



YORK
WOMEN'S
COUNSELLING SERVICE

Impact Report

2022 - 2023



Together, we give women
a space to speak

Contents

Introduction	3
Welcome	4
Values	5
Update from our staff	6-7
Our counsellors	8
Supporting the heart of our organisation	9
Financial stability	10
Our numbers	11-13
The impact	14
Special thanks	15
Contact details	16



Introduction

York Women's Counselling Service provides one to one counselling to women who are experiencing emotional and mental health difficulties as a result of current or past emotional stress or trauma.

Our mission is to provide high-quality counselling for women in the York area who need our help, when they need it, for as long as they need it, regardless of their financial circumstances.

Our vision is a city where women who need help have access to quality affordable face-to-face counselling and psychotherapy within weeks, not years, and are never turned away.

Our approach is a unique mix of short and long term support: We are among a handful of organisations in York where the usual maximum of 6 sessions per person does not apply. The number of sessions offered is based on the time each woman needs.

Run by women for women

Our service provides professional counselling, by women, in a confidential and safe setting for women experiencing difficulties, overseen by dedicated female trustees.

Our services have never been more needed.

85

Women supported

835

Counselling sessions held

£11.43

Average donation received per session

Welcome

from Susie Braithwaite, Chair of Trustees



" It requires resilience to keep going in the face of such overwhelming demand for our services, thank you to our team who, across the board, could not have given more"

York Women's Counselling Service (YWCS) is a unique community guided by a strong set of values and a commitment to wellbeing. It's an honour for me to thank our incredible staff and all our volunteers, volunteer counsellors and everyone who has played their part in this busy year. It requires resilience to keep going in the face of such overwhelming demand for our services, but across the board our team could not have given more.

I'm enormously proud of the way that our team has responded to the aftereffects of the pandemic and the additional challenges that the cost-of-living crisis has placed both of our operations and the lives of the women that we work with.

Reflecting on the last twelve months, we've delivered high quality counselling to more women than ever before and in addition have focussed on building our effectiveness and sustainability of the charity. Throughout this report you'll hear more about our major achievements during the year

We are proud to be an organisation run by women for women and this year we've continued to strengthen our team. New talented trustees have joined as well as a fresh cohort of volunteer counsellors. It's testament to our safe working environment that many of last year's trainee counsellors have graduated and remained with us. We've welcomed a new administrative support officer to provide crucial backup to service delivery. In March we made the decision to restructure our team to take the charity forward. Our team, led by a new director will make it possible for us to reach more of the women who need our help.

Of course, none of this is possible without the support of many funders of all sizes from trusts to individual donors. This year we were particularly grateful to achieve our first three-year funding award. We are delighted that growing numbers of people who understand the difference that access to excellent counselling makes are choosing to fundraise for us. We were particularly proud that YWCS was recognised by a nomination for the King's Award for Voluntary Service. On behalf of the women whose lives have been transformed, our thanks go out.

YWCS has a good understanding of the challenges that will face women in the future, and sadly know that demand for our highly regarded service will only increase. By continuing to build our organisation and work in collaboration with other service providers across the City, we plan to be able to meet this need and to provide a safety net for vulnerable women in York in the coming years.

Values



Our values, drawn up in consultation with staff, counsellors and trustees, underpin and guide everything York Women's Counselling Service does. In delivering this service and running our organisation, we want all our work to be informed by our core values and by always holding in mind the wellbeing of all of those engaging with YWCS or receiving a service from us.

Fairness

Integrity, inclusion and equality are the foundations on which our community is built and continues to grow from.

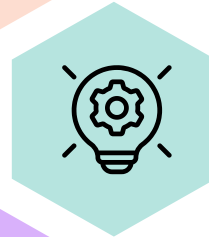
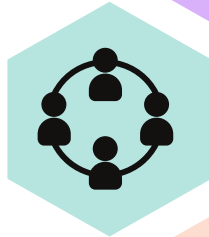


Relationships

Building transformative relationships with the women who are using our counselling service is at the very core of everything we do.

Community

YWCS is a community of women who share a commitment to offering a high-quality counselling service to women within the York community. Community is at the heart of what we do.



Creativity

We value the use of imagination, inspiration and inventiveness within our YWCS community to create positive change for women.



