

Reach Merseyside Limited

Company Limited by Guarantee.
Registered Charity no 701330



Trustees Annual Report

Year ended 30th September 2022

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 was the year we moved beyond Covid lockdowns and restrictions into the accepted new normal of hybrid working for counselling appointments. All the adaptations of the last couple of years enable us to work with a mix of: face-to-face, telephone and video counselling, according to the agreement between each client and counsellor. Pandemic impacts of: lockdown, separation, grief and medical traumas continue to be some of the issues clients bring to sessions alongside the many other hurts, losses and struggles they experience. Once again our counsellors have exercised remarkable flexibility in adapting to their client's needs and maintaining professional standards in their work, to allow so many people from so many places to find such appreciated help.

Through all that Reach did this year; hundreds of hurting people were able to find a reliable, hopeful, professional, Christian and compassionate service. Selected quotes throughout this report are from clients who have had, or have concluded, their counselling this year. These, alongside the various facts and figures, will reveal a sense of the care that many people experienced through the organisational co-operation of our: counsellors, administration team, trustees and supporters (both partners and friends).

" At a time when I was struggling with the after effects of Covid lockdown and burnout, Reach helped me get back on my feet again. It has given me a sense of peace. So valuable. Thank you ! "

former client

This co-operation has led to many people: mainly in the North West of England and North Wales but also in West Yorkshire, and via phone and video, elsewhere in the U.K and even abroad, to again find Christian counselling help for their relational, emotional, mental and spiritual difficulties. Clients often tell us, that they are coming to Reach feeling desperate and often at the most difficult times in their lives.

This year we have arranged 2894 counselling appointments across our 6 different venues and remotely. This represents a huge amount of work done by our counsellors and administration. This is an increase on last year's 2714 and, despite lockdowns, our 3rd highest ever total. What is particularly notable; is that only 17% of these were affected by postponement or non-attend. This compares very favourably with our last full pre-Covid year, when 28% were affected. This positive reduction is likely due to the increased direct communication between clients and counsellors, over appointment arrangement, that has been introduced since lockdown. The reduced number of postponements/non-attends meant that the total number of held appointments, at 2393, was only 15 appointments below our highest ever number.

However, the number of new clients registering for counselling with us was 264 (one new one every working day). Which was a dramatic increase of 88 (50% up) on last year's 176, and over a 100 new clients up on the year before that (2019-2020). This figure is also over 50 more than our previous record of 207. We also managed the majority of these without our appointments' manager, who only returned near the end of the year, and on a phased return. This level of work explains some of the pressures and challenges we have faced, and this level is likely to continue, but with our appointments manager taking responsibility for allocating new clients. This also means; new clients are having slightly fewer appointments before finishing. With all these pressures, we have still managed to allocate most new clients within a month, and most having their first appointment within 3-6 weeks from us receiving their registration form. Under 5% of these have been for children and young people. Our main children's and young persons' Liverpool counsellor is still unavailable for this type of work.

These new registrations mean that we have now counselled 5,652 people throughout our history, with about 40,000 counselling appointments in the last fifteen years alone. We are honoured that so many people have, and continue to see Reach as a safe and hopeful place in their times of trouble and we are very grateful to everyone who has made this possible.

“ My sessions gave me a lot of hope and peace, I will certainly remember it all and recommend Reach counselling to others.”

“ My counselling helped me to grow beyond what I could have imagined. I am very grateful.”

Former clients

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 (about 20% of clients). We are pleased to have continued to see a significant number of couples seeking help who are black and of other ethnicities, when cultural influences are often a key part of the work. This seems that we are being trusted and able to work in a genuinely inclusive way. We have also counselled a small number of children and young people (ages 6-17), as two of our available counsellors (in West Kirby and Chester) are trained and experienced in this type of work.

To all our clients we, have offered a: distinctive, professionally managed and evaluated counselling service. 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 want a pastoral counselling approach, that enables their Christian faith to be fully incorporated into their counselling experience. This especially applies when working with church leaders, who will often particularly

select Reach due to our Christian identity. We have gained more leaders this year as clients, as the issues of Covid and lockdowns have particularly impacted this group, and remote work now enables those from further afield to easily have counselling with us. It is very encouraging that leaders are being recommended to Reach by other leaders. We feel very honoured to serve them in this way as they lead and care for their congregations and communities. 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 (e.g. £20 per session for someone earning £20k p.a. and so on). Our distinctive proposition allows people at all economic levels of society to access counselling. This makes it available to those who are: unemployed, students or on benefits, as well as those who are at the top of their professions. This means we don't control the average donation, but nurture a respectful financial relationship. This year we held on to our target of £15 per session (even though this is not widely communicated), and achieved £12.40 which is almost identical to last year. 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. Special thanks go, in particular, to our Partners, whose reliable giving continues to make this way of working possible.

