

Open Minds Counselling Services: The story so far

A report into differences made to date
and what the future may hold



Winner

**Best Professional Adults & Children's
Counselling Service - South Yorkshire 2021**

Winner

Doncaster Adult Safeguarding Award 2020

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The Parable of The Starfish

Once upon a time there was a philosopher who would walk along the beach every morning, thinking about how to help the world.

One day as he was walking along the shore, he looked down the beach and saw a figure moving back and forth, rhythmically dancing to the day.

This gave him great pleasure, so he began to walk faster to catch up. As he got closer, he saw that it was a young woman and the young woman wasn't dancing, but instead she was reaching down to the shore, picking up something and very gently throwing it into the ocean.

When he got closer he called out, 'Good morning! What are you doing?'

The young woman looked up and replied with simple joy, 'Throwing starfish in the ocean.'

The man looked puzzled and said: 'I guess I should have asked, why are you throwing starfish in the ocean?'

'The sun is up and the tide is going out. And if I don't throw them in they'll die.'

'But, don't you realize that there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it. You can't possibly make a difference!' said the man.

The young woman listened politely. She then bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it gently into the sea past the breaking waves and said with a smile...

'... but I made a difference to that one'.

Open Minds' philosophy has always been to provide meaningful, high quality therapy to as many children and adults as we can, within our means.

We can't work on the scale of local authorities and the NHS. Instead, we focus on the difference we make to each person we support, and to making the best difference we can, for them.

Since 2007 we have made a difference to over 4,600 'starfish', each one precious to us and to the people in their lives.

“Understanding and friendliness encapsulates the whole organization.

I was welcomed immediately and told that 'everyone here is equal, regardless of whether you are training, volunteering, qualified or otherwise'.

I am reminded of the Pink Floyd song 'Us and Them'. From my experience attending training, workshops, into various mental-health related issues, hierarchies have always been evident, power differentials emphasized by labels of expert, specialist and consultant/doctor on the one hand and client/patient on the other; being 'worked for' rather than 'worked with'...

My experiences elsewhere were of doing a job and then leaving. At Open Minds I feel part of the team; there has always been a warmth and richness, a vibrancy that is both uplifting and contagious.

Open Minds offer this to clients too, of whom the focus and ethos is always on.

For me Open Minds is making headway into the taboo, the gap that exists between 'us and them', in the hope of creating just an 'us', working together.”

Introduction

Open Minds Counselling Services Ltd. is a highly credible, well-reputed charity in Doncaster, working with adults and children aged 8 and upwards.

Open Minds provide free and subsidized therapeutic support to improve clients' quality of life by reducing anxiety, ill health and mental dysfunction, helping to build coping skills and capacity for healthy living.

Since 2007 **3,073 adults and 990 children** have benefitted from counselling and talking therapies at Open Minds, over 400 attendees of training, and more than 130 counsellors have qualified with our support.

97% of people would recommend Open Minds to others and 97% would return to Open Minds in future.

The work we do

Open Minds have an incredibly positive record of working with children and adults in both prevention and postvention work.

Using paid and unpaid professional support from qualified or trainee therapists Open Minds provides a variety of talking therapies on any issue to ensure children and adults can access timely, specialist therapies to resolve trauma, distress and dysfunction. Services are by appointment only.

Open Minds successfully deliver medium to long-term therapies to address past trauma and embedded patterns of thinking and reacting, in order to prevent further deterioration. Open Minds has empowered thousands of people, of all ages, to develop the confidence to survive, live and thrive.

Open Minds' core activities are:

1. **Talking therapies** for adults and children aged 8 and over
2. Supporting vulnerable adults and children through **advocacy and mentoring** to improve family dynamics, access appropriate diagnoses, medical, educational and other support, and to access appropriate benefits
3. Providing **placements** to trainee counsellors to enable them to qualify, and to continue in their career development
4. Providing **training** to improve the work of professionals such as counsellors on specialist issues like anger-management, bereavement and creative interventions

“I think that you bring out the best in people and provide the environment for everyone to join in with you. All blessings to you...for what you achieve working together with others. I could not have asked for a better first experience as a trainee counsellor.”

Feedback from volunteers

“good tools to use with grieving families. Good to understand how people grieve and not necessarily death. Importance of listening skills.”

Feedback from trainees

“The richness of depth and variety of staff at Open Minds has broadened my horizons immensely. I have learned more and developed from 'working with' clients.”

Feedback from volunteers

“It's given me ideas that will help me when I start my counselling work in a school this year how to help a young person focus on issues they want to, how to assure them of what remains confidential, and how to identify their choices.”

Feedback from volunteers

Our Model

At Open Minds we use **talking therapies to address life distress** on any issue that the person is struggling to process, from childhood and relationship trauma, to loss and life distress. Early therapeutic intervention can prevent mental health deteriorating into dysfunction and anti-social behaviour.

We meet ever increasing demand by recruiting trainee counsellors as volunteers. From their first hours on placement to beyond their qualification as therapists, we provide extensive practitioner support to mold them into resilient, competent professionals with transferable skills to many different roles.

We have nurtured 130+ counsellors to qualify, by providing:

1. A placement in which they can gain essential hours of practical experience in order to qualify
2. Flexible working times around their childcare/adult caring needs, or their paid employment
3. Internal supervision and casework management from our Adult Team and CYP Team leaders
4. Specialist in-house training to enhance their client work and professional development, including working with CYP, creative interventions, neurodiversity, bereavement, anger-management, and suicidality.
5. Supporting their academic research and studies
6. Opportunities for career progression into paid practice
7. Many volunteer with us for years post-qualification

We have provided a **client volunteer pathway** for more than 40 people, helping to improve their self-esteem by providing a warm, compassionate environment in which they can develop their skills towards life and employment.

To ensure that **we are truly people led** Open Minds use a continuous flow of feedback into our work and our impact on the lives of our clients and their families. We show that we listen by making changes as and when needed. **Examples include:**

- **Ongoing blended in person and remote working** to accommodate client needs and safety preferences in 2021.
- **Training in response to client needs**, such as increasing our anger and PTSD training in 2016 – 2017 in response to 45% of referrals involving Domestic Violence.

