



## **Chairs' Introduction**

Our principal aim for the past year has been to consolidate the considerable expansion of the service that has taken place over recent years. I am very pleased to say that whilst much work remains to be done, considerable progress towards this aim has been achieved in 2018/2019. We enter the current financial year much stronger, more focused and better equipped to address the growing demands for our services. That this has all been achieved whilst offering a greater volume and range of the highest quality mental health services than ever before, is testament to the untiring efforts of the whole Riverside team - our counsellors, the clinical team, fundraisers and the board of trustees, throughout a demanding year. I'd like to draw attention to a number of aspects that have been particularly important to achieving this positive change in direction.

### **Fundraising**

It was not so long ago that Riverside was largely self-funded – with clients in a position to pay higher fees subsidising fees for other clients, such that services were affordable to all. As the service has grown in terms not only of the number of clients, but also the complexity of cases, age-range of clients and number of locations, the service has become increasingly reliant on fundraising activities to complement fees. Fortunately, our fundraisers have stepped up admirably to this challenge, and we have exceeded our fundraising targets – an excellent result which places our finances in a good position. The service has had to adapt to this change though, as along with reliance on grants come targets that have to be tracked. Maintaining close alignment between these targets, the clinical needs of clients and the ethos of the service has taken considerable effort during the year – and has led us to establish a Funding Alignment committee.

### **Board of Trustees**

Another aspect of the service that has undergone a significant transition during 2018 / 2019 is the board of trustees, with the previous Chair and two other trustees taking their bow after many years of sterling service to Riverside. This has enabled new trustees to join the board, bringing with them a broad range of useful competencies such as safeguarding and organisational strategy and planning, as well as deep connections within their local communities. We now also have an excellent balance of experience and new blood – a happy combination that I believe will provide the basis for continuing excellent stewardship of the charity over the coming years.

## **Management of the Service**

No aspect of the service had been put under greater strain by the rapid expansion of services in recent times than the clinical management and administration team. The situation has been exacerbated by inadequate IT systems and tools, such that many tasks that should have been simple involved considerable administrative overhead. Changes in day-to-day practice had also outpaced changes in job descriptions and created some problematic gaps in available suitably qualified staff. Through a lot of hard work, a new management structure has been put in place that addresses these issues, and combined with an extensive recruitment campaign has enabled the creation of a new organisational shape that matches our finances, yet is better able to deliver the services required by our clients. We are also proud and excited to have secured a step-change grant from the Oxfordshire Community Foundation, and have instigated a key project to rejuvenate our IT systems and processes, a programme which will be guided by a very experienced project manager with excellent experience within another mental health service.

## **Strategy**

As we entered the new financial year, we held a very productive and informative strategy day – identifying several fundamental themes. We recognised that we were on a journey from being a small informal charity towards becoming a core part of mental health provision landscape in South Oxfordshire, and were able to articulate a number of the following:

Decisions we have to make

Things we need to change / evolve

Things we want to stay the same

Obstacles and Hurdles to overcome

Realities that we have to face up to

Principles that can guide us

I would like to finish by extending my heartfelt thanks to the Riverside team for their tremendous efforts on behalf of the charity during the past year. I believe that through continuing to pursue the clear strategic direction we have now been able to define, combined with the continuing goodwill of the whole extended Riverside family, we will continue to grow in strength and health throughout the coming year.

Adrian Marsh

Sept 2019

## **Report of Director & Clinical Lead - 2019**

### **Our Clients**

We are currently living in very uncertain times and I think all those reading this report will feel some resonance with the view that there is a feeling of discord in society with a polarisation of views which is generating tensions and disharmony. There is an undercurrent of fear for the future and many of us are feeling disillusioned with those in positions of authority who we feel should be able to make a difference. This evokes feelings of impotence, powerlessness and vulnerability that we can defend against by becoming intransigent and antagonistic. There is a place for strong feelings but sometimes they emerge in inappropriate and less than helpful ways and get muddled in with other areas of our lives that unsettle us and impact on mental health.

The current culture forms a backdrop to our world that we can't ignore. How individuals respond to the external world influences their internal, emotional world and as a service we have to take this into consideration when working with clients.

There is no doubt that Mental Health awareness has risen. News highlighting the need for mental health support for both adults and young people abounds but sadly this is not the case with mental health provision, despite the rhetoric. Thresholds are continually rising for access to services. The increasingly stringent criteria mean that individuals deemed as having less severe needs are unable to access support through the NHS and those who do meet the exacting criteria have to contend with long waiting lists.

