

# Head of Service Report for AGM held on 19th, October, 2019

ACC has had an eventful year since the last AGM in October 2018. We have had a number of changes in our personnel – two Supervisors – one has gone for training as a Psychoanalyst, one has had to withdraw through serious illness; both places are now happily filled. Some six qualified counsellors have moved on (often to pursue paid work - it is easy to forget that all our counsellors are unpaid volunteers) and their places taken by a pleasing group of counsellors who are in the process of completing their Diploma training - and actually pay for the privilege of being at ACC.

Having instituted the new post of Office Co-ordinator and found an appropriate person - who regrettably then left following a stress-related illness - Ben has been promoted to the post. We also now have a new Treasurer in the person of Kate; she has done a sterling job (her predecessor became seriously ill and the person before that retired to live with the Queen – well, went to live in Windsor!).

I must take responsibility for closing our doors to new clients for a period at the end of last year – our waiting list was, in my opinion, getting way too large. We are now continuing as before, though the waiting list is even larger now (over 40) – the arrival of more counselling trainees will shortly reduce this number. Clearly the need for a low-cost counselling service in the region is as great as ever. We have also seen the retirement of our Workshop Co-ordinator and are, with a new Co-ordinator, in the process of identifying workshops, planning some three per year; we did have one entitled “Depression....how to move the client forward” (which we regrettably had to cancel because of an insufficient number of applicants) - and a briefer one on “gender issues” will follow the AGM.

Our thanks go to several of our counsellors who are offering additional time to providing brief counselling to women currently residing at the Littlehampton Women’s Refuge.

ACC have requested again that parking be made available for at least one, preferable two, vehicles belonging to our receptionist attending our office between 10.00.a.m and 12 noon Monday to Friday – we do hire four rooms at Dove Lodge! Parking locally has become a real problem.

The wellbeing of our Counsellors is felt to be very important and we have thus required our Supervisors to provide training in responding to aggression or even violence in the counselling room.

By way of general feedback, I am able to indicate that we have had 115 prospective clients contacting ACC over the past 12 months – this would have been even higher had we not closed our list for two months. Of this number, some 43 have continued into ongoing counselling – not a large figure, suggesting that some applicants change their minds about actually proceeding - a larger number await allocation.

The Deputy Head of Service has spent a lot of time putting together a statistical analysis of the service. This focuses on the 12 month period up to 1 August 2019. A number of trends can be identified. The number of clients applying to ACC (115) has fallen compared to previous years (135 in 2017 and 146 in 2018 respectively). This may have been due to ACC closing its doors to new clients for approximately two months earlier this year, in an attempt to reduce the waiting list. Apparently, other organisations offering counselling in the area (such as Lifecentre and Time to Talk) also currently have long waiting lists.

Of these 115 clients, 94 were assessed (81.7% which is comparable to previous years). The average time from applying to assessment was 3.4 weeks, which is slightly longer than previously. Of the 94 who were assessed 43 have started counselling and 30 are still on the waiting list. The percentage of those assessed who start counselling has fallen to 45.7% (compared to 67.6% in 2017 and 58.4% in 2018). However, this figure can largely be explained by the longer waiting list this year. The average time between assessment and starting counselling is 10.7 weeks (compared to 7.5 weeks in 2017 and 9.8 weeks in 2018), which is a gradually increasing trend.

The average number of sessions for all clients ending this year is 37.7 (compared to 16.1 in 2017 and 39.0 in 2018). 23.3% of clients starting this year ended before having 12 sessions (compared to 36.0% in 2017 and only 10.6% in 2018). However, encouragingly, more clients are opting to continue for longer: 50.0% of all clients have been in counselling for over a year (compared to 34.6% in 2017 and 37.0% in 2018) and 15.2% have continued in counselling for over two years (compared to 11.8% in 2017 and 11.6% in 2018). Fewer sessions appear to be being missed by clients than in previous years (13.8% in 2019 compared to 22.9% in 2017 and 15.1% in 2018).