How we are led:



Figure 1: Diversity in Directors

Directors are recruited based upon not only what they can bring to Open Minds, but their lived experiences which give them the drive to help others.

Our Team

Open Minds began in 2007 in response to a need for longer-term counselling on any issue to adults and children in Doncaster. People were falling through the cracks of care, often being unsupported until their mental health deteriorated, and their suicidality escalated.

Our Managing Director Helen Mason was our first ever counsellor, founding Open Minds to work on the principle of *I, Thou*¹; *working with rather than doing to* people. Using Helen's experience of community development, supporting and managing VCFE organisations, fundraising and counselling, Open Minds developed an innovative new approach for talking therapies, including therapy alongside advocacy and wraparound support where needed. Open Minds blend paid and unpaid counsellors, who are nurtured to increase their confidence and competence to work with people at all levels of need. This enables greater numbers of clients to access support for life distress and mental health issues sooner. **Typically children and adults wait no longer than 10 weeks for appointments.** Supported and held to account by our Management Committee, Helen continues to run Open Minds with compassion and focus.

The core of our **Board of Directors** have been with Open Minds since we began in 2007. Our founding members each have their own lived experience of life distress and of accessing the mental health system for support for themselves or family members. Additionally two thirds of our Directors are people of colour, two thirds are women, and two thirds are affected by invisible disabilities. This means they share the passion and pro-active mindset needed to put clients first and continue driving Open Minds forwards. We also encourage the involvement of new Directors.

Our team of volunteers and employees work together to bring out the best in ourselves and our clients. **Our counsellors and other volunteers** are from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, countries, faiths and sexual orientations. Of our 28 counsellors; 39% have a disability, 11% are BAME, 71% are women and 29% men, 11% are LGBTQI, 36% have neurodivergent families or are themselves ND, 21% are lone-parents, 46% are carers. All have come to Open Minds as a result of life experiences which drive them to support others to overcome life distress and psychological difficulties. This gives us a wealth of experience to draw from, and our staff become like extended families to one another; supporting one another as peers and professionals.

(correct as of October 2021).



Photos showing examples of team events over the years

Making A Difference

Our Aims	Our Reasons	Our Actions	Our achievements
<p>1. Reduce psychological distress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the UK, mental health issues affect 25% of adults³ and 10% of under 16s⁴ 75% of mental health conditions emerge before the age of 18⁵ In 2014 1/6th of adults attempted suicide while on the waiting list for psychological therapies⁶ Improvements in mental health tend to be maintained one or two years⁷ and up to 10 years after therapy has ended⁸ 	<p>We provide a diverse array of meaningful support for adults, children and families to help them develop the skills, relationships and confidence they need, early enough to prevent further deterioration and begin a happier, healthier life.</p>	<p>In 2020 – 2021 Open Minds 94% of adult clients & 100% of under 17s improved their psychological well-being.</p>
<p>2. Reduce trauma/ impact of abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adverse Childhood Experiences increase the risk of early death⁹ and reduced quality of life¹⁰. 24% of children have self-harmed by the age of 17¹¹, and 7% will have attempted suicide.¹² Research shows that talking therapies reduce long-term risk of suicide by 26%.¹³ 	<p>Open Minds' clients have often been subject to severe trauma, and suffer mental ill health. Through therapy they can significantly improve their resilience, access their inner strengths and resources and develop healthy relationships to help them grow.</p>	<p>In 2020 – 2021 Open Minds' work reduced suicidal thinking in 100% of children and 100% of adult clients.</p>
<p>3. Reduce anti-social behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty and the lack of access to appropriate support early enough is extremely damaging to children and adults.¹⁴ In 2017 45% of adults and children on Open Minds' waiting list were perpetrators or victims of Domestic Violence (see fig. 6, page 11). Many of our clients are survivors of abuse including children traumatized by violence, neglect and sexual abuse. 	<p>We use our unique blending of therapy and anger-management to address underlying trauma and distress, and improve relationship behaviours by managing anger and reducing the risk of harm. We help clients to resolve dysfunctional thinking, disproportionate feelings and destructive behaviours.</p>	<p>In 2020 – 2021 aggression was reduced in 100% of our adult and 100% of our child clients.</p>

Making A Difference

Our Aims	Our Reasons	Our Actions	Our achievements
<p>4. Reduce exclusion from services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2014 75% of people with a mental health problem did not get treatment¹⁵. 70% of children do not receive psychological support early enough¹⁶. 	<p>Open Minds provide accessible, affordable counselling and support to people who would not otherwise have been able access therapy. We do not exclude people by ability to pay, asking for a contribution only.</p>	<p>Open Minds continue to accept referrals for adults and children over 8, taking on an average of 272 new adults and 92 new CYP clients per annum.</p>
<p>5. Reduce deprivation/ isolation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nationally mental ill-health is the primary reason for claiming health related benefits^{17,18} Doncaster is in the 10% most deprived areas in England, with extensive long term physical and mental illness¹⁹. 	<p>We advocate for clients to ensure they get access to the health, educational or financial support they need. This includes participating in Team Around The Child or Family meetings, providing reports, and attending medical or benefits assessments.</p>	<p>Since 2007 we have provided more than 1,000 reports or letters of advocacy for over 300 children or adults. These included over 70 ESA/PIP/DLA forms or reports, and advising on child/parent contact for 90+ individuals.</p>
<p>6. Increase skills locally.</p>	<p>Secure employment which pays a living wage is difficult to obtain in Doncaster, as it is everywhere. Since 2007 98% of Open Minds trainee counsellors have pursued counselling as a career change to accommodate their life circumstances such as disability, parenting and caring responsibilities.</p>	<p>We train professionals in specialist skills such as anger-management work, therapy with children, and more, supporting trainee counsellors to qualify. Many counsellors continue to volunteer with us for years after qualifying. This also gives Open Minds a resource of many highly skilled therapists, increasing our capacity to help those with complex needs. We have provided specialist training to 135 counsellors and over 400 other professionals or members of the public since 2007.</p>	<p>Open Minds began in 2007 with only 8 volunteers, and since then has worked with 190 team members. We have supported more than 130 counsellors to qualify and progress in their careers. Through this process of upskilling therapists we have provided meaningful therapy to 3,073 adults and 990 children.</p>