“ These counselling sessions have changed my life and transformed my thinking. My counsellor always made me feel safe and comfortable. This has been a wonderful experience I am so glad I have done it, it had a lasting effect on my life for sure. ”

former client

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

Venues

Face-to-face counselling has returned to all, but one, of our 6 venues. Work has begun again in: Liverpool, West Kirby, Chester, Wrexham and Sheffield with Manchester the exception for various reasons. This will be reviewed shortly. It is to be noted that this doesn't seem to have been a problem for most of our Manchester clients. Remote counselling now accounts for about a quarter to a third of all our appointments. While many clients have benefitted from the: convenience, less travel and freedom to choose counselling from wherever they maybe, others are relieved and delighted to be back to in-person appointments. Unsurprisingly; some counsellors are more comfortable with remote ways of working, than others, and each counsellor shapes their own mix of face-to-face and remote work. Once again a very small number of appointments have taken place in people's homes for those who are house-bound.

At our Liverpool hub we have installed an attractive new large sign above the front door. This virtually completes the outside updating of the building. This follows on from the repainting of exterior walls and windows that was completed last year.

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 (whose fantastic support also enables a Reach counsellor to work there), IPAC in Wrexham 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.

“ My counsellor gave me the tools to get through difficult situations in a helpful way. It was a very positive time for me and has really helped me,. My counsellor was just amazing. Thank you. “

former client

Counselling and Team

This year's 2894 counselling appointments were managed by a team of 16 counsellors across all venues. The counselling team is a mix of employed and volunteer counsellors. We finish the year with a counselling team of 15 (11 women and 4 men), with one leaving and one joining, we already have 2 interviews planned for next year. We have employed 2 further counsellors following their successful student placements with us. They will both be working with Liverpool and remote clients. We now have 7 of our counsellors employed at some level. We are keen to build on this number, where and when possible, as it puts us in a stronger place to replace counsellors should they leave, rather than being too reliant on the generosity of volunteer counsellors. We also want to continue to invest in counsellors so they can have more time available and therefore gain greater experience.

We have had 4 people active on our administration team through the year (with a new volunteer due to join shortly). This is fewer than the 6 we have operated with in previous years and has put a considerable strain on our appointment management/allocation and administration systems. The record number of newly registered clients of 264, a huge 60% increase on the average of the last two years, has only been possible due to: a considerable refining of our systems and processes, greater use of technology (70% plus of new registrations are now received by email) and our co-ordinator taking on this work temporarily. We are delighted and relieved that our appointments' manager has returned from long-term compassionate leave and has been focussing on the management of closed cases alongside other work. This ensures our finishing and evaluation processes are adhered to.

We have continued with a commitment to record standard procedures for as many operational processes as we can, to make it easier for new team members to step into administrative work as well as encouraging consistent standards of work, as we serve our clients. This practice has been prioritised following the Trustees exploring risk management and succession planning.

“ My counsellor was so good at picking upon things I might have otherwise glossed over this helped me to go a lot deeper. I am now in a much stronger place emotionally than I was. All this

was over the phone, which worked really well. “

Former client

We have recruited 1 new volunteer counsellor, who is on placement, in Liverpool, as part of their diploma course. 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. We held an in-house training workshop on '*working with the distinctive dynamics when counselling couples*', for a few of our counsellors who work with couples.

“ I was initially quite nervous about counselling- whether I would be able to open up enough to benefit and whether there would be a sense of understanding and rapport between myself and the counsellor. My counsellor made me feel very comfortable and help me to open up as well even challenging me at times. I found the sessions very helpful and glad that I did them and worked through my thoughts and feelings. Thank you. “

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 developing our work with those who have or are dealing with issues around transitioning their gender- we have written and distributed a paper titled '*trans language: respect, politeness and freedom of thought*'. This is to help all our counsellors and reception staff offer a consistent approach with clients, as well as appreciate the freedoms they have at Reach in expressing their own views in discussing this controversial matter. We remain attentive to the national discussion taking place on banning 'conversion therapy', and how, if at all, this may influence any work we do with those exploring their sexuality and gender (as it is mostly referred to).

