before my depressive state I had a very hectic schedule. Work, university, language classes and volunteering left me with virtually no time for anything else. It all fell apart when I received some bad news regarding a family member and everything came crashing down. It got so bad that I even wrote two letters: one for me if I lived through this and one for if I did not. It came to a head when I found myself cutting into my right shoulder and it was the reaction of family members that prompted me to seek help. Visiting Cogwheel meant that I could talk about how I felt in a safe, quiet environment and try and work out my next steps with a helping hand. Discussing healthier ways of coping with stress was strange at first but it did help.

Thank you to all our donors