Outcomes

All Age Rainbow of Positive Change 2020 - 2021

Figure 3: Outcomes Bar Chart

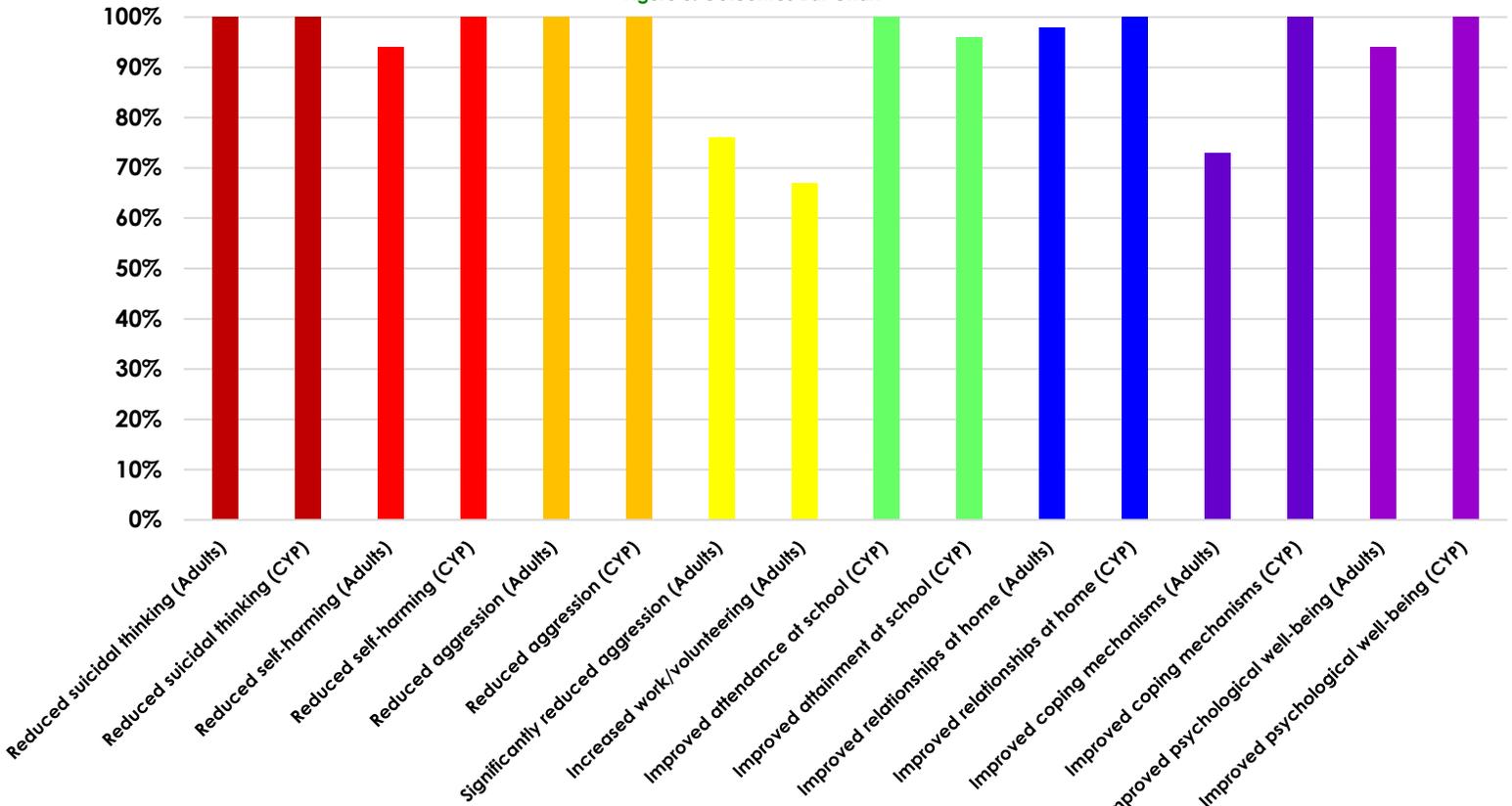


Table showing OUTCOMES for individuals participating in therapy

Adults experienced:	2016 – 2017	2017 – 2018	2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020 *	2020 – 2021
• Reduced suicidal thinking	90%	97%	100%	100%	100%
• Reduced self-harming	90%	94%	100%	N/K	94%
• Reduced aggression	91%	100%	100%	50%	100%
• Significantly reduced aggression	N/K	84%	100%	64%	76%
• Increased their work/volunteering	86%	97%	90%	N/A = lockdown	67%
• Improved relationships at home	N/K	95%	97%	N/K	98%
• Improved coping mechanisms	87%	97%	92%	64%	73%
• Improved psychological well-being	86%	93%	96%	52%	94%

Under 17s experienced:	2016 – 2017	2017 – 2018	2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020 *	2020 – 2021
• Reduced suicidal thinking		94%	100%	* during lockdown in 2020 we were not able to gather our typical data as efficiently as in pre-pandemic circumstances, and were not able to consult directly with CYP	100%
• Reduced self-harming		100%	96%		100%
• Reduced aggression		96%	100%		100%
• Improved attendance at school	91%	88%	100%		100%
• Improved attainment at school	91%	89%	97%		96%
• Improved relationships at home		86%	100%		100%
• Improved coping mechanisms		97%	100%		100%
• Improved psychological well-being		97%	100%		100%

Figure 4 and 5: Outcomes Tables

* during lockdown in 2020 we were not able to audit ourselves as efficiently as in normal circumstances, and therefore did not gather all of the data we would normally acquire.

