



Cogwheel Counselling

Registered Charity 1157141

Affordable help when life slips out of gear

Cogwheel Counselling

Annual Report

Photo: Neil Davies Business Support & Fundraising Manager (left),
Isabelle Dolis Head of Services (right)



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Overview

"I AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY OF GETTING COUNSELLING DESPITE MY CURRENT FINANCIAL CHALLENGES. THANK YOU."

Established in 1988, Cogwheel Counselling is a charity working throughout Cambridgeshire to improve the emotional and psychological wellbeing of local people. Cogwheel endeavours to carry out its mission by:

- Providing a range of counselling services for all ages (in-person and online), including providing services that are affordable to those on low and limited incomes
- Promoting emotional and mental wellbeing
- Ensuring the charity provides the highest quality of service through its accreditation with BACP (the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy).



2025 was a year of steady growth for Cogwheel. The year saw increases in both the number of counselling sessions provided and the number of people taking part in our fundraising events.

We were also able to launch a new weekend service this year 'Cogwheel on Saturday' which is proving popular with expansion set to continue into 2025/26.

Chair of Trustees

Report

The demand for mental health services continues and Cogwheel Counselling has seen a steady flow of interest across the year. The number of scheduled counselling sessions grew to 4,583 in 2025, an increase of over 500 sessions on the previous year.

A busy year for Cogwheel Counselling:

Our Head of Services has been busy recruiting counsellors, both trainees and experienced - in order to offer a full service. Our charity has expanded as we have introduced a new 'Cogwheel on Saturday' Service providing weekend counselling. The weekend slots are proving popular, with expansion planned to continue into 2026.

Our Cogwheel Counselling Support Fund (CCSF) is also supporting more people with almost 1,000 sessions providing people on low or no incomes with affordable counselling. This makes roughly a quarter of all sessions provided by Cogwheel in 2025. To access the CCSF people self-refer for counselling, we then identify where financial assistance can be provided. The CCSF is supported by grants and fundraising. The demand for the CCSF has almost doubled in the last 4 years that the fund has been operating showing the need for continued access to affordable counselling.

Familiar and changing faces:

The Board of Trustees is a steady group of 6-10 volunteers.

This year we said thank you to Dr Nigel Walters. Nigel has been involved with Cogwheel for about 30 years in the capacities of counsellor, trustee and fundraiser. As an experienced architect his knowledge and pragmatism was invaluable in supporting the review of our premises and renovation of the service's offices. The staff of Cogwheel are very grateful to Nigel for his involvement in securing our central Cambridge location.

This year we welcome two new trustees. Both have recently moved to the area and are keen to bring their unique and extensive skills to Cogwheel. Revd Mark Burleigh brings a wealth of experience in chaplaincy and Spiritual care management. Caroline Harper-Jantuah is a corporate management consultant specialising in coaching, diversity and inclusion.

CHAIR OF TRUSTEES REPORT

The Chair's Journey:

Over the last year, I have concentrated on building my knowledge through membership of the Association of Chairs. They are an enthusiastic group who offer support and resources.

I meet regularly with senior staff to review and plan. We identified areas to develop including trustee recruitment, social media and direct marketing, plus updating the board's practices with IT. We looked to create the foundations for a strategic plan that can be taken further in 2026 / 2027. I am currently completing an audit of our governance code to identify our next areas for improvement with the view to hold a strategy day.

Volunteering:

Every year our dedicated Business & Fundraising Manager organises and manages events to support Cogwheel Counselling and the local community. We have various roles that require volunteers.

This includes:

- The TTP Cambridge Half Marathon – Cogwheel have places in the run and lovely runners participate to raise funds. Entrants are asked to raise £250 and in 2025 over £1,500 was raised.
- The Cambridge summer festivals – Staff and volunteers support some of the local summer festivals by holding a stall. This is our primary way to spread the Cogwheel name and network.
- The Cogwheel Canter – Our New Year's Eve community running event held in Girton where entrants of all ages can choose from a variety of distances from a toddler race up to 10km. Volunteers support the preparation and management on the day covering the Recreation Ground pavilion base including the popular cake and drink stand, and the running routes.

Thank you

We are very grateful to everybody who supports Cogwheel by volunteering as counsellors, trustees, fundraisers, or by providing admin and IT support.

“COGWHEEL HAS TAKEN ME FROM A DARK PLACE TO A PLACE OF HOPE”

Please see the website for further details.

