

**Chair’s Introduction**

At the time of writing we are 6 months into the Coronavirus pandemic – an event without precedent in generations. From the outset, the response of the whole Riverside team to meeting the huge challenges presented by operating in what felt like an entirely new world has been nothing short of magnificent. The clinical management and admin teams ensured that high-quality counselling could continue to be delivered, transitioning almost overnight into an online service, whilst the fundraising team ensured that our finances remain healthy. Our clients have been held safe in very anxious times.

The dramatic recent events risk overshadowing the progress we made in the period *before* the pandemic. In line with our plans for the year, we have taken steps to put the service on solid foundations – starting a service-wide digital upgrade programme made possible by a generous grant from the Oxford Community Foundation and introducing some time-limited clinical approaches. Our finances at the end of this financial year are more secure, thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and donors, and the amazing energy of our fundraising team.

I’d like to draw attention to a number of aspects that have been particularly important this year.

**Fundraising and Finances**

In FY 19/20, fundraising contributed 57% of our income and as such is critical aspect of the service. Although we embrace a wide range of fundraising activities and seek unrestricted grants, more than half of the funds we raise are restricted grants from charitable trusts. The Funding Alignment Committee was introduced last year to meet the challenge of ensuring that there was close alignment between the clinical needs of our clients, the ethos of the service and our fundraising efforts. It is important that we can accurately track our spend against the stipulations of the grant providers. The committee has become an important aspect of the regular workings of Riverside.

**Board of Trustees**

Our board of trustees has remained largely stable over the past year and their contributions have been invaluable. I would like to take this opportunity to thank particularly our one outgoing Trustee who has served Riverside very well as a Trustee for many years and although stepping down from her trustee role to concentrate on writing, she has offered to continue supporting Riverside as our Legal Consultant.

**Digital Upgrade Programme**

We have taken important steps this year towards improving the foundations upon which the service is founded. The transformation started with a service-wide transition to Office 365. This enabled the whole service to have Riverside email addresses and made sharing information much easier. The largest project within the upgrade programme is the transition towards a Cloud-Based Client Management System, which should help to significantly streamline the administration aspects of the service, booking of sessions and keeping of confidential client records. The CBCMS went live at the beginning of September.

**Management Team**

During the past year we have also taken steps to streamline the management of the service, integrating the management of The Space, our service for young people, more closely within the umbrella of Riverside Counselling Service and looking across the service to ensure that all functions were carried out in the most logical and efficient way. The way that the service was able to respond so quickly and efficiently is testament to the strength and professionalism of our management team

More heartfelt than ever before, I would like to finish by paying tribute to the whole Riverside team – thanking especially the Director and Clinical Lead and the Senior Management Team and our Fundraiser, for going so far above and beyond over recent months, not forgetting our counsellors, administration team and the board of trustees. You have all contributed immensely over the past year to ensuring that Riverside is excellently positioned to continue to thrive and to meet the ever growing and evolving mental health needs of the South Oxfordshire community.

Adrian Marsh

Sept 2020



**Director’s Report 2019-20**

This has been an extraordinary year, when all our worlds were turned upside down. It is now six months since the country entered Lockdown which had ramifications for us all personally, but also had a profound impact on the service. Much of the year has therefore been dominated by how this has changed the way we work. Fortunately for Riverside the senior clinical team were able to transition the service successfully and rapidly so we could continue to work with our clients and support our counsellors online. Now as we enter September, we are gradually transitioning the service so it can begin to work safely with clients predominantly face to face again.

In tandem with the ongoing changes necessary to work in the world of Covid-19, we have been going through a ‘Digital Upgrade Programme’. Managing such a large service over multiple locations became unwieldly, and we made the decision to seek funding to enable us to streamline processes so as a service our focus would remain on the clinical task, rather than administration. After a successful bid OCF (Oxford Community Foundation) provided the funding to make this transition possible and having recruited a very able Project Manager, following months of preparation and planning, at the start of September our new CBCMS (Cloud Based Client Management System) went live. Part of this project has also encompassed our desire to engage with a more diverse client group. To do this we have been increasing our social media presence and have upgraded our website providing access to resources and information that can support the community’s mental health.

During the first part of this year we made the decision that with numbers of referrals increasing year on year we needed to find a way of meeting both the individual need of each client, as well as meeting the need for mental health support in the communities where we work, without stretching our resources too thinly. The infrastructure could not sustain further growth, and as with all charities, we need to work in a way that does not put undue pressure on finances, so that we remain viable. We have therefore, introduced working with clients in a more time limited way, so offering clients up to 44 sessions rather than predominantly working in an open-ended way. The number of sessions will remain clinically led.

To keep the number of counsellors steady, our aim is to have a team of 50, we have recruited 10 new counsellors, to start this month across the area. During the year we have also welcomed new supervisors who have added a high degree of clinical expertise to the team, as they come with a real breadth of experience and an enthusiasm to support the work we do. We are also delighted to have recruited a highly motivated Administrator who is passionate about the work we do and brings with her a wealth of expertise. We all as a team value the essential support she provides particularly her technical knowledge and her patience.

Looking at the statistical data, it is important to hold in mind the impact of Covd-19, which makes this year rather unique. At the start of the crisis in March the focus for most individuals was on physical health, but gradually it has emerged that this crisis has taken its toll on individuals and the community as a whole’s mental health. Lockdown and Coronavirus brought with it many issues, isolation, loneliness, fear, uncertainty, financial hardship, stress, loss, to name but a few. We have yet to see the full impact of the pandemic, but we as a service feel that we have been resilient and robust in our response to it.

