



Release Counselling and Therapy for Women CIO Annual Report 2022-2023

The Trustees of Release Counselling and Therapy for Women present their Annual Report for the period ended 31 March 2023 together with the accounts for the Charity.

The accounts comply with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011, the charity's governing document and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015).

Message from the Chair and Chief Executive

Release Counselling and Therapy for Women was set up in Brighton and Hove in January 2013, and registered as a UK charity in 2020, to provide affordable counselling and other forms of support for women across Sussex experiencing mental health distress.

The vision of Release simply put is for better mental health and wellbeing for women across Sussex. As part of this, we aim to increase inclusion, reaching women often excluded from counselling and other mental health support due to cost.

Our mission is to support women to change how they feel and to live better. Through low-cost one-to-one counselling and a range of therapeutic groups, we empower women to bring about change in their lives, live better happier lives, and become more active in their communities through feeling more connected.

We have experienced a period of rapid growth in our activities in the last couple of years, increasing our income to over £100k, with the year ending April 2024 expected to show yet further growth. This increase in income reflects the high levels of demand for our services, which provide such vital support to women across the region.

Lastly, we would like to thank Fran Beckett who stepped down as chair in March 2023, for her invaluable guidance and contribution to the charity during her time in the role. It has been hugely appreciated!

Ellen Baldwin, Chief Executive Officer Felicity Purchase, Chair

RELEASE COUNSELLING AND THERAPY FOR WOMEN CIO TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

Overview of our work

Release Counselling and Therapy for Women CIO are committed to equality of opportunity for all staff and applications from individuals are encouraged regardless of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and marriage and civil partnerships.

Release Counselling and Therapy for Women CIO are fully committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of people and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.



Release Counselling and Therapy for Women (Release), is a UK registered charity, working to improve the mental health of women in Sussex, reduce isolation, and enable women to bring about changes in their lives. We specialise in maternal mental health, supporting mothers and their babies during the perinatal period, a key transition period in which many mothers experience vulnerable mental health.

Release operates a team of qualified counsellors and carefully selected trainee counsellors, and work within the BACP (British Association for Counsellors and Psychotherapists) Ethical Framework. As a team we have additional specialism in the areas of trauma and sexual violation, perinatal mental health, couples counselling, addictions, and bereavement and loss.

All our activities are funded by voluntary donations and other funding sources, to ensure that all women who are in need of support can access our services.

In 2020 Release Counselling and Therapy for Women transitioned from a Community Interest Company to a UK Registered Charity to better reflect the nature of our work. Release Counselling and Therapy for Women has been operating since 2013.

Mission

Release exists to help women across Sussex change how they feel and to live better, through one-to-one counselling and a range of therapeutic groups

Charitable objectives

To protect and promote the mental and emotional health of women (and their families where necessary), living in Brighton and Hove and the surrounding areas. This will be achieved through, but not necessarily restricted to: providing an affordable and accessible counselling service, and by the training of individuals or groups in the provision of such counselling and therapeutic support.

Our core work

We fulfil our mission by running the following three areas of service:

1. **One-to-One affordable counselling** for individuals, on a time-limited basis.
2. **Therapeutic Groups**
3. **Workshops & Retreats**

RELEASE COUNSELLING AND THERAPY FOR WOMEN CIO TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

Achievements and performance

The charity has upscaled it's work during the period covered by this report, and facilitated the delivery of a wide range of community support, including:

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- - Delivering our 10-week postnatal counselling groups for mums experiencing postnatal depression and anxiety, 13 times, in a variety of new locations. All 13 groups developed into peer support groups at the end of the courses.
- - We launched a new 8-week group for second/third+time mums, and ran it twice during the year for 25 mums and their infants.
- - We continued to run our 8-week parenting group, 'Circle of Security,' as a follow-on to Mummyshock.
- - We ran 11 monthly women's mental health wellbeing days, set in nature for over 200 women and their infants, in partnership with Plot 22, The Plot Stanmer Park, and Rock Farm.
- - In addition, we have provided low-cost counselling for women in Brighton & Hove through our 1-2-1 counselling provision, with over 600 hours of counselling.

The following stories give an insight of the impact that our services have had on individual women:

"When I started Mummyshock I was in a really tough place as a new mum. My hormones were all over the place, I couldn't stop crying, I had a baby that needed me to keep it together and I felt like I had absolutely lost the plot. On top of this, I felt that other people were judging me, that other mums were coping so much better than me, and that maybe I just wasn't cut out to be a mum. After the first Mummyshock session I walked away feeling so much less alone. I stopped judging myself for every bad day and thought of the other mums in the group who I knew were also finding these things hard. It felt like I was carrying them with me throughout the week. I knew I wasn't the only person struggling with breastfeeding, waking up every hour throughout the night or crying over a bottle of spilt breastmilk. I don't think there's anything that could have truly prepared me for how difficult the transition into motherhood would be. But Mummyshock helped me put all those broken pieces back together again and now I am so much more confident as a mum, and on top of that, I have a community of fantastic women who I am so thankful to have in my life and who I will continue to see as our babies grow older. I will always be thankful to the Mummyshock team for supporting me in one of the most challenging periods of my life, and for helping me overcome post natal anxiety. I honestly cannot say a big enough thank you for running this fantastic programme and connecting us all. Mummyshock has been the village I needed."

"I have suffered from social anxiety my whole life, but this group has massively changed my early experience of being a mum positively. I thought I'd be a recluse heading into motherhood, but instead I have spoken up within the group and met others outside the group. It has provided me with so much confidence going forward."

"I feel that Mummyshock is incredibly important for all mothers during the postpartum journey. It provided me with a community of mothers and informs and reassures about all the changes that present themselves after having a baby. I wholeheartedly believe that all mothers should experience Mummyshock."

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RELEASE COUNSELLING AND THERAPY FOR WOMEN CIO TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

Plans for the future

In the year ahead, along with continuing our existing delivery, we plan to launch a new Mummyslock group specifically for mums with a history of sexual violence, as well as launching more groups and workshops for LGBTQ+ families in Sussex. We also plan to build on our current success by continuing to meet the growing need for our postnatal groups by providing services in new locations throughout Sussex.

ADDENDUM 2024

In early 2024, we made the strategic decision to focus our delivery this year on the areas of greatest demand for the Charity, which is our Mother Nurture 10-week group and our Second Nature 8-week group across Sussex. We will be suspending our 1-2-1 counselling provision in May 2024 and concentrating on our group work this year.

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