If you would like more information about any item mentioned in this report, please email:

chairoftrustees@cogwheel.org.uk

Head of Services Report

I recently passed the milestone of four years in role as Head of Services at Cogwheel. Being able to look back over a longer period observing the storms and sunny

spells affecting our charity has helped me understand that it is our organisation and teams' ability to weather the rough seas that truly matters rather than investing energy into the assumption that constant calm seas is a realistic and achievable aspiration. In the mental health and wellbeing field, this is called resilience, the ability to bounce back from adverse experiences and circumstances, something we often work towards with our clients. That said of course putting things in place towards financial sustainability remains a completely valid aim.

The ongoing economic pressures and political climate, the ever-increasing tightening of resources and ever-expanding mix of demands whether they be on individuals (such as our clients or team members) or systems (such as our charity) do create a predicament that is increasingly difficult to navigate. Our clients seem to delay seeking psychological help risking a more pronounced degradation of their mental wellbeing which in turn may impact their ability to meet the cost, however reduced, that receiving professional help commands. The complexity of our work is increasing which generates recruitment costs in order to safely, ethically and competently work with the levels

of distress we meet.

One project we have developed in collaboration with South Cambridgeshire District Council has been to work therapeutically with male social housing tenants with mental health needs. This has been a challenging project working with often difficult to engage clients whose trust in the systems around them has been seriously eroded. Some of these clients are now returning to our affordable service to continue the work. It is a great source of pride to see how our counsellors have been able to reach these often complex and understandably resistant clients and work towards coping better and living stronger, the very apt name of the project.

HEAD OF SERVICES REPORT



Generating surplus in order to invest in staff and develop our knowledge base and ability to fund more low-cost sessions is not a new strategy. To this aim, we have focussed on expanding two services in particular with the aim of generating momentum to uphold our mission. It has been a pleasure to see our trustees and the leadership team come together to develop a grant application towards growing our Employee Counselling Service. In the latter part of 2025, we have also opened a new, non-subsidized service open on a Saturday. Whilst only a small service, it is making use of our resources more extensively and creating opportunities for support for those whose work commitments during the week make accessing therapy difficult.

Additionally, we have worked creatively on enhancing our

communications strategy to raise awareness of our services more proactively on social media and we have updated the Employee Counselling Service section on our website to demonstrate more extensively how organisations benefit from their team members working with us. To this effect, we have recruited a new, dynamic and creative Communications Officer with whom I have worked actively to create more visibility of all that we offer, our values and how counselling with us can make such a difference in a person's life.

Our commitment and efforts to continue to offer affordable therapy is all the more needed in this difficult climate, creativity and lateral thinking have enabled us to contribute new initiatives as we persevere on our journey towards sustainability longer term.

Cogwheel Counselling service in 2025

We hope this information helps demonstrate the breadth of work of Cogwheel and the support provided to clients.

Number of counselling sessions

A total of 4,583 sessions were provided in 2025 to individuals of all ages which was a 10% increase from the total of 4,040 in 2024. Over the last two years there has been an increase of over 1,000 sessions.

This total includes a total of 328 sessions for children/young people- this was a decrease of 80 for 2024 due to counsellor recruitment difficulties.

Number of people seeking support

463 people of all ages contacted Cogwheel seeking mental wellbeing support for themselves or their children. This number was a similar level to that in 2024.

The gender balance of those referring to Cogwheel in 2025 shows a continuing trend of a majority of those referring being female (63%) but there was an increase in males referring 35% compared with 28% in 2024. The number of non binary identifying doubled to 2% last year.

Cogwheel Counselling Support Fund (CCSF)

The key objective of Cogwheel is to provide affordable counselling. With clients asked to make a minimum session contribution of £29, we hear this level of cost is beyond the reach of those clients who are receiving benefits, not in employment or on low incomes. The CCSF established in 2021 contributes up to £18 per session for this group of clients. The number of reduced cost sessions has nearly doubled in 4 years from 536 to 996 in 2025 which was over 20% of all sessions provided. This reflects the cost of living crisis that many on lower incomes have experienced in this time.

Employee Counselling Service (ECS)

This service provides access to short term counselling for employees in a variety of organisations and businesses, and 100 ECS sessions were provided. Full ECS information is available on the Cogwheel website.

