

Reach Merseyside Limited

Company Limited by Guarantee.
Registered Charity no 701330



Trustees Annual Report

Year ended 30th September 2020

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 respecting 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 has been an exceptional year. One that started off in fairly normal fashion, with: typical counselling practices, ambitious targets and normal expectations was dramatically transformed. This was when we realised we were dealing with a pandemic that affected everyone on the planet; and often in very significant and sad ways. We also faced additional unexpected internal changes and challenges at a similar time.

This led to drastic adjustments to the way we offered counselling from the end of March. Counsellors moved to primarily working from home, offering telephone or video calls for their clients, and a dramatically reduced reception and administration capacity available in the Liverpool hub. However, with all these, what would have previously been unthinkable, measures we have still been able to help hundreds of hurting people, right across the North West of England, West Yorkshire, North Wales and even way beyond, to find relational, emotional, mental and spiritual help in their time of need.

This year we have arranged 3173 counselling appointments across our 6 different venues, remarkably this is only less than 200 lower than last year's highest ever total 3357 and our second highest number ever. This is a surprising and significant achievement considering the unprecedented circumstances of this year. Even this may not reveal all the work that has been done, as since counsellors have begun working remotely, the number of recorded postponements has dropped dramatically. There could be a number of reasons for this including postponements not being recorded due to the new systems. It is to be noted that the average number of appointments in the second half of the year is lower than the first half, as lockdown really took effect. It will be interesting to see how this continues into next year. New registrations were down significantly at 154 compared to last year's 207. This was primarily due to the very small numbers in the first three months of lockdown (April to June) as people had yet to accept the value of remote counselling. Less than 5% of these have been for children and young people, as this area of work has not yet been fully integrated into our remote systems and our main counsellor in this area is unavailable.

These new registrations mean that we have now counselled 5,212 people throughout our history, with well over 25,000 counselling appointments in the last ten years alone. 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.

“ Thank you so much for continuing to be available to me during the pandemic. It has meant so much.”

Former client

Clients

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. What is of note; is that since the worldwide response to the death of George Floyd and the questions around race and fair treatment, we have had an extraordinarily high percentage of BAME (Black Asian Minority Ethnic) couples seeking help. This means they have heard about us and/or visited our website then concluded we are the right place for them. It is encouraging to know that we are seen as being highly inclusive by those looking for marriage and relational help in these particularly difficult times. 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 and one is just beginning.

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.Ps, 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 £12.41 which is down on last year's £13.37. Once again the reduction across the first few months of lockdown reveals an evident dip. While we would like this average to be higher, it is once again 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.

“ Continuing to have counselling on the phone during the pandemic has been such a blessing.”

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 have aimed to give new clients a first appointment within 3-5 weeks of our receiving their registration form, this is achieved most of the time, but we don't have specific figures as we haven't had capacity to measure this.

Venues

This year we have continued to spread beyond the North West of England as counselling began in Wrexham starting in October 2019. The intended venue switched from a room in a local church, to a purpose designed counselling room in a small office just off the main high street in the town centre. This has easier access and greater independence. Alongside Sheffield this will become our second venue 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. Overall we now have 6 counselling venues. Once again a small number of appointments have also taken place in people's homes for those who are house-bound. Of course, from late March and lockdown, venues became less important, and though some have re-opened for restricted times, others have remained shut throughout the remainder of 2020. A couple of our counsellors have begun to hold outside sessions with clients, where a covid-safe walk and talk counselling appointment can be particularly beneficial for the client.

We intend to refurbish, update and improve our main Liverpool offices and counselling rooms and have raised some funds towards this (see marketing and fundraising). We have also improved our security around keeping notes and data. We are now virtually fully compliant with our privacy policy, as records and notes sometimes going back sometimes 30 years have been shredded in order to only keep those related to the last 3 years as advised for adult clients and 7 years for young people and children. This is all part of respecting peoples' *'right to be forgotten'* as is part of GDPR requirements.

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 3173 counselling appointments were managed by a team of 18 counsellors in total, with 3 coming off the team and 4 joining, we finish the year with a team of 15. The most unexpected change was; Jane, our employed Liverpool and West Kirby counsellor, leaving for a new job in August. We have managed to cover most of her hours through the

additional work by Emily (Liverpool) and Liz Jones (West Kirby). Liz has met with the key people at West Kirby URC in preparation for this next stage of our Partnership with them. This means that 6 of our counsellors are now employed at some level. We have had two of our counsellors furloughed in the early months of lockdown as clients were unsure about remote counselling, we now only have one due to shielding issues, they also happen to be our appointments' manager.

We have 6 people on our administration team. Although for various reasons during the pandemic, most, including our appointments' manager, have been unavailable. This has put a considerable strain on our administration systems. We have only been able to manage due to our counsellors now doing the vast majority of their own appointments' management as they are working from home. We are hugely grateful to them for this additional work and their good natured flexibility.