Reasons People attend

Figure 6: Table Showing Statistics For Issues Covered In Therapy

Issues	2016 – 2017	2018-2019		2020 – 2021*	
	Adults	Adults	CYP	Adults	CYP
Addiction - Any	6%	3%	3%	14%	0%
ADHD					12%
Anger-Management	37%	26%	38%	13%	42%
Anxiety / Stress	65%	76%	85%	74%	92%
Anxiety Attacks				26%	15%
Autism Spectrum Condition				8%	23%
Bereavement All	13%	46%	67%	41%	31%
Bullying	22%	9%	59%	10%	50%
Child Protection / Custody	8%	9%	13%	0%	4%
Depression	52%	65%	41%	42%	50%
Domestic Violence – Victim	15%	15%	15%	8%	15%
Domestic Violence – ongoing risk from others	7%			11%	12%
Drug / Alcohol Abuse (Not Addiction)	5%	11%	3%	4%	0%
Dyspraxia					4%
Eating Disorder		8%	0%	6%	8%
Impulsive reckless conduct	9%	5%	13%	4%	0%
Inappropriate sexual conduct	4%	1%	3%	2%	0%
Long-Term Limiting illness	14%	16%	23%	8%	0%
Neuro-Divergence (all conditions)				16%	29%
Obsessive Compulsive Behaviours				8%	12%
PTSD				11%	0%
Relationship issues	45%	54%	36%	42%	23%
Risk to Others (from the client)	33%				
School attendance problems	9%		28%		4%
Self-Esteem	42%	49%	51%	40%	54%
Self-Harming	19%	12%	44%	11%	42%
Sexual / Gender Orientation	2%	3%	8%	0%	8%
Suicidal Thinking	24%	38%	56%	40%	23%
Trauma - other	20%	14%	51%	9%	4%
Trauma – Sexual Abuse	9%	16%	3%	2%	0%
Victimization / Hate Crime (As Distinct From Bullying)	6%	3%	15%	0%	4%

* The period April 2020 – March 2021 was affected by the COVID19 pandemic.

NB: One client may discuss many issues during therapy

Red font indicates subjects most frequently brought to therapy in the year specified, over 20%

YOU'RE MENTAL YOU ARE WELL YES I AM,
I HAVE A MIND
I INVOLVE IT IN THINKING
 IT IS PART OF MY BODY and sometimes
body parts go wrong.

WHEN THEY DO YOU GET HELP,
and if we can't then we need to care for them.

THERE IS NO SHAME IN BREAKING
A LEG.
We seek help, we set it, we rest it.

BUT WHEN OUR MINDS ARE BROKEN WE FACE ALL
SORTS OF FEARS.

M is for MISUNDERSTOOD
E is for EMBARRASSED
N is for NOT AROUND HERE
T is for TAUNTED
A is for ALONE
L is for LAUGHED AT

But if we seek help, set it, rest it.

WE FACE ALL
SORTS OF POSSIBILITIES.
M is for MOTIVATION
E is for EMPOWERED
N is for OUR NORMAL
T is for TOLERATED
A is for ACCEPTANCE
L is for LOVE


YOU'RE MENTAL YOU ARE WELL YES I AM,
I HAVE A MIND
by Alan Morgan

A poem written for Open Minds by a client volunteer

“When I was struggling you gave me counselling... helped me... gave me strategies [and the] confidence to deal with things when they arise.

I looked forward to my sessions... and every time came away feeling a sense of release, a sense of having dealt with something.

I now feel much happier and able to cope with life’s up and downs.

I have since suggested you to others I know who would benefit from your caring, calm approach.

You provide an essential service; a little oasis of calm in a sometime chaotic world”

“a fantastic service to help and support others, the staff and volunteers are amazing, warm, kind, genuine, sincere and very friendly indeed... I hope they continue.”

“I think that ‘Open Minds ’ is excellent as it has only been on very rare occasions in my 47 years that I’ve sought help”

Therapy for Adults

Open Minds has, since 2007, **provided counselling for over 4,000 children and adults on any issue**, where distress and difficulties in daily life and relationships are caused by life difficulties and trauma, not mental illness. Open Minds provide medium to long-term therapy to address all of the issues causing distress. In this way we help build healthier coping and relationships styles for enduring positive change.

We work extensively with adults who have **life limiting illnesses**, some of whom have mobility issues. Indeed in 2020, 17% of adults were on a health-related benefit such as PIP. Consequently we offer telephone and video therapy and have the use of two ground floor rooms for accessibility. We open 10am to 7pm, and Saturdays. During lockdown 93% of clients were **White British** and 8% of adult clients were **LGBTIQQA+**.

Typically our **gender split** is balanced but during the pandemic this changed to 66% female and 34% male. Only 43% of our clients were in paid **employment**, with 24% in full time work. The pandemic influenced client-work significantly, with **Faith** featuring for 42% of clients, up from 28% in previous years. 89% of clients were **Low Intensity** and 21% were **High Intensity** (suicidal, self-harming or having complex mental health issues).

Table 1, in the appendices shows how Open Minds has grown through the years, **working with 3,073 adult clients to date.**

Case Study

This gentleman came to Open Minds in need of someone who could listen to him and help him understand as his marriage dissolved around him. He was isolated from his support network, hurt, confused, and blaming himself. He was grieving many losses; his marriage and family, a parent's life, and his job due to cutbacks. He was financially contributing to his family but not able to spend time with his children. He could not afford private counselling, and was too complex for NHS counselling, but not complex enough for secondary services.

Through counselling at Open Minds he learned he could still live and manage, despite what he was going through. Gradually he was able to grieve, and find hope. Counselling helped him learn to think positively for the future, build his self-esteem and challenge himself to see things differently, from a stronger foundation of believing in himself. He found accommodation and new employment, and now knows that he can still be a loving dad to his children despite not living with them.

“I didn’t speak to my parents or friends about my problem in as much detail as with my counsellor... I thought it was perfect”

“My son, after initial apprehension, looked forward to attending, counselling helped him overcome some of his fears and gave him a sense of security again.”

“When my daughter started Open Minds she was emotionally fragile, had low confidence and a poor opinion of herself. Since one to one and group sessions her confidence has grown massively, she has learnt coping strategies to control her feelings and how to express herself better. This has also helped her deal with being bullied and coping with moving to a new school. She is like a different girl.”

