

**Chair’s Introduction**

The backdrop to this years’ report has of course been the ongoing COVID pandemic – affecting every aspect of our work, including the mental health of the communities we serve, the means through which we deliver our clinical work, our own working practices and our fundraising efforts. Whilst this has presented a succession of tremendous challenge to the organisation, I am delighted to say that Riverside Counselling Service has risen to deal with each and every one and has entered the new financial year both financially stronger and more resilient than ever before.

This is just as well, because as life returns slowly to normal or evolves to a new normal, new challenges will inevitably arise – e.g. as emergency sources of funding put in place to support the work of charities during the pandemic are gradually removed. Despite offering more sessions, our waiting lists have increased. At the time of writing, we are carefully starting to re-introduce face to face working as appropriate and evaluating what hybrid mix of working practices may best suit our clients and team members going forward. These are just some of the ongoing challenges which we face, and many more, as yet unforeseen challenges will no doubt emerge. I am confident however that we will continue to demonstrate the flexibility and resilience that have carried us forward over the recent trying times and through reflection, great teamwork, being open-minded and willing to learn, will improve even more in the future.

A number of aspects that have been particularly important this year.

**The Clinical team**

I’d like to start by highlighting the tremendous commitment, flexibility and hard work shown by our whole clinical team over the last year. The team managed to transition almost overnight to online and telephone working, and despite the challenges, delivered more sessions than ever before during the year (5,257). During this unprecedented period of growth and change, the quality of our clinical services continues to reach the highest possible standards. These results are only possible through the untiring efforts of our Clinical Director and her senior management team.

**Fundraising and Finances**

This year we managed to grow both Fee income and Fundraising. Fee income grew as a result of the impressive 19% increase in the number of sessions delivered although fundraising grew at an even faster rate and thus the trend over recent years of greater reliance on our fundraising efforts continues. In FY 20/21, fundraising contributed 60% of our income and as such, is an absolutely critical aspect of the service. We are extremely grateful to all of our donors and grant providers, without whom we simply could not continue our work. The Fundraising report contains a list of those organisations we would like to thank and I would also like to add a personal note of thanks to our Fundraising team, for their sterling and unstinting efforts in these areas, ably supported by our Treasurer. We are pleased to have been able to increase the amount of reserves during the last 12 months – putting us in a stronger position to deal with the many uncertainties that lie ahead.

**Board of Trustees**

Our board have trustees has remained largely stable over the past year and their contributions have been invaluable. We continue to look for new members of the Trustee team who can extend the range of skills and connections available to Riverside.

**Digital Upgrade Programme**

The Digital Upgrade Programme, enabled as a result of the Step-Change grant provided by the Oxfordshire Community Foundation, has been pivotal in enabling us to be flexible and able to adapt so swiftly to online working. Reviewing progress and fine-tuning any wrinkles in the system has been an ongoing process throughout the year.

The last twelve months has reminded us, should any reminder have been required, that despite the best-laid plans, none of us ever knows quite what lies around the corner. In such uncertain times, organisations rely on the quality of their people; their commitment, flexibility, openness to change and readiness to rise to the challenge. Riverside is truly fortunate to have such a strong team and that is how we have managed to not only survive, but grow and strengthen over the last year. Without ever being complacent, these same qualities bode well for our ability to face the challenges which lie ahead as we contemplate the future.

Adrian Marsh

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