“ We can't speak highly enough of the value of our sessions. Our counsellor was very professional at all times and we were put at ease so that we could fully open up our feelings in a 'safe environment.' It was really helpful to have Christian counselling where our beliefs were fully understood. A totally positive experience.”

Former clients

We have recruited 5 new volunteer counsellors this year. We remain committed to only inviting those onto the team who, following references and interview, we believe are at a point 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. Some work with the BACP (British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists) code of ethics which is very similar.

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.

“ My thanks to all the team for your commitment to supporting those in times of need. I know it has helped me enormously.”

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 and managers, 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 has this year involved our supporting those who work: 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. While we normally encourage counsellors to bunch their clients together and allocate as close to home as possible to minimise travelling, since April there has been very little travel of any sorts for appointments. This is something we will consider further even when the pandemic is over.

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.

“ Reach provides an excellent starting point to rebuild your life through counselling. I now feel more able to cope with my mental health issues, family bereavement and illness.

Thank you to my counsellor who was very kindly in manner and a great listener and empath.”

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 Reach 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 reduced slightly, from 65 to 61, 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 once again, as in the previous 6 years, especially grateful to those Partners who have given very generously on an annual basis.

This consistent support from Partners, which has been of even greater value this year, gives us a reliable financial foundation to work from each month. This allows us to pay a number of our team and to operate our fair donation policy, which is at the heart of our highly socially inclusive service.

We also have 179 Friends the same as last year but with a turnover of 6, 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. We have been able to send 2 update communications this year to Partners and Friends via email and post where appropriate.

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. The Council met four times this year, two of these meetings were over video.

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 now been accepted by the Charity Commission. This will give anyone going onto the Charity Commission website a more accurate understanding of who we are and what we do.

“ Firstly it was great to share and talk about my life in relation to my faith, and secondly, my counsellor had the skills, experience and warm personality to help me trust and openly share with her. Talking to her helped to understand and see things I wasn't able to see before...even though we only had 4 sessions (via phone during Covid 19).”

Former client

Marketing and Fundraising

Our ‘One in a Thousand’ appeal concluded in April. This was our seeking to encourage 1000 people to donate £10 each towards the refurbishment of our Liverpool base. We were just short of the £10,000 target, but with over £9,000 and people still adding to it occasionally, this will help considerably. We are very grateful to the response particularly from some of our Friends, as well as past and present clients who have become aware of this target.

We have established our first corporate partnership with Right at Home a local care provider. These are relationships with businesses that would be happy to be connected to Reach and would offer us meaningful support of £100-200 per month.

We had a major event planned around several people being sponsored to abseil down Liverpool Cathedral. Unfortunately this was postponed due to covid restrictions. We don't know if or when this will now be able to take place.

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, due to the unavailability of key team members there are areas still to be updated.

"Great counselling, helped me through difficult times."

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, and now calling, 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, although this is the area of work that has been most affected by covid restrictions..

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

Having opened our Wrexham counselling room in October 2019. 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, which will begin next year, 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. This refurbishment 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 are exploring contact with one particular trust that may enable us to work with a much larger budget and allow us to do more extensive changes.

Once again 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. Our previous target of increasing or even maintaining the amount of counselling at over 3000 appointments per year will need to be reviewed as we assess the ongoing impact of the pandemic on client

numbers and donations. We expect to slightly increase the number of paid counselling hours and administration hours throughout next year. 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), couples counselling and work with children and young people. 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. Alongside this we will explore the challenges associated with dual relationships where a counsellor may have a supervisor who also could have some measure of management style authority in relation to them.

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 intend to engage with about 10% of our Friends to discuss with them how they would like the Friend relationship to develop, as this has remained rather static for a number of years. We may introduce the possibility of friends agreeing to a low annual donation.

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 of seeking to achieve supporter relationships with 20% of all Evangelical Alliance affiliated churches in the North West. We will reset a target date of 2025 for this. Our present estimate is that this would be a between 60 and 90 churches.

"Everything from the first contact was excellent. A very good experience."
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.

We will seek to explore fundraising opportunities that connect with funding networks and groups we have not yet had contact with. This may require a more dramatic or innovative

event to capture peoples imagination. We haven't yet identified a suitable replacement for a major fund raising event as we contend with covid restrictions.

We will continue to explore how we can further integrate the work of marketing and fundraising into our 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 will explore the possibility of sending a much shorter update to our Partners, perhaps every 3 months, alongside the more lengthy Supporters Café update they receive twice a year.

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 and sustainable platform, as now having counselled over 5,000 people we press on towards toward the very ambitious target of 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 North West, West Yorkshire and North Wales and now even other areas of the U.K. and abroad through our remote counselling work. We will need to connect with the faith, generosity, skills, availability and compassion of so many people in order to continue and develop. Evaluation will also have to done of people's expectations, issues and preferences for the different ways of working once we fully emerge from this pandemic. Whatever the uncertainties we will choose to look ahead with hope and faith as well as being grateful to all who have helped to bring us this far.