Relevance

We aim to make everything we do purposeful, meaningful and tailored to the individual needs of our clients, volunteers and staff and our organisation.

Safety

We are committed to doing all we can to safeguard our clients, colleagues and organisation, promote their health, wellbeing and human rights and protect them from harm, abuse and neglect.

In order to make counselling accessible to everyone, we have a hardship fund called the SPRING FUND. When a woman cannot afford the minimum £15 per session donation we can subsidise her fee from this fund. In 22/23 there was a 8% increase in subsidised session uptake, from 17.9% to 26.09% of all of our clients.

Updates from our staff



“It’s a pleasure to manage the highly skilled professional team of volunteer and trainee counsellors and psychotherapists and I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge their amazing work and thank them”

Emma Drake, Counselling Manager

It’s a pleasure to manage the highly skilled professional team of volunteer and trainee counsellors and psychotherapists and I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge their amazing work and thank them. Put simply, without their dedication the organisation would not be here doing what it does best. The leadership team and I never take for granted their incredible gift of time.

The issues York women continue to deal with are varied and all are highly impactful upon their mental health, from domestic and sexual abuse to grief, parenting and financial issues. As a result, clients present with various mental health concerns such as anxiety, eating disorders, depression, addictive behaviours, personality disorders, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts. Covid continues to impact mental wellbeing; in particular, the development of working from home, for a lot of people this has been advantageous but for others it has left them isolated and unable to make and sustain valuable supportive connections.

We have also seen more younger women looking for support in managing high levels of social anxiety. Periods of lock-down and the ever-increasing range of social media platforms have resulted in face-to-face activities becoming hugely anxiety provoking. This potentially indicates the developmental stage of building and maintaining relationships, both personal and professional, became inhibited during this period. In addition, clients are expressing extremely low levels of self-esteem, constantly comparing themselves to unrealistic filtered images of human beauty. This low level of self-worth has resulted in women making unsafe decisions about their physical and emotional well-being.

Provision of low cost, and where it needs be, free counselling for vulnerable women is at the heart of what we do. The ever-increasing impact of the cost-of-living crisis is borne out by our experience. Where difficult choices exist many women will prioritise their families over themselves, and women are less able to afford to contribute to the cost of their counselling. The percentage of women we’ve needed to support through our Spring Fund has risen from 17% in 2020-21 to 26.09% at the time of writing. I am all too aware of the pressures on our fundraising to make this possible, and grateful that this vital subsidy continues to be in place.

For everyone who is part of YWCS, wellbeing is a priority; unfortunately, during 2022-2023, YWCS experienced an adverse impact upon some of the staff and counsellors’ resilience levels; therefore, as we look forwards to 2023 – 2024, we are exploring ways, in line with our values, of offering specialist wellbeing help when needed for the whole team.

Our counsellors and psychotherapists are the heart of our organisation and enabling them to feel supported, relaxed and resilient will continue to be one of my main priorities over the coming year.

“We continue to be so grateful for the support we get from generous donors and we do hope this continues as we navigate these latest challenges; we simply cannot survive without it”

Charlotte Walton, Operations Manager



We emerged from the pandemic with enormous pride that not only had we survived, but thrived thanks to emergency grants and the dedication and commitment of our therapists and trustees. However, we were launched immediately into a cost-of-living crisis which had a devastating impact on those already living a hand-to-mouth existence. Demand rose once more, yet client donations fell due to so many clients having nothing left to give. We refuse to turn women away for financial reasons, and so our ongoing challenge is to find alternative sources of income so that we can continue supporting those women most in need.

We continue to be so grateful for the support we get from generous donors and we do hope this continues as we navigate these latest challenges; we simply cannot survive without it.

I made the difficult decision to leave my role as Operations Manager in July 2023 to focus on developing a private counselling practice. However, I have remained involved in YWCS as a volunteer – both in a counselling and a fundraising capacity. I am as passionate about the organisation as I always have been and am delighted to still be involved in this life-changing organisation.

“I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work alongside the amazing team here at York Women’s Counselling Service”

Helen Fairburn, Director




I am delighted to introduce myself as the new Director of York Women’s Counselling Service.

