

Reach Merseyside Limited

Company Limited by Guarantee.
Registered Charity no 701330



Trustees Annual Report

Year ended 30th September 2019

Objectives and Activities

To offer professional quality Christian counselling to any individual, couple or family in need across the North West and beyond; ensuring that finance is not a hindrance to them receiving help. Christian counselling includes, *pastoral counselling* which we offer to those who have a Christian faith and who want their faith incorporated into the counselling, and *community counselling* which we offer to those of any other faith or of no faith. This ensures we offer this distinctive service with a commitment to respect each client. We also aim to increase people's relational and care skills through training in listening, counselling and related issues.

Achievements and Performance

This year again we have we have been able help hundreds of hurting people, right across the North West of England and even into West Yorkshire, to find the relational, emotional, mental and spiritual help they have been looking for in their time of need. We have arranged 2948 counselling appointments across our 6 different venues around the North West. This is our highest ever number and over 150 more than last year's previous high of 2743. This year we have had a record 201 newly registered clients, up from last year's 180, over 7% of these have been children and young people.

We are pleased to note that we are now heading towards having counselled nearly 5000 individual people since Reach began just over 30 years ago, with over 25,000 counselling appointments in the last ten years alone. Our clients continue to include people from a wide variety of backgrounds, ages and ethnicities. Most of this year's clients are between the ages of 21 and 70, and again include a significant number of married couples. We have also helped children and young people (ages 6-17), as two of our counsellors are trained and experienced in this type of work.

Clients

To all our clients we have offered a distinctive, professionally managed and evaluated counselling service (quotes from some of this year's evaluation forms are inserted throughout this report). Once again, most of our clients (about 70%) make it clear that they have chosen Reach because of our identity and practice as a Christian agency and request pastoral counselling. Those for whom community counselling is more appropriate often express their appreciation for the values they see associated with a Christian agency, especially when dealing with marriage issues. The main source of all client referrals has been personal recommendation, accounting for well over half of all new clients, other significant sources of referral include: the internet, G.Ps, other organisations and church relationships.

“Reach is an excellent service and really has people at the heart of all it offers.” Former client

We continue to have no fixed charges for counselling, instead we encourage clients to consider our *fair donation principle*. Which asks them to consider donating in line with their income, at £1 per session per £1000 of annual income (eg. £20 per session for someone earning £20k p.a. and so on). This allows people at all levels of society to access counselling with us and enables us to offer help to those who are on benefits right through to those who are at the top of their professions. This, of course, means we don't control all the levers that influence the average donation. However, this year we set a target of £15 per session, and achieved £12.23 slightly down on last year's £13.20. We have a mixed response to this, as it does also mean we are often helping some of those who are among the poorest in our society, which we are happy to be able to do.

The main issues newly registered clients have presented on their registration forms, of the 19 areas we monitor, are once again marital and relational, followed by fear/panic/anxiety/stress with cases of depression and loss also frequently identified. These newly registered clients add to the existing client caseload, where longer term issues are often being worked through, which can include trauma and abuse. We aim to give new clients a first appointment within 3-5 weeks of our receiving their registration form.

This year's caseload has been managed by a team of 18 counsellors and an administration team of 5, which includes 3 volunteers, two of whom are long-term, this is overseen by our appointment's manager.

“Reach was my last attempt at seeking counselling after 3 negative NHS experiences. My counsellor was exceptional and I received excellent support and treatment. The Christian faith we shared added a crucial element to my sessions. Thank you for your compassion, professionalism and excellence.” Former client

Venues

This year we have increased to 7 our number of counselling venues, as a result of beginning working in Sheffield. This is as a result of a former Reach counsellor relocating there and having then met with a number of church leaders, who made it clear there was nothing quite like the Reach model operating in Sheffield and that Reach would be welcomed in their city. Our co-ordinator (Andy) and the Sheffield based counsellor (Kay) spoke at a launch event at St Thomas Philly, the church who are kindly offering us the use of a counselling room for free. Sheffield adds to our 6 existing venues in: Liverpool, Chester, Manchester, New Brighton, West Kirby and Southport. A small number of appointments also take place in people's homes for those who are house-bound.

We have successfully concluded lengthy negotiations on the renewal of the lease for our Liverpool counselling rooms and administration centre with a manageable increase in rent. We now have a 7 year lease with an option for a further 3. The venues beyond Liverpool are generally available to us due to the generosity and co-operation of either an individual church or a group of churches working together. Special thanks are due to: King's Church

Manchester, New Brighton Baptist, Kingsway Chester, Southport Family Life Centre and West Kirby U.R.C for their exceptional generosity in making suitable rooms available for counselling for free or at token levels. This co-operation translates into a strong positive collective message of care to those in need seeking a safe place with safe people.

