

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 once again we have we have been able help hundreds of hurting people, right across the North West of England, West Yorkshire and now North Wales, to find relational, emotional, mental and spiritual help in their time of need. We have arranged 3357 counselling appointments across our 6 different venues. This is our highest ever number and over 400 more than last year's previous high of 2948. This year we have also had a record 207 newly registered clients, up from last year's 201, once again over 5% of these have been for children and young people.

All this means we have now counselled over 5,000 people throughout our history with well over 25,000 counselling appointments in the last ten years alone. This achievement of 5,000 people, each with their own individual story, feels significant. We are honoured that so many people have seen Reach as a safe and hopeful place in their times of trouble and very grateful to everyone who has made this possible.

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 counselled a number of children and young people (ages 6-17), as two of our counsellors (in Liverpool and Chester) are trained and experienced in this type of work.

“ I began counselling with no hope for the future, now I feel inspired to live life to the full. I feel confident to face life with all its challenges. My counsellor was a lovely person whose empathy and compassion shone through.”

Former client

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 once again been personal recommendation, accounting for over half of all new clients, other significant sources of referral include: the internet, G.P.s, other organisations and church relationships.

We continue to work with our *fair donation principle*. Which asks clients 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 distinctive proposition allows people at all economic levels of society to access counselling. From those who are unemployed, students or on benefits right through to those who are at the top of their professions. This means we don't control the average donation, but nurture a respectful financial response. This year we held on to our target of £15 per session (even though this is not widely communicated), and achieved £13.37 which is up on last year's £12.23. While we would like this to be higher, it is also an indicator that we are often helping those who are among the poorest in our society, which we are very happy to be able to do.

“ The help I got from my (Reach) counsellor was brilliant and helped me to see things differently.”

Former client

The main issues newly registered clients have presented on their registration forms, of the 19 areas we monitor are: fear/panic/anxiety/stress followed by marital and relational, 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.

Venues

This year we have continued to spread beyond the North West of England and now have everything in place to begin offering counselling in North Wales based in Wrexham starting in October 2019. Alongside Sheffield this will become our second venue that is outside the North West. We are very grateful to Phil, who has been a counsellor with us for 2 years and has pursued this vision for counselling in Wrexham. We hope to be able to add other Wrexham counsellors throughout the year. Overall we will still have 6 venues as we did last year. This is because of our suspending counselling in Southport due to the lack of a suitable counsellor and all Wirral counselling having moved to West Kirby due to the high quality of the West Kirby venue, resulting in stopping the work in New Brighton. Once again a small number of appointments have also taken place in people's homes for those who are house-bound.

We have begun a refurbishment fund to update and improve our main Liverpool offices and counselling rooms. We have also improved our security around keeping notes and data as well as working towards being fully compliant with our privacy policy. This has involved shredding all records of appointments, diaries and notes going back sometimes

30 years in order to only keep those related to the last 3 years as advised for adult client and 7 years for young people and children.

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, Kingsway Chester, West Kirby U.R.C and St Thomas Philadelphia Sheffield for their exceptional generosity in making suitable rooms available for counselling for free or at token levels. These active partnerships, as well as enabling us to offer counselling to all, give a warm cooperative message of care to those in need seeking a safe place with safe people.

Team

This year's 3357 counselling appointments were managed by a team of 15 counsellors and 6 on our administration team. 5 of our counsellors are now employed at some level. We were sad to lose 3 counsellors throughout the year, due to retirement or new priorities.

The administration team of 6 includes some who are also counsellors. This team which includes 3 volunteers is overseen by our appointment's manager. The team's commitment to treating people with respect and warmth alongside careful attention to accuracy, has once again resulted in a reliable appointments system dealing with 1000's of appointments, that is the administrative foundation of our counselling work. Clients often comment on their positive treatment from the whole team that is in harmony with their counselling experience.

"My experience of Reach was a really positive one. I felt encouraged, valued and listened to at each appointment. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my counsellor who was an inspiration to me."

Former client

We haven't recruited any new volunteer counsellors this year, despite a few interviews. We remain committed to only inviting those onto the team, following references and interview, we believe are at a point in their development where they can offer quality counselling and are prepared to grow with us. We see this expectation as consistent with all our counsellors being on the national accredited register of counsellors and complying with the most up to date government regulations regarding counselling. The register is overseen by the Professional Standards Authority and we access it through the Association of Christian Counsellors. Although it is 'voluntary' it is seen as an expected hallmark of professionalism and involves a commitment to work to a code of ethics. Most of our counsellors work with the A.C.C code of ethics as we are an Affiliated Organisation with them. Our affiliation is more than the certificate in our reception area, as we have really appreciated their advice and expertise when we have faced particularly challenging issues.

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 their 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.

“What you did with us has made a huge difference to our marriage, it is so much better. Coming here made a world of a difference. What you do here is amazing.”

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).

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. This clinical supervision of those outside of Reach leads to our supporting those who work: in prisons, with the homeless, in religious orders and counsellors who are geographically distant from any Reach venue.

Environmental

We believe it is now important to recognise our environmental impact and so are including this section for the first time. I think it would be fair to say we have a couple of environmental 'champions' on the team who alert us to ways we could be more eco-friendly. We then look for ways of implementing these suggestions. We have continued and strengthened our recycling practices within our Liverpool offices. We encourage counsellors to bunch their clients together to minimise travelling and we continue to explore ways counselling can take place as near to counsellor's homes as possible.