I am a passionate advocate of the empowerment of women and believe that every woman deserves access to quality mental health care, regardless of their background or personal circumstances. Sadly, gender discrepancies and barriers continue to persist that uniquely affect women in various aspects of their lives. The real impact of the pandemic on women and the services that support them is still being fully realised, challenged further by the current cost-of-living crisis. Having timely access to affordable long-term counselling and other therapeutic support remains evermore important as we navigate these challenges together.

With my background in counselling and a deep understanding of the unique challenges that women face, I am committed to ensuring that York Women’s Counselling Service remains a pillar of support in our local community. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work alongside the amazing team here at York Women’s Counselling Service, as well as collaborate with other local organisations and community members who share our vision. Together, we can continue to strengthen and expand the services we offer to better meet the needs of people in York.

Our counsellors

Our service seeks to benefit not only our clients but also our counsellors. In order to increase their skills and confidence, we offer access to training courses and workshops in the York area as well as peer-to-peer mentoring within the organisation. This, and our welcoming ethos, have enabled us to continue to attract and retain volunteer counsellors of a consistently high quality. Because of the level of support we offer, we are able to take on a number of trainee counsellors who often continue with us after they qualify.



"An amazing place to work, incredibly supportive, encouragement to flourish, incredibly rewarding and humbling to be part of. When I sit back and reflect it is inspiring to think of such a relatively small local charity making big differences to our community – and I'm proud to be part of it" – **Kate**

YWCS is a very warm and friendly place to work. From the moment I first chatted to people working for YWCS to now, 3 years on, I still feel that same feeling of belonging. I love being part of an organisation where women support and empower other women, it makes me feel uplifted, empowered and proud to be female – **Sarah**

It's a real privilege to be part of the team of counselling volunteers at YWCS. We do give a lot as counsellors, but we also get a lot back which makes us feel valued and appreciated – **Charlotte**

Supporting the heart of our organisation



“We hope the work of the trustee group reflects YWCS values and our commitment to promoting wellbeing...”



This has been a busy year for the YWCS trustees and a key objective for us has been to further strengthen our community by increasing our HR resilience and working to make sure our volunteers and staff feel protected, supported and safe.

In relation to the YWCS values and in collaboration with the staff team, we have further developed our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) processes and made a clear statement about our reasons for being a women's only service. We have strengthened our safeguarding processes and developed a wellbeing position statement with recommendations which have been integrated into our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

Our work on building the HR resilience of the organisation and the support we give our volunteers includes the completion of a set of people's policies, with appropriate differentiation between staff and volunteers. We have also put in place a Learning and Development process for staff and volunteers with a mandatory set of flexible and accessible online training courses (eg safeguarding, EDI, GDPR etc). Our CPD programme continues to be free for all our volunteers and staff, along with regular check-ins, team meetings and informal training and mentoring provided by our Counselling Manager. We have instituted a Fair Expenses Policy which continues to include a monthly contribution to clinical supervision costs for our qualified counsellors. These developments are aimed at recognising the generous contribution of our volunteers, providing resources and support for our wonderful team of volunteers and staff, increasing their professional expertise and ensuring safe practice in the operation of the organisation and delivery of our service.

We hope the work of the trustee group reflects YWCS values and our commitment to promoting wellbeing and contributes to fulfilling YWCS's mission to provide a high-quality counselling service to women in the York area who need it, when and for as long as they need it and regardless of their ability to pay.

Liza Miller and Val Baxter, Trustees

Financial stability



Sarah Williams
YWCS Treasurer

During 2022 – 2023 it has been reassuring to have maintained a financial position that has enabled us to plan and respond to the needs of our organisation and our clients.

Mindful of the cost-of-living increases and the pressures facing our client group, we continue to reduce the reliance on counselling contributions to our overall income. In 2022/23 these totalled 25% of YWCS income as against some 50% in 2018/19.

We secured enough funding to continue to support more women, who would otherwise be unable to afford counselling, through subsidising their counselling payments. We aim never to turn women away because of an inability to pay for help; this year 26.09% of our clients were given access to counselling through our The Spring Fund. This assistance kicks in when women can't make any financial contribution and represents a 30% increase on the numbers receiving free support.