This is borne out by the increase in numbers of individuals contacting us. Year on year more people are seeking support for their mental health and statistically this is replicated throughout the country. This year adult Riverside (please see the separate report for The Space) has seen a 35% increase in enquiries. November was our busiest month with 40 enquires and throughout the year the average is now 28 enquiries per month. Riverside carried out a total of 2960 sessions during the course of the year which is a 7% increase on the year before. We offered an average of 247 sessions per month with October being our busiest month with a total of 326 sessions. In recent months demand has out stripped supply and we now have a short waiting list in most areas. For this reason, we have recruited 14 new practitioners who will join the team in September. At the time of the AGM last year we had 44 counsellors this year it has risen to 50 which will enable us to work through the waiting list, and with other new measures in place, enable us to see more

clients in each location. We currently work from 14 rooms over 4 locations which keeps us accessible to a greater number of clients.

Following a year (2017-18) where Riverside had undergone a great deal of change and the service had expanded into two new locations, we were determined that 2018-19 would be one where our key aim was consolidation. The transition process during 2017-18 had been a huge learning curve where we had gone from working in Henley and Wallingford to expanding our service into Didcot and Berinsfield, opening new hubs with new clinical managers and new counsellors. This was an exciting move that at times stretched our resources and provoked a myriad of challenges, some logistical and some clinical. It was therefore paramount that we had a settling in period so we could really embed ourselves and be clear about how the services we could offer could best meet the needs of the communities. We have been so fortunate to have been welcomed by other community groups in these areas to work alongside them building symbiotic relationships. These partnerships have been of real value and supported us in cultivating appropriate services that clients trust.

It is great to see from our CORE statistics (the clinical outcomes evaluation system that we use) that responses indicate that 93% of our clients show improvement and that out of a possible 10, our clients rate us at 9.04. Knowing our clients benefit from and value what we offer is the most significant force behind what we do.

### **Team Changes**

This year we have said goodbye to our Chair of Trustees, who had a major influence on the service's development over many years, joining the Management Committee in 2011. I know that all of us would want to thank her for the wealth of experience she brought to Riverside, the time she devoted consistently over many years and her tenacity and dedication.

We also said goodbye to two other Trustees, who both supported us admirably, particularly with our many fundraising events. Their contribution really did make a difference and we want to thank them for all they did to support the service. We are pleased to welcome three new trustees who bring with them diverse and valuable skills that will support the service with its strategic thinking. I want to thank all our Trustees who work tirelessly and diligently behind the scenes

In July of this year we have also said goodbye to our Clinical Lead for The Space who was instrumental to the setting up of The Space joining us in 2014. Her clinical expertise and her determination to develop a highly professional, safe and open service for young people and we have now is a robust, secure base on which we can build. Our Deputy Clinical Lead for The Space has also moved on having supported us with her clinical expertise offering training and supervision as well as working one to one with clients and running groups. Her

enthusiasm was infectious as was her passion for this work. We thank them both for getting this venture established and thriving.

We want to thank all those who have made a contribution to the work of Riverside during this past year. We absolutely could not offer what we do without the commitment of our counsellors to both their clients and the service and I do want to take this opportunity to thank them all.

### **Re-structuring**

It is key to our development that the management structure meets the needs of the service and following the last 2 years of transition and consolidation we felt that to enable us to work optimally we needed to re-configure the senior clinical team and add in some additional administrative roles. We now have 2 Deputy Clinical Leads who both have specific 'other' roles, a Clinical Development Lead and a Clinical Co-ordinator for The Space. We have also created two new roles - Clinical Support Practitioner - to help with managing the growing number of counsellors we have recruited. We have also over this last year created a Service Administrator role and an Initial Consultation Coordinator post. We have also, with the support of Oxford Community Foundation, recruited a Project Manager who is in post to project manage our 'digital upgrade' so will be supporting us all through the process.

### **CPD programme**

We continue to offer a diverse and stimulating CPD programme with outside speakers offering 6 workshops/lectures per year, attracting a large number of participants whose fees make it self-funding and enables us to add this to the offering we give our counsellors. Our Introduction to Counselling and Interpersonal Skills course is also popular and this will be running again in January 2020. We now hold two valued monthly in-house clinical discussion groups as well as our regular monthly 'Team Development and Reflective Practice' meetings. Our monthly internal workshops cover a diverse range of topics that are relevant to the current needs of the service. Additionally, this year we will be offering a monthly Clinical Review Workshop.

With a new cohort of counsellors joining us we will again be offering training to those counsellors undertaking primarily an adult orientated course to enhance their work with 'Space' clients. We will be giving them the opportunity to gain essential skills to work with young people age 12-18 years and importantly this allows us to extend our outreach and increase the number of clients we are able to see in this age range.