Team

The 2948 counselling appointments were managed by a team of 18 counsellors, 5 of whom are now employed at some level. We were sad to lose 4 counsellors throughout the year, due to: ill health, re-location or retirement.

This year we have recruited two new volunteer counsellors, following successful interviews. We are enormously grateful to all our counsellors, whether employed or volunteers, who all commit to work to the same quality and 'professional' standards within an evaluated service. The sense of team and consistency of values is maintained through the counsellors being treated with the same warmth and respect with which they are expected to treat the clients. Our appointment's manager's thoughtful and understanding individual relationship with each counsellor is instrumental in this. We are extremely grateful to her (Mal) for her tremendous work in this.

"Reach is a guiding light to those who carry flickering torches. A team of people who give genuine warmth, welcome and guidance in difficult situations. A professional and unique ministry." former client

To ensure a high quality of counselling we continue to use evaluation forms with clients once their counselling has concluded. Some of our counsellors also use measurement tools particularly when working with client's dealing with depression and anxiety. The returned evaluations are generally very encouraging showing average progress from a well being of 1-2 to 4-5 (on a scale of 1-5).

In order to comply with the most up to date government regulations regarding counselling, all our counsellors have joined the accredited register of counsellors. This is overseen by the Professional Standards Authority and although it is 'voluntary', it is seen as an expected hallmark of professionalism and involves a commitment to work to a code of ethics (which we were already doing). Most have joined the register held by the Association of Christian Counsellors (A.C.C) with whom we are already affiliated to as an organisation.

We also offer supervision to in-house counsellors, as well as to external counsellors and chaplains, but then on a fee paying basis. It has been good to be able to play a significant role in overseeing the quality, support and development of counselling and care outside of Reach.

"Thank you very much for all your help, particularly to my counsellor. During the most difficult time in my life you have provided me with great help." Former client

Support

Once again the combination of: the number of people helped, the quality of care offered and the distinctive Christian service has again only been possible because of the support provided by our Partners. These are the individuals/couples and churches who either commit to regular giving, usually monthly and via standing order, or, as in the case of a number of churches, offer us the use of their premises. Although the number of partners has again gone down very slightly, this time, to 63 from 64 last year, the monthly level of giving remains very similar to last year. Most importantly, it is actually about 30% higher than it has been annually in the previous 3-5 years. This is due to the generosity of newer Partners and a few existing Partners increasing their giving. We are again especially grateful to those who have given very generously on an annual basis.

The invaluable and consistent support from Partners gives us a reliable financial foundation to work from each month and allows us to operate our fair donation policy which is at the heart of our highly socially inclusive service. We have 178 Friends, just up from last year's 174, these are the people and churches who are happy to be identified as generally supportive of Reach and may choose to give on an occasional basis

“The help I received was excellent and helped me see how I could come to terms to resolve my situation. I was put at ease right from the start. My counsellor had such a calming presence and had vast consideration in how to support, aide and encourage me in a human and godly way.” Former client

Governance

Reach is governed by a Council of Management of 4 individuals, and though small in number they bring a tremendous range of skills and depth of experience in: finance, medicine, mental health, business and management. They met four times this year.

Due to our stronger financial position we have implemented a reserve to cover up to 6 months running costs, as advised by the Charity Commission as good practice. This will be reviewed to ensure we have an intelligent reserve policy relevant to our situation. Discussions have begun around the issues of succession planning and risk management.

Marketing and Fundraising

Our main focus this year was ensuring our new website went live. This was achieved, although it did involve a lot more work than was expected. It is much larger than our previous one and has been well received, with people commenting on its' contemporary appearance, ease of use and as one client said, *“It now matches the quality of your counselling.”* We are particularly pleased to have incorporated a Supporter's Café page. This is where we can share, especially with our Partners and Friends, the latest developments, opportunities and challenges. We hope this will help our supporters feel more connected to the work they enable through their generosity.

We are continuing to roll out our new logo and accompanying strap line *‘for a better life’*. This encapsulates what we believe and hope is possible for our clients, it is what is worked towards in counselling and what many clients tell us they experience through coming to Reach. Where hundreds of people each year move through depression, anxiety, hurt, loss,

or whatever their starting point may be, to work towards finding their '*better life*.' This roll out of our new logo has been slower than expected due to considerable technical difficulties in matching outsourced graphic design work with in house usability.