We offer supervision to some of our in-house counsellors, as well as to external: counsellors, chaplains and managers; then on a fee paying basis. Through this work; we are also playing a significant role in overseeing the quality, support and development of counselling and care outside of Reach. A lot of work has been done on our Company Handbook, including up-dating many of our policies, as well as more additions than were expected, to help new team members get up to speed and ensure consistent practice, this will be completed next year.

Environmental

We continue to recognise our environmental impact. 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 new clients as close to home as possible to minimise travelling, since the pandemic, there has been far less travel, with so many appointments being remote.

As part of our refurbishment we hope to replace two large old single glazed wooden windows with double glazing that will also be much more energy efficient.

" I am so grateful to my counsellor for her wisdom, reflective listening and understanding- these were all amazing. I didn't expect to feel this different after only a couple of sessions. I couldn't see a way out of my grief and sadness at the start. My counsellors guidance and expertise has been amazing and so appreciated. "

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, churches and organisations 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 a token level. The number of partners has stayed steady at 62. The level of giving from partners was down by just over 10%, with some citing 'the cost of living' for reduction in giving (whereas counselling donations from clients were up by 10%, and nearly filling this gap).

The reliable support from Partners, gives us a vital financial foundation to work from each month. Allowing 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 177 Friends, which is 1 up on last year's total with a turnover of around 5. These are the individuals, couples and churches who are happy to be identified as generally supportive of Reach and generally 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, each of these meetings happened 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 time focus has been on risk management and succession planning.

Our Objects of Association have been re-drafted in order to give an accurate expression of our up-to-date identity and work as a Christian Counselling charity, in contrast to our earlier, and broader, days. We intend to present these to the Charity Commission, in order to give anyone going onto the Charity Commission website a more accurate understanding of who we are and what we do. We are also preparing to change our registered name from Reach Merseyside Ltd to Reach Counselling Ltd, as this is far more reflective of the nature and the range of the work that we now do.

“ My counselling definitely improved my overall well-being. I was able to implement changes in my life that allowed me to live a more fulfilling life. I am very grateful to have been able to access the service. “

Former client

Marketing and Fundraising

Although our ‘*One in a Thousand*’ appeal concluded last year, some donations have continued to come in. This was our seeking to encourage 1000 people to donate £10 each towards the refurbishment of our Liverpool base. We are now (once gift-aid is factored in) very close to the £10,000 target. We remain 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. Due to Covid uncertainties; we have not planned any fund-raising event this year. We may be able to return to the postponed sponsored abseil down the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral.

As planned last year; we contacted 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. Following their encouragement, we offered Friends the possibility of an annual standing order at a suggested £20. A good number kindly agreed to this. We hope, that for them, this will strengthen their sense of connection with Reach. We have also sought to gain as many email addresses of Friends as they wish to give.

We have been more responsive this year to updating our website as Jeff, who works on marketing and fundraising for us 1/2 a day a week, 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 able to contact our Partners and Friends twice this year. This has either been by email, to direct them to the updates on our Supporter’s Café page, or to send them it as a printed Newsletter, when no email address is available.

A new sign was designed and installed at our Liverpool base. With one passer by immediately commenting, *“that’s a hopeful message.”*

“ After my counselling I felt much more sane and able to cope. I saw the bigger picture and felt a lot lighter. My counsellor was

approachable kind, understanding and humorous. I felt like I'd known him for years."

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 working with, 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 since the beginning of the pandemic.

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.

" My time with my counsellor was so beneficial in so many ways- helpful, encouraging and compassionate. I especially loved the fact that he prayed for me during our sessions, which was exactly what I needed. Thank you so much, you helped me in more ways than you know. "

former client

Plans for the future

We remain committed to the 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. Our most recent new venue was Wrexham in 2019, which is working well.