### **Funding**

From the statistics we can see that although the number of client sessions we are offering is increasing, our income from fees is going down. This is because the amount clients can pay, is decreasing as we are, in line with the aims of the charity, increasingly working with those

who are less affluent and are only able to make a minimal contribution. For this reason, we continue to be more reliant on funding.

would particularly like to thank our fundraising manager, who has immersed herself so completely in seeking out funding so that we are confident that what we offer is sustainable. Her efforts have been rewarded as her report details and we have been able to secure much needed funding from a variety of diverse sources. I do though particularly want to highlight the recent Oxford Community Foundation 'Step-Change' funding we received to enable us to develop our back office infrastructure which will set us up for the future so our administration is in line with a service of our size and will build in resilience and make us robust for future developments.

I do though want to thank all who have contributed financially to the service which enables us to continue to thrive in difficult times.

I cannot end this report without acknowledging that the need for consolidation this year has been paramount. We now feel that we are becoming 'part of the furniture' in Didcot and Berinsfield with a sense that we are seen as a resource that benefits the mental health of these communities. Our work in Henley and Wallingford continues to go from strength to strength. We continue to reflect and remain mindful of all that an organisation such as ours has to contend with. Finding ways of meeting growing demand, alongside keeping our aims and ethos central, is an absolute priority and all the decisions we make are based on this premise. It is a huge task to expand and engage with the struggles of our communities and this would not be possible without a whole team approach. I am personally extremely grateful for the team's support and in particular the senior team, who remain reliable, highly motivated, professional and enthusiastic!

We, as a team, look forward to the challenge of continuing to offer professional, affordable counselling in Henley, Wallingford, Berinsfield and Didcot.

It remains a privilege to be part of such a dynamic thriving organisation.

Hilary Arthur, Director and Clinical Lead

September 2019

Clinical Lead Report for The Space Annual General Meeting 2019

Along with our umbrella organisation, Riverside Counselling Service, the theme of this year has been one of consolidation and reflection as our hubs in Berinsfield and Didcot, set up last year, have become further established as sources of high quality and accessible counselling in the community, and our team of counsellors has grown.

Young people's mental health continues to regularly make the news, with research supporting the need for early intervention in mental health at key transition times, such as adolescence, and the knowledge that mental health disorders in adulthood have their antecedents in childhood and adolescence. Young people, and their families, are getting in contact with us in greater numbers, taking a step to seek support for the difficulties they are experiencing, sometimes for a particular issue such as relationship problems or worries about exams, and sometimes because they are troubled by emotions and thoughts that can be overwhelming, or because they are turning to harmful behaviours to try and manage their feelings. Our team of counsellors dedicated to working with young people offer a reflective and confidential space within which young people can be curious about themselves, and find ways to better manage their emotions, communicate their feelings and experiences and build their resilience.

We continue to offer sessions for young people in Henley, Wallingford, Didcot & Berinsfield, as well as limited sessions in the past year offered in Caversham and in Thame. We are growing our core team of qualified counsellors and psychotherapists, and those in advanced trainings specialising in working with adolescents (Birkbeck, IATE, Terapia). Once again in the coming year we will be offering additional learning opportunities for counsellors seeking to advance their skills in working with young people, through clinical supervision, 'Adolescent Workshops', and modules in competencies for practice. We are enormously grateful to those counsellors who volunteer their time and those who work tirelessly and with great dedication to ensure the continuation of the service. Together this has meant that we could respond to 104 enquiries, deliver 63 consultations and 735 counselling sessions for young people over the year 2018-19.

In the year to come, in addition to our core work in counselling young people, we will be piloting a parenting programme for parents of teenagers called 'Circle of Security - parenting' which aims to support parents to reflect on their experiences of parenting

their child with all the changes that adolescence brings; to identify their strengths as parents and the different attachment cues given by their teenagers, who are themselves in the midst of turbulence and change; and to better navigate the often troubled waters of the teenage years.

We continue to be successful in raising money through events and also in securing funding to contribute towards the development of our service, so thanks need to go to our fabulous fundraising team for their tireless efforts in this, and to the organisations and individuals

who have supported our work. We are so grateful for all of their generous donations, which make our work possible.

I am stepping down in my role from July 2019 and would like to say thank you to all of those who have supported and worked with me in establishing The Space as a service offering this vital service for young people in the area. It has been a great privilege to have been involved with such a dedicated and engaged team and to have met with and learned from the counsellors, families and young people with whom I have worked. We know that access to timely, high quality therapeutic support for young people experiencing emotional distress is vitally important and that in a climate of austerity and uncertainty this both increases pressures on families as well as leading often to increased waiting times for fewer services to address needs. Against this picture Riverside stands out as an organisation championing the place of voluntary sector counselling services and working energetically and determinedly to this end. I am sad to be saying goodbye and would like to wish the team all the very best in taking The Space forwards over the coming years.