**Number of enquiries** is slightly down from the previous year:

339 -2018-19

323 -2019-20.

If we look at this in more detail, we can see that for the period up until March numbers were higher than the previous year, 258 in comparison with 247. There is no doubt that Lockdown had an impact. The number of enquiries in March this year was 16, whereas last year it was 51. As a service we were initially unable to take on new clients until we had in place processes that would make it safe to carry out both Initial Consultations and ongoing work with new clients, either by video call or on the phone. It was necessary for all counsellors to undertake a training to work in this way and we needed to comply with emerging guidelines from the BACP. Although the timing coincided with the services Easter break, we had procedures in place so that we able to open the service to new clients in less than a month, and numbers began picking up again. In June this year we had 44 enquires and by 11th of this month, September, we have already had 22.

It should also be noted that it was just prior to Lockdown we changed the way payments are made. We introduced a new Registration & Initial Consultation fee which had to be paid in advance. This was to reduce rate of non-attendance (DNA) at Initial Consultations. The fee was set higher than our previous rate, although as with all fees it is negotiable, but this too, we believe, impacted on the number of enquiries in the initial stages. The information below is taken from our AGM Stats Report.

**Number of Initial Consultations** (Clinical Assessments):

It is here we see the greatest impact of Covid 19, our capacity to offer Initial Consultations required us to put in place new measures, but there was also a generic societal aspect. Although majority of us have altered the way we work, keep in contact, communicate with the outside world, this took time and there are those who haven’t been able to make this adjustment. Some who made enquiries chose to go on a waiting list for when we returned to face to face work, and it is those clients, who are perhaps the most isolated, who we are now beginning to see safely face to face. At the start though of Lockdown, we needed to train our counsellors to be able to assess a client’s capacity to engage in mediated therapy safely, as well as the logistical and technical aspects of working in this way.

**Number of sessions** has seen an increase of 20% over the past year:

Despite the impact during Lockdown the numbers of sessions we have offered has risen:

3695 - 2018-19

4450 - 2019-20

Looking at the number of sessions from March we are able to see that due to the commitment of our counsellors, the quality of the relationships they had established with their existing clients, the support of their supervisors and the senior team’s swift response to manging the transition of the service, we were able to retain a high percentage of clients so we could continue to offer them therapeutic support at an extremely difficult time.

368 - March

249 - April (service closed for 2 weeks for the Easter break)

454 - May

**CORE - Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation**:

In order to assess the impact of our work on clients, we collect CORE data, although we are aware that the amount of data we collect is currently too low to generate reliable statistics. We have put in place, new ways of capturing the statistical data in relation to CORE through our CBCMS. The small amount of data we do have indicates that 75% of clients show a marked improvement.

We have yet to analyse our Client Satisfaction Surveys but will report back on these when analysed.

It is hard to think back to pre-Covid times, but I do want to just briefly mention some key points:

**Group work**:

We successfully carried out a ‘COSP’ (Circle of Security Parenting – Early intervention programme) and ‘Being Yourself’ groups. These are both a course of workshops that support parents, particularly mothers to manage relationships with their children, so they can provide a secure base, and to be able to develop self-esteem and resilience.

Our therapeutic group is now well established and the feedback from clients indicates there is real value in offering this to clients who have undertaken individual work but who would benefit from a further intervention. We hope these will recommence and we will expand on our group work once safe to do so.

**Training**:

Developing the expertise of our clinical team is key to maintaining a high standard of clinical work and being able to increase our offering. To continue the work we do with Young People we need to ensure our counsellors comply with the BACP guidelines for working with 12-18-year olds. We have offered again this year a YP training that meets the requirements; it is well attended and well received. We have also offered training in Time Limited Work and supported with training and workshops for working online. Our CPD programme had a successful start to the year attracting a high calibre of speakers and was well attended by counsellors in the community as well as our own team. The programme will resume when possible.

**Transition Audit** -from face to face to online/phone counselling:

We have carried out an audit, with interesting findings, on transitioning with clients to working online or by phone, and hope to compile the data to produce a paper.

Headlines from the ‘Transition Audit’:

We collected data on 73 clients from 26 counsellors- we were able to transition effectively and relatively smoothly, technical issues aside, and it has been in the main, a positive experience as we have been able to hold and continue working with our clients.

We are aware, having attended forums with other similar counselling services, that our retention rate was well above the average for similar services – 93% of our clients continued.

**Fundraising and Celebrations**:

Last October we had our very successful 30th Birthday Party, and we were also the chosen beneficiary for the Henley Herald’s Awards evening which took place in February. The Henley Lockdown Festival, an amazing event, that raised our profile and due to the generosity of the local community, raised much needed funds. Not being able to put on our planned summer fundraising events has meant that we are heavily reliant on donations, grants and trusts and we have been very fortunate in having our exceptionally motivated and capable fundraiser who has worked hard to attract funds.

As with each year we have said goodbye to some of our placement, and qualified counsellors. One of our Trustees has changed her role and is now our Legal Consultant on our Advisory Committee. We want to thank all those who have contributed to the work of Riverside during this past year. We are reliant on the commitment and dedication of all the team to keep the service vibrant and flourishing. I want to thank all our Trustees for their support, particularly our Treasurer who has worked to support the changing needs of the service tirelessly. Feedback from our counsellor’s Annual Review process enables me to say with confidence that Riverside is a good place to carry out this complex and demanding work; counsellors feel well supported and contained and this is reflected in the work we do with clients. We have fared well in difficult times – Thank you to you all.