We will continue with the improvements on our Liverpool hub, that the successful 'One in a Thousand' fund-raising project has enabled. Our aim is to create a place that provides a: welcoming, hopeful and healing environment. All aspects of the clients' and team's comfort will be taken into account as we develop this. We are considering making, at least, one of the counselling rooms more child and young person friendly. This would further enable the creative work that takes place with the children and young people we counsel. We intend to replace our phone systems that are over 20 years old. We will also consider any changes that could improve the energy efficiency of the building, notably replacing an old dormer window. These changes will improve the experience for all those who attend for counselling, as well as a few further small changes (tiling the steps and eye level signage) on the outside, that will improve our image with the hundreds of people who pass by every day.

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. This is

exacerbated by some in the NHS (and elsewhere) signposting people to us, who tend not to be the most reliable of clients in their attendance. We want to try and maintain the practice of new clients being contacted by an allocated counsellor within 3-4 weeks of them registering with us. We will introduce a response protocol; to inform clients we have received their registration within 3 days of receiving it. We will also monitor the appropriate balance of employed and volunteer counsellors to ensure sustainability of the counselling service. Our previous target of increasing or even maintaining the amount of counselling at over 3000 appointments per year remains.

While we have no immediate plans to increase the number of paid counsellors, we shall keep a close eye on this and will move forward if conditions seem to be favourable. We expect demand for counselling to remain high, and may have to review our present model and expectations to prevent becoming overwhelmed e.g. beginning more counselling relationships with an agreed limited number of sessions. 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. It may require counsellors being paid at a higher rate for this, and so a higher donation level encouraged for these times. 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, or essential, when we have highly experienced counsellors at these venues. We will continue to incorporate qualified counsellors or student counsellors (on placement), as volunteers, when they are successful through our interviewing and recruitment process. In our experience, typically about 50% are successful. We would still 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 our 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 more fully appreciate and connect with the work Reach does and that they can support. We will also look to simplify the process of people becoming Partners online. We will give particular attention to developing legacy giving, both as an online proposal for supporters to consider, as well as 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 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, and review this target. Our present estimate is that this would be between 60 and 90 churches.

“ I have benefitted greatly from the counselling at Reach. My counsellor was amiable, professional, calm and assured, this all helped me to unlock solutions. This was instrumental in not only lifting me out of a rut, but towards resilience and a better future. “

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

may 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, groups and individuals we have not yet had contact with. This may require a more dramatic or innovative event to capture peoples imagination or a new relationship to open these possibilities.

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 continue to keep our Partners and Friends updated through the Supporters' Café and alert them to the latest ones. We will aim to do this twice a year.

We are keen for our appointments' manager to be able to more fully resume her overall responsibilities early in the coming year, especially around allocating clients and updating records. This will bring much relief elsewhere in the system, especially where others have been covering this work. At present, she is not intending to fully resume her counselling work. We shall see if this changes. This would particularly affect our capacity to work with children and young people.

" I have benefitted greatly from the counselling at Reach. I have been able to give myself permission to let go of carrying guilt and shame. I can now move forward positively. "

former client

We expect that the discussions around succession planning that have been happening within the Council of Management, will lead to operational work taking place to move this forward. In exploring succession issues, we have identified the need for : a Succession Audit, developing Succession Connections and to engage in Succession Conversations, as we recognise there is no 'one way' of succession planning and practice. We appreciate that each organisation has to find its' own route, if it is to be sustainable. The Council intend to formally change the name from Reach Merseyside Ltd to Reach Counselling Ltd. This will be far more accurate in reflecting the work we do now. We also intend to present up-to-date Objects of Association to the Charity Commission, so anyone looking at us on their website will get a more accurate impression of how we work now. The Council of Management have also set themselves the target of acquiring two new trustees next year.

As we look to next year, we are also hugely grateful for all that has been achieved in the history of Reach, as we have now counselled well over 5,500 people and managed about 40,000 appointments just in the last 15 years. We value all the: generosity, work and care that has allowed so many people to be helped. We continue to look to a gracious God whose: wisdom, grace and provision has guided and inspired all that has been done through Reach. We are aware of our need to focus on maintaining and developing the quality and availability of a service that many hurting people seem to value highly at their darkest times. Our future challenges seem likely to be related to coping with increased demand alongside ensuring we help those for whom most other agencies wouldn't be a best fit.

We will seek to be future-minded, and consider in all we do: how are we making this easier for someone else to do, and how do we need to change and adapt to face a future where mental health and well-being have greater prominence than ever, while still being true to our identity as a Christian Counselling charity in serving those who are eager for pastoral counselling; both near and far away.