COGWHEEL COUNSELLING IN 2025

Counselling service contracts/projects

The first 4 months of 2025 saw the tail-end of an 18 month counselling contract with a group of Doctors surgeries in East Cambridgeshire. The contract was successful in improving the wellbeing of patients but unfortunately was not extended for funding reasons.

With a grant award in the Spring of 2025 a specific mental wellbeing project started seeking to reach out and support a cohort of disengaged and hard to reach individuals (vulnerable housing tenants in South Cambridgeshire).

Cogwheel Counsellors

The number of sessions provided by staff counsellors has increased from 44% in 2023 to 61% in 2025 and this is expected to increase further in 2026 reflecting the counselling experience required to support the rising presenting complexity of clients.

“COGWHEEL DID A REALLY GREAT JOB IN HELPING ME TO FEEL BETTER ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN MY LIFE, MAKING NEEDED CHANGES, THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE, AND HELPING TO EASE MY ANXIETY AND OTHER SYMPTOMS. I WOULD HIGHLY RECOMMEND COGWHEEL TO ANYONE WHO NEEDS COUNSELLING!”



Measuring the Impact of Counselling at Cogwheel

Measuring and enhancing the impact of counselling is essential to Cogwheel's clients and to Cogwheel as an organisation.

As a counselling service provider, Cogwheel is committed to holding itself to the highest standard possible and seeks to ensure the work we do is not only consistent but also of high quality. Most adults we work with show a marked improvement in their mental wellbeing as a result of their counselling at Cogwheel and this is evidenced in three different ways;

- Use of an industry -recognised questionnaire: CORE-OM 34
- Feedback through Cogwheel's End of Counselling Questionnaire
- Case studies

It is important to advise that clients complete their questionnaires voluntarily at the end of their course of counselling and all case studies are anonymised.

CORE-OM 34 questionnaire

This questionnaire has good validity and reliability as a measure of

psychological distress. Clients complete this both at the start and end of their course of counselling as a minimum. CORE-OM 34 is comprised of thirty-four statements which are responded to by agreeing, disagreeing or choosing three intermediary positions. These statements cover the four areas of wellbeing, functioning, problems/symptoms and risk.

Averages are calculated for each sub-category and an overall average provides a total score which indicates that levels of distress are either severe, moderate to severe, moderate, mild or healthy. The change in score is a reliable indicator of how the client has improved over the period of counselling.

In 2025, we analysed entries for 125 clients. A total of 119 showed a positive change between their starting and ending scores, this is equivalent to an improvement in the wellbeing rate of 95.2%.

MEASURING IMPACT

A smaller sample of 58 clients in 2024 showed an improvement for 55 individuals, resulting in an improvement rate of 94.8% overall, very similar to 2025. It is to be noted that the sample was markedly smaller.

End of Counselling Questionnaire

The impact of counselling is also monitored through the Cogwheel End of Counselling Questionnaire which clients are asked to complete voluntarily in their final session. This creates an opportunity for them to provide feedback about their counselling experience in their own words. We are keen to hear what they have found helpful or unhelpful about their interactions with Cogwheel and the counselling process itself. Not only does the questionnaire enable us to improve our service, it also gathers information about what additional health, relational and lifestyle improvements have been observed. The qualitative data generated provides further insight into clients' experiences which can be shared anonymously when consent has been given.

A sample of client quotes are included throughout this Annual Report, and many illustrate the transformative impact counselling at Cogwheel can have on an individual and by

extension on their family, social circles whether friends or colleagues and even their community at large.

Case studies

Case studies are used to illustrate the many different ways counselling can impact the life of an individual. Cogwheel takes the confidentiality of our clients extremely seriously so case studies are not only anonymised but may be a compound of multiple client stories where personal details will have been changed. As these bring the work we do to life, they are regularly shared with grant funders. Isabelle Dolis, Cogwheel's Head of Service recently prepared a case study to show the benefit of clients supported by the Cogwheel Counselling Support Fund.

"I FEEL LIKE I HAVE THE TOOLS, AND IMPORTANTLY, THE CONFIDENCE, TO HANDLE WHATEVER COMES NEXT IN LIFE. THERE WILL NEVER BE ENOUGH WORDS TO ADEQUATELY EXPRESS HOW GRATEFUL I AM TO COGWHEEL"

A case study

Elena (not the client's real name) came to Cogwheel Counselling struggling with anxiety and depression. Difficult past experiences for this client included physical and emotional abuse in childhood. She experienced domestic abuse and coercive control in her adult, intimate relationships which included extreme violence. Elena presented with some risk to self, including recurrent thoughts of hurting herself. Her support network was limited and there was no contact with her family of origin. Elena's children were both a strong protective factor that motivated her efforts to change and improve her life and a great challenge at times too. Some of their behaviours, as neurodivergent children, triggered difficult feelings from her own childhood which were both difficult to bear and manage.