“Open Minds helped me talk about things that bothered me, also gave me confidence and helped me understand how I feel xxx” (child aged 15)

“Open Minds has created a place where I fit in and feel safe. It has helped me get through the hardest times.” (child aged 12)

Children & Young People

Open Minds have supported nearly 1,000 children and young people since 2007 through one to one and family support. We work creatively, whether in person, by telephone or video call, to inspire the child to overcome trauma and develop coping skills for their life. This may also include supporting:

1. **The family** on behalf of the child, to improve relationships or put in place support at home to enable the child to flourish.
2. **Schools** to develop strategies to encourage the child to engage in the classroom and manage their mental health in school more effectively.
3. **SEN and Neuro-Atypical** young people. This includes supporting the family to adapt to the young person’s needs, and support the education provider to understand and adapt to the student’s behaviours. We also support children to access diagnosis and benefits.
4. **Partnership working.** We are embedded within the Doncaster VCF community, and well positioned to identify young people’s needs which cannot be addressed in counselling, and make appropriate referrals, signposting or making connections to help address their needs.

Many of the children we work with are very vulnerable, including having suicidal ideation, self-harming and being at risk from other people. The child works to overcome enduring trauma, and the embedded sense that they are not good enough or the trauma would not have happened to them. We help children to rebuild healthy attachments and develop lifelong psychological resilience and coping strategies.

Counselling with children involves art, creativity, imagination and play. Counselling allows young people a place in which to discuss openly the parts of themselves they most fear will lead to their rejection and exclusion in their daily life. Facing up to these possibilities openly and with the counsellor alongside them can help them to develop the emotional resilience to manage not only the ups and down that come with being a child, teenager or young adult, but also the ways in which their family dynamics and how they see themselves in the world might change.

Children and young people can explore their romantic, sexual and gender orientation in counselling, thinking these things through, gaining an understanding of how they see themselves, their identity and how they choose to present that to the world, allowing them to more safely prepare for the adult world.

What do our counsellors see as the main issues in children coming to Open Minds?

“isolation, poor diet (possibly leading to ill health).”

“if rent cannot be met, this means this is their caregivers priority, children can pick up on this maybe start worrying which could lead to anxiety, possibly even over being bullied or judged because of it which could then lead kids to not go to school then getting excluded leading to less opportunities as they get older”

“cyberbullying, access to drugs and alcohol, peer, family and social pressures, fashion and media, nutrition and malnutrition, process of attachment being interrupted in modern day [culture]”

“I suppose if we use Maslow triangle of needs and joking aside add Wi-Fi and battery to it, it demonstrates perfectly how mental health and poverty interlink in children and adolescents”

“Cyberbullying; Bullying in general causing anxiety. Poor self-esteem...[poverty] causing them not to socialise and have activities to do out of school due to financial constraints on parents again anxiety, depression, bullying and social pressures as a whole”

Case Study

Counselling offers the child or young person the chance to talk to an adult who they do not have to protect from the truth of their feelings and in whom they can confide their deepest fears and greatest hopes. Therapy is confidential except where someone is in danger. The counsellor feeds back to parents only what the child is willing to share, and often not at all.

Open Minds believe in providing therapy for as long as therapeutically necessary; for most under 17s 10 sessions will be sufficient, but some children have experienced trauma and abuse lasting many years. This requires an investment of time and care in order to help these children recover from their fears, low self-esteem, PTSD, and attachment difficulties caused by poor parenting or abuse.

Very often children have also not fully escaped from their abuser and continue to be exposed to trauma. Many children have fled domestic violence but are court ordered to have contact with the perpetrator of that trauma. We advocate for the child; adding our voice to theirs to try to ensure they are heard by appropriate authorities.

For example we worked with a brother and sister who had been subjected to domestic violence by their father. They had escaped with their mother and had built a new life. However their father had unsupervised contact and continued his emotionally abusive and neglectful parenting. Following the children's wishes Open Minds recommended that they not have direct contact with their father as this was significantly impacting upon their ability to cope with daily life; the brother was incontinent of urine and faeces and the sister was aggressive at home after visits to their father.

We advocated for them to court and CAFCASS as their father continued to seek access to them. During this time we worked therapeutically to help them cope not only with the stress of knowing he might be granted further contact but also their fear that he would find them and hurt them.

We worked to build their self-esteem, help them recognize that anger is a normal emotion and did not mean they too would become like their father, and helped them to cope both with trauma and with normal life.

“An excellent, constructive, hugely beneficial service which massively has a positive impact for my family!”

“all of the counselling sessions worked for all of my family... without counselling for me and my two children, then I do not think I would have coped very well and would not have been able to help my children”

“express feelings in order to deal with problems... helped to sort out problems and find more happiness...helped our family understand each other”

“I can't thank you all enough at Open Minds my daughter has started smiling again and she has started to get that spark of life back in her eyes, it's a long road ahead but as long as we have Open Minds in our lives I know we will get to the end of the darkness x you are our light in the darkness”

Families

The number of referrals we receive for adults and children has continually increased, as has the level of trauma experienced by those children and adults. This has been compounded by the COVID19 pandemic, and is often due to the cycle of poor parenting and trauma.

People who are traumatised in childhood through experiencing poor parenting, domestic violence or other trauma may then grow into teenagers and adults who are disenfranchised and disengaged from education and employment, with inadequate support around them. Many become victims of domestic abuse in adult life. They may struggle to find work, suffering financial instability. This compounds their feelings of not being good enough, of not being able to manage, and pushes them further into unhealthy coping mechanisms and mental illness. They may then become increasingly suicidal, self-harming or becoming self-destructive. Their own children may then suffer from this same cycle.

All of our therapies are at their heart relational, with the therapeutic relationship helping the client to learn how healthy relationships can work. This helps them improve relationships in their lives by giving them the skills to communicate feelings of hurt and anger without hostility, and to recognise when their own relationships are abusive.

We work with families to help parents and care-givers communicate with one another and with their children.

We empower parents recognise how their actions impact upon their children, and develop healthier ways of parenting to improve their children's lives and behaviours. Families build the skills to communicate their thoughts, express feelings in a healthy way, and nurture relationships which can endure challenges from outside without becoming abusive or self-destructive.

We also advocate for families, writing reports, attending TAF meetings, case conferences and court in order to represent the child's voice, wishes and needs.

Despite our track record of success we have no funding to work with families, meaning that demand is far greater than capacity, despite our highly skilled and dedicated therapists wanting to work with every family who are referred.