Fundraising through bid writing continues to be a key focus; We are proud to have achieved our first three-year funding award from North Yorkshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, for work supporting women who've experienced sexual abuse or sexual violence.

In addition, our fundraising diversification strategy continued to develop: Despite the reduction in counselling contributions, our donation levels overall were maintained thanks to our increased profile and a number of large personal gifts for which we are extremely grateful. Our Continuing Professional Development programme is now contributing income from external participants and room rental at our premises also helps cover our running costs as well as offering a benefit to our volunteer counsellors.

Fundraising will always be a challenge for a small charity and we are not complacent about our position. We regularly check key financial indicators including the monitoring of our Reserves, in line with our Reserves Policy, and will be implementing a 3 year funding plan as part of overall YWCS strategy in the upcoming year.

And a huge thank you

Chelle Thirsk from CGA Accountants. For over 13 years Chelle has given her expertise and considerable time to organising and advising on YWCS finances. Without her YWCS would have struggled and we will be forever grateful for everything she's done. Chelle has handed over the reins of YWCS Treasurer to Sarah Williams who joined us in March 2023. We are delighted that Chelle will continue her involvement as our External Auditor.



Our numbers



Around one in five women have a common mental health problem, such as depression and anxiety – Mental Health Foundation

4

Days waiting list open in October 22 before being filled

1.7 MILLION WOMEN in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse and violence in 2022 – Crime Survey for England and Wales

At YWCS 41% of clients experienced domestic or sexual violence

11

Days waiting list open in April 22 before being filled

WOMEN

Women are twice as likely to experience depression than men (Streb et al., 2021). 15% of women receive treatment for depression, compared to only 9% of men (Mental Health Foundation)

34

Women on the current waiting list November 23

5

Days waiting list open in January 23 before being filled

More than 1 in 5 of our population (22%) are in poverty in our country. 14.5 million people – Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK poverty report 2022

At YWCS 26.09% of our clients accessed our Spring Fund for subsidised counselling due to financial hardship

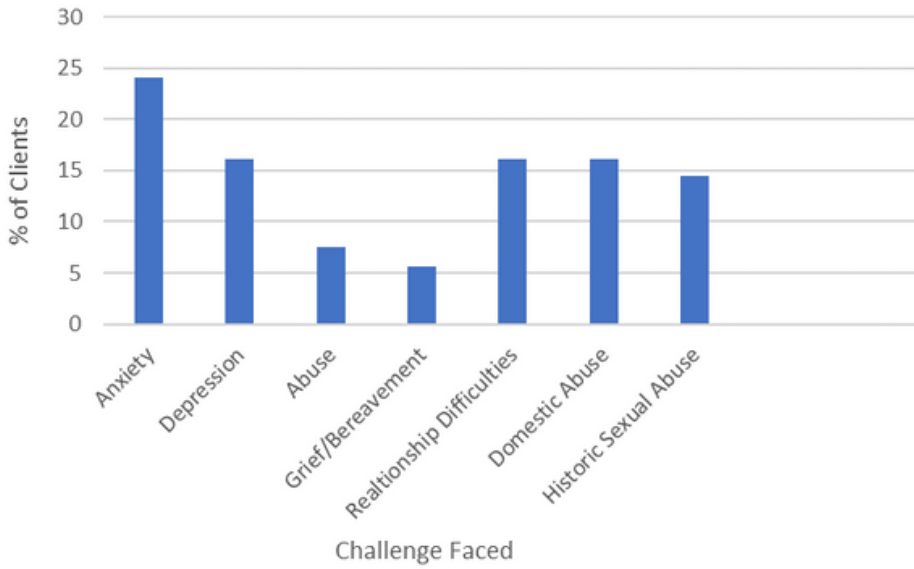
Evidence shows that 53% of women who have mental health problems have also experienced abuse – [healthassured.org](https://www.healthassured.org)

In September 2022, 66.5% of IAPT clients showed reliable improvement – NHS Digital 2022

At YWCS, 100% of clients scored lower on the CORE-10 'psychological distress' measurement tool after therapy