More recently, Elena suffered two significant losses which compounded her low mood. Elena struggled extensively with sleep often repeatedly interrupted by nightmares and her hygiene and self-care were minimal due to a general sense of apathy. She also experienced regular flashbacks from the abuse she suffered in childhood.

Elena described living in constant fear. Following assessment, Elena was offered a course of twenty weekly affordable counselling sessions and benefited from a further reduction in fee through the Cogwheel Counselling Support Fund. Counselling would not have been an option for Elena without this additional reduction as finances as a lone parent were very tight indeed. Elena elected to work on developing her resilience and trust in herself, in her abilities and in the possibility of a better future for herself and her children.

At first, the therapy enabled Elena to tell her story and have it witnessed and her feelings recognized and validated. Ensuring that the work remained safe was paramount and therefore different grounding exercises were practised and emotion regulation was focussed on to start with. As Elena had a particular interest in writing, later in the work, therapeutic letters were introduced. Elena wrote a letter to her younger self at first.

MEASURING IMPACT - CASE STUDY

This enabled her to express care for her inner child and the love and attention that she did not receive herself. She was able to engage with forgiving herself and others through this very moving exercise. Towards the end of therapy another letter was written, this time to her future self. This letter made space for hope and served as an acknowledgement of the recovery process started through this work. It included a recognition that life brings both joys and sorrows and that she is now so much more able to manage the latter in a calmer manner, equipped with strategies to sit with uncertainty and discomfort without being annihilated by overwhelm, sadness and shame.



Charity Finances: An Overview for 2025

The opening paragraph to last year's Finance Review included a 'feeling of relief' that there had been a small surplus in 2024 and we are pleased to report again that this surplus trend continued in 2025 when a surplus of over £8k was recorded.

There was a time in the second quarter of 2025 at the end of the counselling contract with the Ely Primary Care Network group of surgeries when there were some financial concerns. This contract funding which ceased because of other local NHS priorities had helped to facilitate and finance a more sustainable operating and management structure.

The replacement of the lost contract income was a priority and Cogwheel's Head of Services led an initiative to introduce a new Cogwheel on Saturday (COS) service. This service provides counselling for full rate payers and there is no

restriction in the number of sessions that can be provided. The surplus from the Cogwheel on Saturday service is now helping to fund the core operating costs of the weekday affordable service.

In addition we have sought to promote Cogwheel's Employee Counselling Service with dedicated funding from the Aidan Trust. There has been some success but our ECS service faces competition from EAPs (Employee Assistance Programmes) and other service providers.

Overall in 2025, income increased to £245k of which £157k was counselling income and the rest was raised from grants, community fundraising and donations.

CHARITY FINANCES 2025

Charity costs rose by £21k in 2025 to £236k- there is a continuing need to employ counsellors including the Saturday service and to meet the presenting complexity of clients seeking support from Cogwheel.

The Cogwheel Counselling Support Fund continues to work well with nearly 1000 reduced cost sessions provided in 2025 at an overall cost of nearly £14k to the Charity. We are fortunate to have received a steady source of grant funding which directly assists financially disadvantaged clients. Special thanks to the St James's Place Charitable Foundation for providing CCSF support over a 2 year period.

In addition to this, Cogwheel received a total of 6 donated laptops from PEM and Sustainable Tech 4 Good.

The Charity continues to be grateful for the support of a core group of Trust grant funders and generous personal donors without whose support we would be unable to continue delivering affordable counselling to people living across Cambridgeshire.