Creative Interventions Used In Therapy



Artwork from our ND and CYP clients



Art and Nurture work in the garden



Sensory garden built by our counsellors for use by ND and CYP clients by CYP and family therapy clients



Egg-smashing to explore doubts and hurtful thoughts



Flags to explore what we show to others, and what they see of who we are



Board games for diversion while talking about big things



Cake decorating to express our feelings on the minion's faces



Flag making and Salt Art to explore our feelings and sense of self



Pumpkin decorating to talk about masking feelings

“Open Minds supported me in appointments with a Psychologist and the Autism Team. I would not be able to attend and speak for myself, as I struggle with my memory and communicating.”

“I found a very pro-active type of counselling...putting my problems/experiences into context and helping me through a difficult time”

“While attending Open Minds my counsellor suggested that I have a number of traits of Autism. He helped with the report and guided me through the process.

When attending my ASD assessment Open Minds helped me with the run up to the appointment and preparation, they also attended me for the first part to help and support me.

Open Minds have also helped me to complete forms for ESA and PIP when my mental health stopped me from working, they supported me on assessments and helped me explain to the assessor the problems and issues I have.

I also have welfare check appointments each week and they help to support me through my ongoing issues.”

Neuro-diversity

We offer therapy and additional support to children and adults who are neuro-divergent (ND) with conditions such as Autism, ADHD or Dyspraxia.

We receive numerous referrals for children whose distress is connected to being ND. **In 2020 - 2021 29% of CYP clients and 16% of adults have a diagnosed ND condition.** Being ND is not in itself a condition which needs curing and is not something we would ethically attempt to treat, but we do support ND people to overcome distress and dysfunction.

Sensory processing difficulties, pain management, emotional regulation and social communication are often significant factors. ND people, especially Autistic adults, often benefit from counselling for life distress. However, the majority of referrals that we receive for ND children require a more proactive approach. We support the ND adult, or child and family to better identify triggers in the environment and in how they perceive the world, which they can then adapt to and address to function safely.

Where appropriate we support ND clients with developing communication skills to allow them to express and assert their own needs and boundaries, and to recognise and respect the needs and boundaries of other people.

NB: Counselling is a process of exploration, reflection and change. As with all clients, the Neurodivergent adult or child must consent to participate in therapy.

Case Study

A child attended counselling for anger, due to persistently attacking younger siblings. Through therapy it became clear that Autism, sensory and social processing difficulties explained the distress and violence.

We advocated for the child successfully towards diagnosis and worked closely with the family to better manage sensory processing difficulties. This included high-pitched sounds, such as the pitch of the younger siblings' voices, which triggered the Autistic child to react violently in their distress.

We supported the family to develop opportunities for time outs, supervised play, ear defenders when playing, and helped the siblings identify when a meltdown was approaching.

We advocated for the family in school to get the support the child needed.

“Learnt me not to get angry and talk out my differences”

“it has learnt me to react better, become calmer and I feel I’m a better person for doing this”

“I have an insight how to deal with things and situations which I found difficult to deal with. How to try and reconcile a situation and problems that arise”

“I’m wary of counselling as I know...it can be very insipid, wishy washy and a waste of time. Instead I found it to be proactive and helpful in a practical way...some solutions to the problems I have”

“Open Minds supported me with benefit applications and appointments, such as the PIP Assessment. Without support, I would have been too nervous and would have not gone at all.”

“Open Minds has helped me attend my ESA benefits interviews as I find them too intimidating and get confused and upset with all the questioning which triggers much distress. They help me stay calm and remind me on important facts I cannot recall. Open Minds also helps me with the ESA forms as I am overwhelmed by them and they help me break it down into pieces I can manage.”

Feedback from clients

Anger-Management

Open Minds reduce anti-social behaviour through therapy to both aggressors and survivors to improve relationships, manage anger and reduce risk of sexual harm. In 2020 19% of adults and children attending Open Minds' were perpetrators or victims of Domestic Violence, and were referred to therapy for anger-management to reduce domestic violence by exploring trauma to then resolve dysfunctional thinking, disproportionate feelings and destructive behaviours.

Aggression was reduced in 100% of our adult and 100% of child clients in 2020 – 2021.

NB: this work is possible only where therapy is unlikely to increase the clients' risk to others

Relationships

Open Minds is well-reputed for providing **relationship therapy** to people of all ages, from those in their teens to their 80s!

We work to avoid heteronormative bias and encourage people of LGBTIQQA+ relationships to access our support, whether for romantic or sexual relationships, or for family therapy.

Relationships at home were improved in 98% of our adult and 100% of child clients in 2020 – 2021.

Advocacy & Support

Often counselling is not the only support an individual needs. Open Minds work flexibly to secure **wraparound support** for the sources of clients' life-distress including chronic illness and financial insecurities. We have provided more than **1,000 reports or letters of advocacy for over 300 children or adults** and have a long history of successfully supporting our clients to access the care they need. This includes:

1. **Advocacy for adults** including supporting them to interact with professionals and organisations more effectively
2. **Advocacy for CYP**, including giving them a voice regarding parental contact, and supporting them to manage their school and home life more effectively
3. **Support** for clients to complete benefit forms or attend assessments such as those for ESA claims and appeals
4. **Signposting** to other relevant services e.g CAB

NB: this is not support we offer in general, only to clients who are engaging in counselling. We do not accept referrals purely on the basis of providing advocacy.

“Being able to talk openly about feeling suicidal is what helped me deal with those thoughts, understand what was underlying those feelings and actually grounding me enough to prevent me taking the suicide option.”

“I suffer with EUPD, Recurrent Depressive disorder, Anxiety, and Psychosis... have started medication... My coordinator is wonderful to work with, a really knowledgeable man, who I am very comfortable with. With my mental health issues, to have that level of trust and ease with a person is very problematic for me, and speaks volumes about how excellent he is. He is always professional, approachable, and kind.”

“IMP;ACT overcome the barriers in my way. Without IMP;ACT I would struggle with appointments, not speak up for myself and my needs and be whitewashed out of the room. IMP;ACT has helped me actually ask for the help I needed... the outcomes would have been very different for my physical and mental health. With IMP;ACT’s support I have also been able to return to volunteering which is good for me.”