This year we have installed a new boiler in Liverpool which is more energy efficient and as part of our future refurbishment we hope to replace two large old single glazed wooden windows with double glazing that will also be much more energy efficient.

“My experience with Reach was positive and I enjoyed it. It gave me lots of new insights and helped me a lot. I am thankful for Reach and that I got the counsellor I did.”

Former client

Support

All that we do including: the number of people helped, the quality of care offered and the distinctive Christian service has once again only been made 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 for free or at token level. Although the number of partners has only increased slightly, up to 65 from 63. Most importantly the level of giving from partners remains, as last year, about 30% higher than it had in any previous 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 179 Friends, just up from last year's 178, 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.

“My counselling at Reach helped me in maturing in my family and work relationships, to have healthy boundaries and to discover God's joy in my life. It was invaluable to have a Christian counsellor, they were brilliant.”
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. This year two of our meetings were focussed on risk management, this was seen as a precursor to succession planning.

Our Memoranda and Articles have been re-drafted in order to give an accurate expression of our up-to-date identity and work as a charity, in contrast to our early days. These have been agreed by the Council and we now need to begin the conversation with the Charity Commission.

Marketing and Fundraising

This year's focus has been on developing strategies to raise £10,000 towards the refurbishment of our Liverpool base. To this end we have initiated a 'One in a Thousand' appeal in which we are encouraging 1000 people to donate £10 each. Under this umbrella we also held a sponsored walk promoted as our 'Warmer Welcome Walk.' This took place in beautiful Derbyshire countryside that we have walked through before. The small group of 6 who undertook this 30km route raised just over £4,000. We have also spread the news of this appeal using attractive printed cards and have been encouraged by the response from Friends, and even past and present clients who have become aware of this target. We will continue this appeal until April 2020.

Although there has been little increase in the number of Partners (those who commit to regular support), just up one to 64, we have been looking to develop corporate partnerships with businesses that would be happy to be connected to Reach and would offer us meaningful support of £100-200 per month. We have a couple of meetings arranged with small business owners who seem to share our values and are eager to pursue this. We hope to have the first of these corporate partnerships in place in October 2020.

We have been more responsive this year to updating our website as Jeff, who works on marketing and fundraising for us 3-4 days a month, has been able to give it regular attention. This is of particular priority with our Supporter's Café page which 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 have been continuing to roll out our new logo and accompanying strap line '*for a better life*'. although at a slower pace than desired due to staff and skill shortages in this area and the technical difficulties in matching outsourced graphic design work with in house usability. Work has continued on this and progress is being made.

"The counselling I received was amazing!! Her support was crucial during some really difficult times. I highly recommend Reach as a counselling service." 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

Our Wrexham venue is due to open in October 2019 next year. The intended venue has changed from a room in a local church to a purpose designed counselling room that is in a small office just off the main high street in the town centre. 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.

As part of the intended refurbishment on our Liverpool office we hope to make at least one of the counselling rooms more child and young person friendly. This is to further enable the creative work that takes place with the children and young people we counsel. We will also have a strong consideration of any changes we make that can improve the energy efficiency of the building.

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 or even maintain the amount of counselling to over 3000 appointments per year we expect to slightly increase the number of counselling hours for which counsellors are paid. We are also keen to further extend the number of counselling hours that are available to clients after 5 p.m. and will be on the lookout for ways of achieving this. We would also hope to increase our overall skill levels in working with clients who want C.B.T (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) and those experiencing P.T.S.D (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). This may involve us supporting counsellors who want to work in these areas with further training.

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 would like to add another supervisor to the team, this may have to be through one of our present counsellors being trained to do this.

We intend to explore further how our 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, as we have seen in response to our *'One in a Thousand'* appeal. 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 look to simplify the process of people becoming Partners online and 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 look to build on our engagement 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. We will reset a target date of 2023 for this. Our present estimate is that this would be a between 60 and 90 churches. We will contact at least half of these churches next year in order to begin developing dialogue and relationship with them. We will start with contacting around 100 Liverpool churches in relation to our building refurbishment.

" My counsellor was better than anybody I've seen before (elsewhere). The sessions I came to helped a great deal. I will be visiting again as I have another son who is dying and I will be in need of help again." Former client

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. We will again make funds available to each counsellor to use towards their continuing professional development. A pastoral care course is still being considered.

Regarding any major fundraising event, we will continue with our *'One in a Thousand'* initiative (to raise £10,000 towards our refurbishment). This appeal is already being received warmly and if successful will enable us to 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 seek to explore fundraising opportunities that connect with funding networks we have not yet had contact with. This may require a more dramatic or innovative event to capture peoples imagination. We will also review options on holding a further sponsored walk next year, with a different time of year or route being likely. Our priority in this will be to recruit a significant group of people who are eager to raise sponsorship this way before putting in place the route, planning and publicity.

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 of Partners and Friends, this will enable more people to find connection with Reach. This is so we may establish a strong enough platform, as we have now counselled over 5,000 people, and start to head towards the very ambitious target 10,000 in the years to come. For this to happen we will need new people to appreciate, support and be actively involved in the positive work that is being done in thousands of lives and families across the Northwest, West Yorkshire and North Wales through the faith, generosity, skills, availability and compassion of so many people. As we look ahead with hope and faith we are also extremely grateful to everyone that has helped to bring us this far.