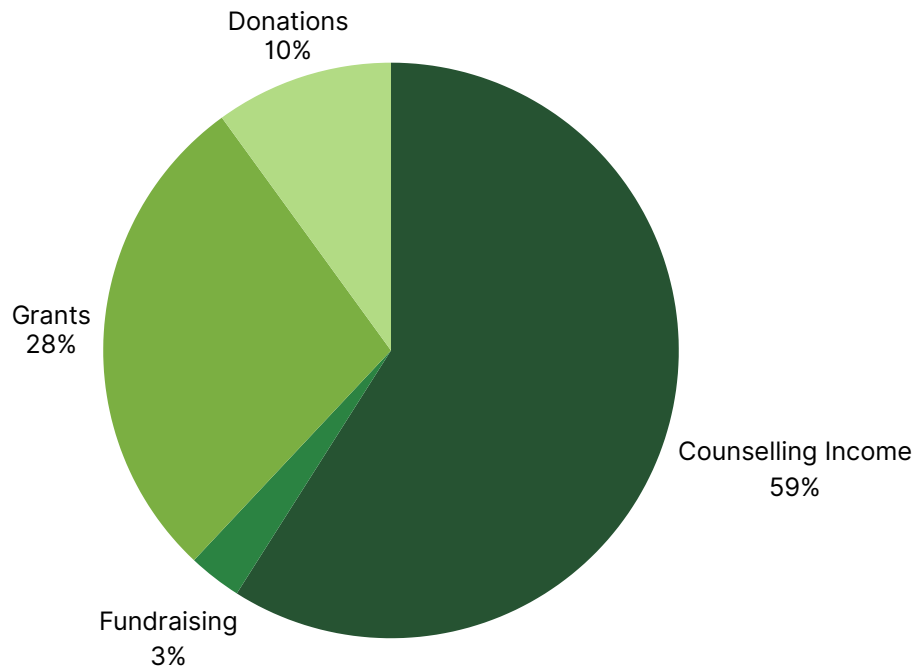
To all those who have contributed in 2025 - a warm thank you from the Cogwheel Finance Team.

2025 Grants & supporters

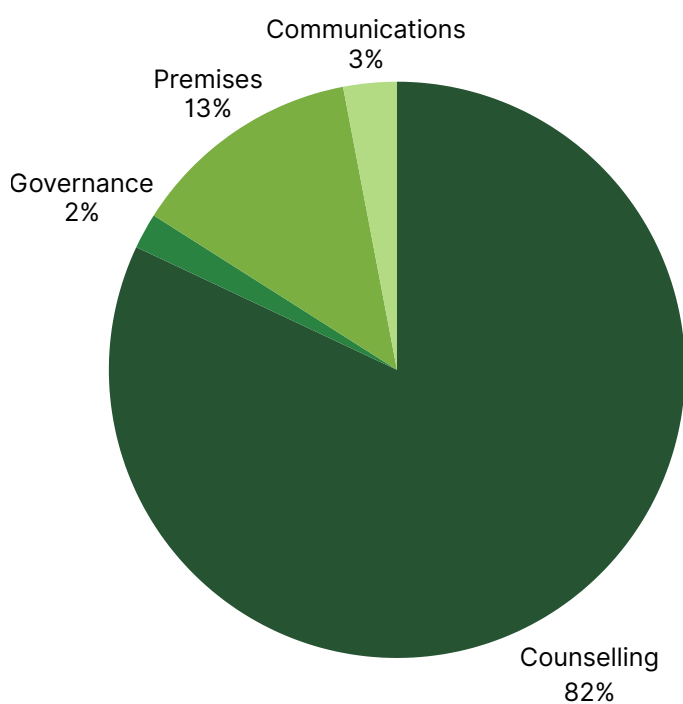
- Aidan Trust
- Alan Boswell Group Charitable Trust
- Archangel Architects
- Assura Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICB Grants Programme
- Barnabus Oley's Charity
- Cambridge Community Foundation
- Cambridge South Rotary Club
- Cole Charitable Trust
- Ely Diocese Board of Finance
- Estelle's, Histon
- Frank Litchfield Charitable Trust
- Girton Parish Council
- Girton Town Charity
- Jesus College
- John Huntingdon's Charity
- King's College
- Magdalene College
- Marsh Christian Trust
- PEM Charitable Trust
- PEM
- Pye Foundation
- Shelford Feast
- St James's Place Charitable Foundation
- Strangward Trust
- Sustainable Tech 4 Good
- The Big Give
- Trinity College
- Woodfines Solicitors

Financial Graphs

Where our income comes from



How funds are spent





Community Fundraising in 2025

New Year's Eve once again saw strong support for the Cogwheel Canter Running Festival, with 637 runners of all ages taking part – a 10% increase on the previous year. The event raised £3,000 for Cogwheel, bringing together families, friends and supporters for a joyful end to the year.