The IMP;ACT service



Drawing on our extensive experience working with children and adults with life distress, suicidality and complex needs, **Open Minds developed the IMP;ACT service to provide a combination of practical and psychological support to adults aged 18 or over who had made an attempt on their lives**, or who had intended to die within the 12 months prior to the referral.

The IMP;ACT Team are managed by Open Minds' Managing Director and also include a clinical supervisor, 3 coordinators and 3 mentors working to develop effective support for past attempters of suicide in order to help them find healthy ways to cope when life distress causes their mood to plummet and suicidal ideation to increase.

IMP;ACT is a thorough process of unpicking all the damaging elements of an individual's life and approach to living, and rebuilding these into healthy patterns of behaving and being. As such, IMP;ACT works in-depth with a tightly-controlled caseload of service users in order to maintain effective working. Between March 2020 and August 2021 IMP;ACT worked with 20 individuals to move them into long term coping and healthy behaviours, **winning the Adult Safeguarding Award for 2020**.

The combination of practical support through coordination to reduce sources of distress in their lives, alongside mentoring to improve emotional and psychological resilience **is saving lives**. IMP;ACT's SROI (Social Return On Investment) is £269 per £1 invested, with **10 individuals directly stating they would have completed suicide without the intervention of IMP;ACT**.

The 2021 IMP;ACT report is available at:

Reports | IMP;ACT Team ([making-an-impact.com](https://www.making-an-impact.com))

The budget for IMP;ACT is £52,204 per annum, for 2 years and is commissioned by NHS England and Public Health Doncaster.

Photos showing examples of partnership working over the years



@Doncaster Social Prescribing
@Doncastersp1

Great discussions with @Ed_Miliband @RosieWinterton and Doncaster Health Social Care Forum discussing the way forward for Doncasters VoluntaryCommunity and Faith Sector. #letsdoittogether @DoncasterMind @HeatherBoyceUK @ChangingLives_ @Live_Inclusive @_bfriend @social_sober



Networks and Partnerships

Open Minds complement other services by enabling them to provide support such as addiction strategies, re-housing, or medication, while we work with underlying trauma and distress, dysfunctional behaviours and relationships.

Over 200 organisations refer to us, primarily from Doncaster but also Yorkshire-wide, and we have excellent relationships of mutual support and referral. Our relationships with other VCFE services have empowered us to begin developing a forum for counselling service managers to work together to share expertise and best practice and use our collective voice to improve Doncaster's local provision.

Open Minds has long been an **active participant** to strategic change in Doncaster, including:

1. **Partnership working** throughout the years with Doncaster Mind, Doncaster People Focussed Group, Doncaster Pride, Clouds Community Counselling Service, Bentley Substance Misuse and Alcohol Services, Parents Understanding People with Addiction, Cask Corner, Healing Our Way, and more
2. Since **2008** contributing to **Doncaster's Health and Social Care Forum**, sharing best practice between VCFE leaders working to improve health and social care in Doncaster.
3. Since **2018** contributing to **Doncaster's Mental Well-being Alliance**.
4. Contributing to **Doncaster's 2018 Mental Health Stakeholder** consultation process towards improving crisis and well-being management for highly vulnerable and suicidal people.
5. Contributing to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for **Doncaster's Child Poverty Commission 2018** impact of poverty on children's mental health and family dynamics.
6. In **2018** supporting **Young Minds' Mental Health Champions**; mentoring young clients of Open Minds towards being able to advocate for better mental health services in Doncaster.
7. Being a founder member of **Voluntary Action Doncaster's** management committee in **2018**.
8. Since **2019** being an active member of the **Alternative Provision Alliance**, partnering with Doncaster Mind and PFG.
9. Initiating the **Doncaster Counselling Network** in **2021** to connect leaders of VCFE counselling services in Doncaster.

Costs and Value

“Just like people, organisations are alive. They’re always developing and adapting, and can be equally vulnerable to stress... can spread like contagion throughout an organisation. When this happens, it can become traumatised, unhealthy and distressed.

In order to protect themselves from painful feelings, organisations often respond to trauma in the same way as people, i.e. by operating in survival mode.

...On top of organisational trauma, many practitioners carry their own adversity and stress, which can compound existing factors, as exemplified by this classic quotation from Remen (1994, p. 96):

‘The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it, is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water and expecting not to get wet.’

That’s why we need to acknowledge the impact of phenomena like secondary trauma, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout, as well as... wider team and organisational dynamics. This is fundamental to our own and to other people’s wellbeing. Wellbeing is not only essential for the work itself, but has a ripple effect on decision-making, relationship-based practice, staff satisfaction, sickness, and so on.”

Triesman, 2021 endnote 21

The greatest threat to Open Minds’ ability to expand and improve our working is the constant, impending threat of closure due to the loss of funding.

During periods of longer-term funding we have developed, expanded and delivered a wide ranging and far-reaching variety of services such as those described in this report. However during each grant period, the last 18 months becomes a constant process of seeking further funding, limiting the additionality we can offer.

In times of plenty our Managing Director may herself provide weekly therapy to 8 children, young people or adults, and deliver training, advocacy and wraparound support.

In times of scarcity the Managing Director’s time is entirely devoted to managing the service, strategic developments and seeking continuation funding. This means we lose capacity for counselling and wraparound services at such times.

Our dedicated team support people in psychological distress and this can take a toll on their own well-being, especially when compounded by continual and repeated financial threats due to funding loss. All of our staff suffer the ongoing stress of insecure employment, causing Open Minds to risk losing members of our team as they seek greater job security.

Open Minds is fortunate to have very low staff turnover (outside of the periodic influx of trainee counsellors, who traditionally move on after around 2 years). Open Minds minimize turnover by supporting our team well. This includes their relationships with the Managing Director and Practitioner Support Team Leaders, for the adult counselling team and children’s counselling team, alongside an independent EAP and wraparound support for counsellors and non-counsellors.

Current funding ends on 31st March 2022, at which point we will be forced to close without further investment.