Many clients face multiple challenges but anxiety is the most prevalent



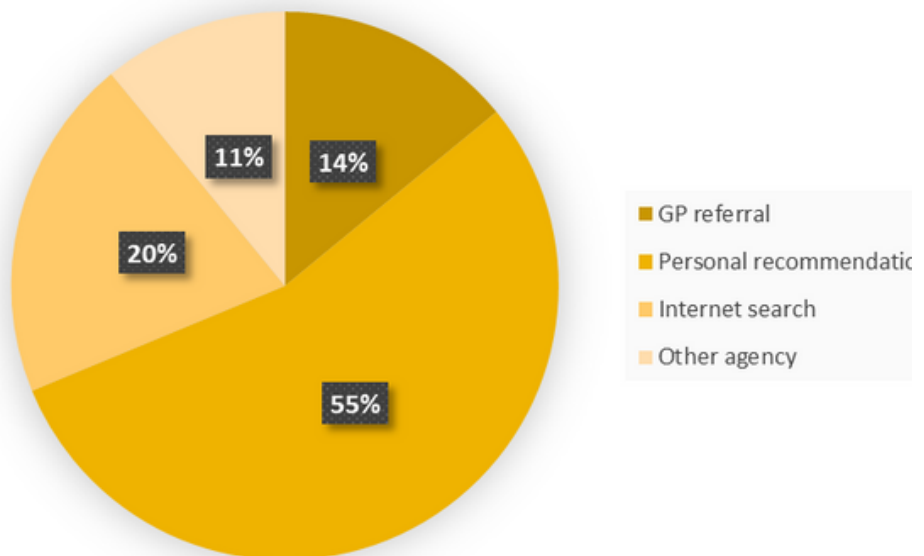
Challenges our clients are facing

Data taken from financial year 2022-2023

Over half of our clients come to us via personal recommendation

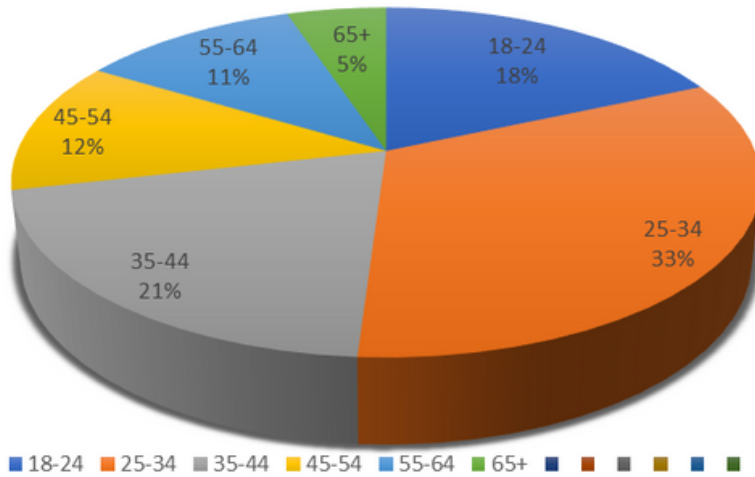


How our clients find out about us



Data taken from financial year 2022-2023

We support women of all ages with a third being aged 25–34



How old are our clients?

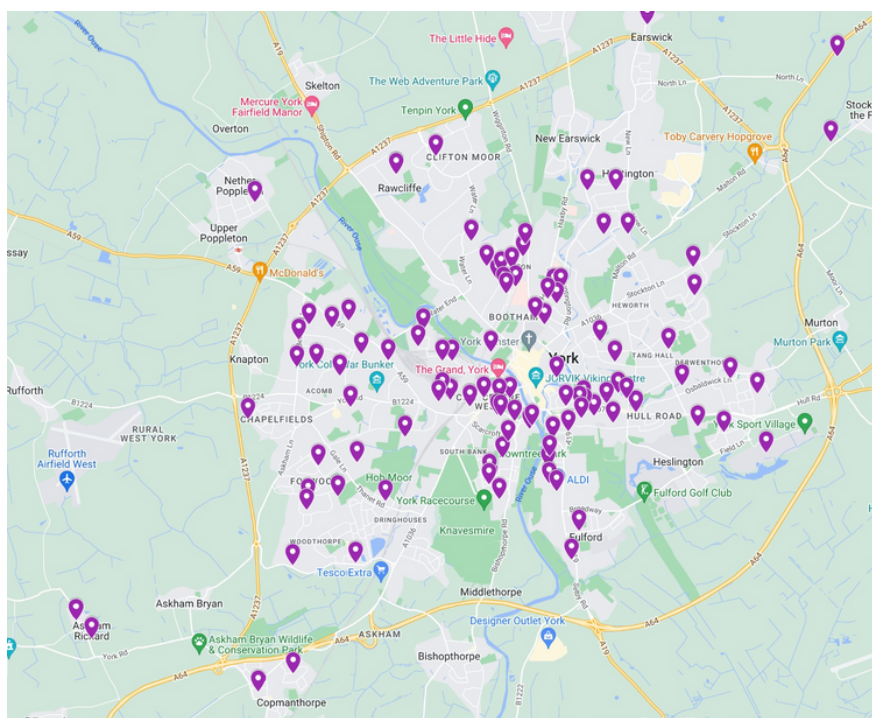
Data taken from financial year 2022–2023