"I got over a big hurdle that was having a bad impact. My counsellor was great, she couldn't have made me feel more comfortable and able to open up." Former client

Public Benefit

Our service is open to anyone in need in the North-West and beyond, who requires counselling, where we believe we have the appropriate experience and skill to help. In practice this leads to our seeing: individual adults of all ages and ethnicities as well as couples who are married, co-habiting or pre-marital. We also counsel children and young people.

Our records show a range of 19 main categories that people present as their reason for coming to see us. These include: depression, abuse, fear/panic/anxiety/stress, anger, trauma, marital problems and other relationship concerns. Through supervision and evaluation of the counselling we can maintain and develop the safety and effectiveness of our work. We pay particular attention to the numerical evaluations and comments that clients put on their final evaluation forms, which, we are glad to say, consistently highlight how positively people have benefited from their experience with Reach.

Plans for the future

We are exploring the likelihood of opening a counselling venue in Wrexham next year. This is particularly being pursued by one of our newest counsellors who lives in the area and has vision for this. Our co-ordinator has already visited the proposed venue to discuss preparing it to receive clients. Once again we are grateful for the generosity of a local church in enabling this development. This would then give us 8 regular counselling venues. We remain committed to a principle of relational development and would only expect to add further counselling locations should any proposals arise from strong relational development with another individual or church/organisation.

We will continue to carefully manage the balance of the number of counsellors with the level of publicity and interest in order to avoid becoming overwhelmed with demand. We also need to keep an eye on the appropriate balance of employed and volunteer counsellors to ensure sustainability of the service. To be able to increase the amount of counselling to over 3000 appointments per year we expect to increase the number of counselling hours for which counsellors are paid.

We hope to keep moving towards the general aim of having at least one employed experienced counsellor at each venue, often working alongside volunteers. We also accept that this may not always be possible. We will continue to incorporate newly qualified counsellors or student counsellors when they are successful through our interviewing and recruitment process (typically about 50% are successful).

We intend to explore further how our new website can encourage people to see Reach as both a counselling agency and a fundraising organisation. We would like to see a dramatic increase in the number of donations from those who aren't clients through the website. We may experiment with a more emotional 'storyline' or video to grab attention and help people appreciate the work Reach does and that they can support. We will also further develop our legacy giving initiative as an online proposal for supporters to consider, this may be backed up through letters to selected supporters as appropriate to a good legacy giving strategy.

We will engage with the wider church particularly to stimulate greater understanding, co-operation and support. Our very ambitious target remains seeking to achieve supporter relationships with 20% of all Evangelical Alliance affiliated churches in the North West. Our target date of 2020 for this now looks unlikely and we will have to review this. Our present estimate is that this would be a between 60 and 90 churches. Now with our new website we can contact these churches with confidence that online we are presenting ourselves in a positive and appropriate way. We will begin to contact at least half of these churches next year in order to begin developing dialogue and relationship with them. We will start with contacting Liverpool churches in relation to our building refurbishment.

External counselling training is only likely should there be a radical review of our priorities, a suitable available trainer or developing relationship with another training agency. These options will be considered next year. A pastoral care course is still being considered.

One unexpected training initiative being considered is a 5 week course on baby massage. This is due to one of our long term supporters, who is experienced in this area, being prepared to offer it as a means of increasing parental bonding and strengthening family ties.

Regarding any major fundraising event, we will review options on holding a further sponsored walk next year, with a different time of year or route being considered. This will be part of our '*One in a Thousand*' initiative, which we will run throughout the year. The aim is to raise £10,000 from 1000 people each donating £10. This will go towards the redecorating and refurbishment work that is needed on our Liverpool offices and counselling rooms. This will improve the experience for all those who attend for counselling as well as improving our image with the hundreds of people who pass by every day.

We will explore how we can further integrate the work of marketing and fundraising into day-to-day activities, so capacity in this area can be improved and progress can be accelerated. This is in order to increase supporter recruitment and engagement, here we will build on the use of the line: "*Together, every week, we are changing lives.*" to inspire and encourage supporters. We are eager to further widen our supporter base and enable more people to find connection with Reach. To encourage others to appreciate and support the positive work that is being done in thousands of lives and families across the Northwest through the faith, generosity, skills, availability and compassion of so many people.