Costs and Value

"counselling and psychotherapy are relatively cost-effective forms of mental health treatment – particularly for more psychologically distressed individuals – with an economic advantage above and beyond their contribution to psychological health and wellbeing²¹"

Open Minds are funded by the Lottery until 31st March 2022, at which point we will be forced to close without further investment. We are eternally grateful to Big Lottery for funding us for 10 years, but as such we are no longer eligible for lottery funding. For the first time since we began in 2007 grant funding will not be an option. Changes in grant making trusts mean they no longer fund counselling or talking therapies, or will not fund indirect costs such as management and core running costs, without which organisations cannot function. We are therefore presenting two options if Open Minds is to continue our fantastic work. For only a small increase in investment a significant increase in capacity is seen between each option.

Proposal Name	Investment Required	Description	Projected Capacity		Item Cost *	
			Weekly	Annually	Per person/course of therapy	Per session
1. Living	£130,000	Open 43 hours, 6 days per week. Current staffing levels. Continuing counselling, minimal training/advocacy.	21 CYP	67 CYP	£508	£51
			60 adults	189 adults		
2. Thriving	£152,000	Open 49 hours, 6 days per week. Increased staffing levels to meet demand. Expanded counselling, training and advocacy.	40 CYP	126 CYP	£402	£40
			80 adults	252 adults		

NB: These costs do not include the IMP;ACT Project which is an additional £52,204 per annum and is funded separately.

If we secure continuation our landlord has agreed to waive all rent costs from April 2022 onwards and is working towards gifting us the premises in 2023, allowing us the opportunity for even greater growth and development.

* These costs contrast with £1,043 for a course of IAPT treatment per person in 2010²², and reported recovery rate of 46% for IAPT in 2016²³

“Distress can make us withdraw, to lose hope and to take ourselves out of society... a society in which individuals reduce the internal conflict between their own wants and needs and understand those in relation to, rather than in competition with, those of others, is more likely to produce a society of happy, healthy people... counselling can play its part in such change.”

(Anon, 2015)²⁴

“From the client’s point of view, counselling is acceptable and valued; it’s cost effective to the taxpayer; it represents real value for money.” (Hill)²³

“One of our greatest achievements and enabled counselling to be valued by the wider services... there is plenty evidence out there that counselling is effective... If someone presents with anxiety, that’s a strong presentation for CBT, but if they present with relationship problems, bereavement, difficulties at work, counselling would be suitable. Someone with depression could go either way, depending on whether they are more cognitively minded or if they are more relational in their approach to life. You get the outcomes you want if you apply the right treatment for the person and for the presentation,” (Palmer)”

Quotes from Therapy Today, 2016 ²⁵

Costs and Value

What does loss of continuation funding and Open Minds’ closure mean?

For CAMHS, and the schools, GPs, medical teams and more that refer or signpost children and young people to Open Minds this means the **loss of specialist counselling support for between 50 - 100 children and young people per annum**. This means greater numbers of vulnerable, suicidal and anti-social young people growing up to be less healthy adults whose issues have not been addressed and whose self-destructive and anti-social behaviours will escalate, incurring greater expense from police, NHS and local authorities who intervene against them, or for them. It means more children and young people at greater risk of not surviving into adulthood due to unresolved suicidality.

For adult services referring onto Open Minds this means the **loss of counselling support for around 250 adults per annum with complex psychological needs**. It means more suicides, more domestic violence, and further damage to the children and young people whose parents continue the cycle of ongoing poor parenting as a result of not getting the therapy they need to interrupt this behaviour. It means increased unemployment as clients are less empowered to engage in work and education. It means increased unemployment as our own team of 20 paid staff are made redundant.

There are no comparable services in Doncaster with capacity to absorb our client work, meaning around 300 people per annum, of all ages, will lose essential therapeutic support.

Several other counselling charities in Doncaster are also at risk of closure, or have already closed, due to lack of funding. Open Minds has agreed to take clients on where other organisations’ waiting lists close, but we have limited capacity. If we cannot secure continuation funding our own waiting lists will close in January 2022 as we prepare to end service provision in a timely and responsible manner.

Appendices

1. Table showing **NUMBERS** of individuals participating in therapy, and team growth
2. Table showing **FEEDBACK** from individuals participating in therapy



Table showing NUMBERS of individuals participating in therapy, and team growth

December **2007** – March **2021**

Period	New clients ^a		Team (primarily volunteer counsellors)	
	Adult	CYP	New	Total that year
Dec 2007 – May 2008	41		8	8
2008 – 2009 ^b	84		8	16
2009 – 2010 ^b	84		17	32
2010 – 2011	241	91	24	53
2011 – 2012	208	91	17	64
2012 – 2013	256	91	6	55
2013 – 2014	264	91	7	55
2014 – 2015 ^c	464	79	10	55
2015 – 2016	286	142	25	66
2016 – 2017	223	88	25	81
2017 – 2018	351	95	27	91
2018 – 2019	210	105	5	73
2019 – 2020 ^d	141	51	7	61
2020 – 2021 ^e	147	30	1	51
April – October 2021	73	36	3	54
Total	3073	990		N/A
	4,063		190	

2010 to 2020 = an average of 272 new adults and 92 new CYP per annum

Table showing FEEDBACK from individuals participating in therapy

Clients of all ages:	2019 – 2020	2020 – 2021
Would recommend Open Minds to other people	100%	97%
Would return to Open Minds for support	96.2%	97%
Expressed satisfaction with Open Minds as a service	80.8%	81.8%

Clients of all ages:	2016 – 2017	2017 – 2018	2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020	2020 – 2021
Felt Open Minds made a positive difference to them	95%	100%	N/K	88.5%	63.6%*

* Re: lower scores in 2019 and 2020: During 2019 we closed for an intermittent 8 weeks due to flooding, building repairs and a suspected gas leak, which affected our feedback. During 2020 a minority of clients were unhappy with the change to remote therapy. It should be noted that outcomes for reduced suicidal thinking, reduced aggression and improved relationships indicate that positive differences were made

^a NB: clients who continue each year where their therapeutic needs required it are not included in these numbers

^b Adults & CYPs were not separated for audits at this point

^c This near doubling of client intake in 2014 was due to the closure of two other counselling charities whose clients we absorbed, during which time we also recruited many new counsellors. This was not sustainable, hence not being reflected in future years

^d Capacity lowered by issues with premises caused by flooding and building repairs in 2019

^e Capacity lowered during COVID19 pandemic in 2020 – 2021

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