In May, 79 walkers and runners took part in the Cogwheel Cambridge Stride, choosing from distances of 6, 13 or 27 miles around the perimeter of Cambridge. Together, they raised £1,600 in support of our work.

COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING IN 2025

We were delighted to have six runners take up one of our places at the Cambridge Half Marathon. Thanks to their fantastic fundraising efforts, they raised a total of £2,000 enough to subsidise 122 counselling sessions for those who would otherwise be unable to access the support they need.

We were also incredibly grateful to take part in local community events, including Shelford Feast and Histon Feast, helping to raise awareness of our services. Shelford Feast also generously donated £500 to support our work.

We were inspired by the creativity and commitment of our supporters this year. Estelle and Holly from Estelle's Make-up and Beauty in Histon hosted an incredible 24-hour nail and brow-athon, raising £1,300 for Cogwheel. In addition, three members of our team (Tabi, Erika and Emily) took a leap of faith and completed a skydive, raising £1,445 through their efforts.

We were delighted to take part in two Big Give campaigns this year. The Christmas Challenge raised £10,020 in December, while the Small Charity Week campaign raised £10,000 – vital funds that help us continue to provide accessible counselling across Cambridgeshire.



COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING IN 2025



Alongside fundraising, we were also grateful to receive in-kind support to strengthen our service. We received donations of two laptops from PEM and four laptops from Tech4Good, helping our team to continue delivering a smooth and reliable service.

We also has an article published in Cambridge Independent to promote our new Cogwheel on Saturday service.

Thank you to everyone who has supported our events, campaigns and fundraising activities this year. Your support enables us to continue providing counselling to those who need it most.



“I APPRECIATE THE EXCELLENT, PRACTICAL ADVICE ON HANDLING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS, SELF-CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS. MY COUNSELLOR WAS SO CALM, KNOWLEDGEABLE, PATIENT AND MADE THE SESSIONS A SAFE SPACE I COULD OPEN UP ABOUT ALL SORTS OF THINGS I HADN'T TALKED TO ANYONE ABOUT.”

Donate or Fundraise

There are lots of different ways that you can support us. You can get involved by joining in one of our upcoming events, holding an event of your own, by making a donation, organising your own fundraiser or by leaving a legacy.



You can support our work by making a one-off or regular

donation with CAF Donate: cafdonate.cafonline.org/18755 or scan the QR code.

You can also send a cheque to our office: 66 Devonshire Road, Cambridge, CB1 2BL.



* Fundraising, payments and donations will be processed and administered by the National Funding Scheme (Charity No: 1149800), operating as DONATE. Texts will be charged at your standard network rate. For Terms & Conditions, see www.easydonate.org.



You could create your own fundraising page with Facebook - for example, some of our supporters

have created a 'birthday fundraiser'. You can also



easyfundraising

support us when you shop online using easyfundraising.



You can text to donate*: To donate £5, text COGWHEEL to 70970. To donate £10, text COGWHEEL to 70191

WHAT COULD YOUR DONATION DO?

- £10 could help us to provide a listening ear when a client makes initial contact
- £15 will provide a counselling session through the Counselling Support Fund
- £30 could subsidise an initial assessment session
- £60 could subsidise two play sessions for a child in distress
- £110 could provide 4 weeks' clinical supervision for 3 counsellors
- £250 could subsidise 10 weekly sessions for a depressed person on benefits
- £500 could give someone a safe place to address long-standing issues with 5 months of weekly counselling

Volunteering

We are able to continue playing a vital role in providing counselling when people need it most because of the amazing support of people like you.

Volunteering can be a really rewarding and useful experience. You can get involved by joining in one of our upcoming fundraising events (setting up, marshalling, etc.), holding an event of your own, creating your own online fundraiser, making a donation, or becoming a Cogwheel Ambassador in your community.

We also keep a register of volunteers who we can call on for events. If you would like further information on any of these, please do get in touch with our Business Support and Fundraising Manager at neil@cogwheel.org.uk.



Cogwheel Counselling Charity Trustees 2025

Emily Argent (Chair of Trustees)

David Wilson (Charity Treasurer)

Jeremy Barnett

David Farrer

Elisabeth Silver

Dr Judith Proctor

Nigel Walter (resigned November 2025)

Clerk to Trustees

Neil Davies

E; neil@cogwheel.org.uk