The fact that more clients are staying in counselling for longer and missing fewer sessions may indicate that the service we are offering is both valuable to clients and valued by them. However, there are knock-on implications for the waiting list. It is important that we consider all ways of reducing the waiting list that do not detract from the service we are offering our clients. The most obvious is insisting that all counsellors see at least three clients unless there are good medical reasons for them not to. Supervisors also need to encourage counsellors to pick up a new client as soon as possible after a

previous client ends. We need to find a way to speed up the Allocations process; to this end the Allocations process has been revised. Clients should also be encouraged to offer the widest possible availability.

It is helpful to compare our clients at ACC to the local demographic by looking at the 2011 census for Arun District. Only 24.3% of applicants this year were male which is lower than the previous two years and well below the 47.7% of the local population. This is disappointing. Looking at the age distribution, all ages are fairly represented by applicants and there has been a slight increase up to 10.4% for the over 65 group. However, this still falls way short of the 26.3% of the population that this age group occupies in the Arun District. This begs the question: should we be aiming to appeal to more elderly male clients?

The Equal Opportunities Questionnaire that clients complete during their assessment yields other useful information. The proportion of White ethnic origin clients at ACC is 96.7% which equates to 97.1% in the local district. There is no data about sexuality on the Census but the 9.8% who answer 'prefer not to say' indicates that for some this might still be perceived as sensitive or taboo information. In the census 65.3% gave their religion as Christian whereas our only 34.4% of clients report being Christian; about a quarter are Atheist which is in line with the census and 26.2% 'prefer not to say' which again possibly indicates a sensitive area for clients. 19.7% of ACC clients reported having a disability which is similar to the 21.1% with long-term illness in the Arun District. Only 1 out of 12 requested special arrangements, which hopefully were passed to the prospective counsellor via the assessment.

May I continue with the feedback by telling you that pleasingly we have again had no formal complaints to process. The annual appraisals (by which every counsellor meets individually with their Supervisor) indicate that there is a great feeling of satisfaction with the provision of the supervision of their work with their clients, and with the Supervisors that oversee this. The Supervisors also meet individually with myself; though hard work, they appear to be very content with their groupwork. This feedback means that we have updated the size of the office, providing an additional table, chairs and space for office staff and a meeting place for our counsellors, increased filing space, changed various systems including assessment and allocation, and changed our counselling rooms to provide greater noise reduction and seating comfort. ACC has also increased the annual honorarium paid to Supervisors by a half again this year, bringing their remuneration close to the going rate for their input.

The clients who came to the end of their counselling and completed the feedback form suggested that the overall quality of the service provided by

ACC was considered to be “excellent”. Similarly, so too, were the assessment sessions that clients experienced at the outset –just one rating giving a “good” whilst the rest were rated “excellent”. The ability of the counsellors to help clients make changes in their lives was rated “excellent” by 8 respondents - 2 indicating a “good” rating. All responded said that they would recommend ACC to others. I will read out just two typical comments, namely, “it changed my life for the better. I am eternally grateful for how the counselling helped me and moved me forward”, and, “having someone so open and understanding to talk to and make me look at things differently has really helped me to believe in myself”. The only more negative comments indicated that ACC could be improved by reducing its waiting times. As a consequence, it has been decided to contact clients waiting for over three months to check their availability and see whether this could be extended. We also try to achieve this by having a continuing emphasis on our Counsellors seeing a minimum of three clients at any one time. We could reduce the duration of counselling or increase the size of the service, but this is not felt to be appropriate or possible.

So that, ACC continues to offer an ongoing accredited counselling service to local people, at a cost they can afford, provided by professionally trained and supervised individuals. None of us are perfect - but we do our best to provide an important and effective service in the area.

I would like to offer a big “thank you and well done” to everyone involved at ACC!

Hans Frankham