Clients come to us from across the city



Where our clients live

Data taken from financial year 2022–2023



The impact – What our clients say

The most important thing is the fact that YWCS is run by women for women and this was a big attraction for me

Emma really helped me to make sense of my stress and anxiety and, by learning where it was coming from, has helped me to cope with these feelings better. I feel more positive and have even got a new job!

It's been a helpful, excellent experience.

After negative previous therapy experiences, I found YWCS at a time when I had lost hope. YWCS has restored my faith in therapy and enabled me to trust again. Thank you.

I found Frances attentive, compassionate and really approachable. It's an excellent organisation which I would recommend.

Thank you for helping me believe in myself and my abilities

Such a lovely calm atmosphere, it feels safe my counsellor felt very empathetic and listened to me and helped me make sense of stuff. I feel better equipped to deal with things.

Special thanks to:



The generosity of our supporters has enabled us to give vulnerable women life-changing support. Thank you to all the people and organisations that helped make a difference: volunteer counsellors, trustees, staff, service partners, supporters, regular donors, fundraisers, expert volunteers and funders.

Contact details

York Women's Counselling Service

15 Priory St,
York, YO1 6ET

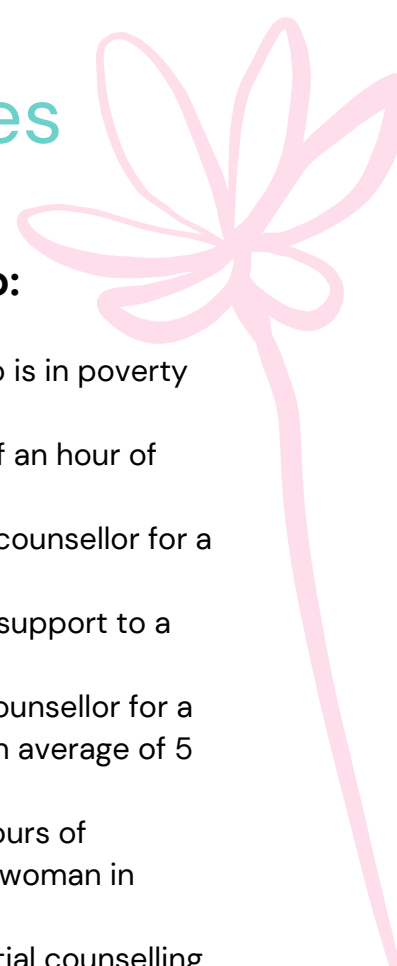
Email: enquiries@yorkwomenscounselling.org

Phone: 01904 652 706

Website: www.yorkwomenscounselling.org



How you can help change lives



Donate today

Scan the QR code if you would like to support York Women's Counselling Service and make a donation.



How your gift will help:

- £15 will provide a woman who is in poverty access to our support
- £35 will cover the real cost of an hour of counselling
- £40 will support a volunteer counsellor for a month
- £100 will provide 6 weeks of support to a woman who needs our help
- £240 supports a volunteer counsellor for a year, with each counselling an average of 5 women annually
- £500 will provide over 30 hours of professional counselling to a woman in distress
- £1000 will secure a confidential counselling room for 4 months, enabling our counsellors to hold up to 640 counselling sessions



Registered charity number: 1086078