

The Olive Branch Counselling Service (reg charity 1140475) is based in Winchester, serving the community of Hampshire. Our mission is to offer professional and affordable counselling to adults experiencing mental health issues or diagnosed with mental health disorders. Our beneficiaries have gone through a range of difficult experiences such as bereavement, relationship breakdown, isolation and illness.

The Olive Branch is open Mon-Fri 9am to 8pm. We hold the Professional Code of Conduct and the Ethical Framework outlined by British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP). Our 48 volunteer counsellors are either in training or fully qualified and supported by four part-time staff. They are passionate about helping people and work within the BACP Ethical Framework, offering counselling that is competent, non-judgemental, respectful, and confidential. The Olive Branch supports their continuous professional development, with regular training and clinical supervision in line with BACP guidelines. We work in partnership with local organisations such as Solent MIND, Community Mental Health teams and Winchester Bereavement. We were awarded our second Local Hero Award from The Mayor of Winchester in 2021 for ensuring local people were cared for when they most needed help during the pandemic.

The need

One in four people experience mental health issues each year in England. People with anxiety and depression has increased since the pandemic. 90% of our beneficiaries said their mental health had worsened due to the pandemic. The hike in energy bills and food prices in 2022 has further increased these numbers. The 'Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: survey of mental health and wellbeing' from NHS Digital predicts that more than 26,000 people aged 18-64 in Hampshire and Portsmouth will have a common mental health disorder in 2025. We are a local grassroots charity in Hampshire offering long-term affordable talking therapy, in person and online. Clients make a voluntary payment they can afford. For some this is just a few pounds. 2020 62% of our clients were low to zero income. The remaining costs are covered by the charity. Most local counselling providers are private practices charging over £45 an hour or agencies with long waiting lists offering short-term counselling. People on low incomes simply can't afford this.

Our counselling services and reach

Our beneficiaries have multiple levels of disadvantage. Some are unemployed, in poor housing and have experienced relationship stress, loss or anxiety. Others have endured abuse and physical ill-health. On average 50% are referred to us by medical services, 15% by mental health services and 35% are self-referrals. All clients are offered weekly 50-minute counselling sessions many will receive over x 20 sessions over 4-6 months (some require fewer sessions, others up to a year). Our counsellors build a secure relationship with them, unpick underlying reasons for their issues and look at care strategies and coping mechanisms. This will help them to encourage change, improve their self-esteem and ongoing wellbeing. Helping build relationships with family, friends and professionally in the workplace.

Since 2017 we have supported 1,605 clients. 99% said counselling positively impacted their life. Two thirds of our 48 volunteers have joined Olive Branch to do their placement for their last year of BACP training and commit to 100 hours of counselling. The rest are fully qualified up to Level 5 in counselling and 8 are volunteer supervisors. They volunteer around 5 hours a week. In 2020 we moved our counselling online due to the pandemic. Since 2021 30% of counselling takes place online.

Who we help and our impact

Every year the Olive Branch provides counselling to approximately 200 people struggling with their mental health. In 2021 we had 195 new client enquiries and 180 started their counselling with 10 being referred on to specialist agencies. Of these 180 beneficiaries:

- 70% were female and 30% male.
- 80% were on low or zero incomes (under £20,000 is classed as low income)
- 72% were living in and around Winchester, 18% in Southampton and 8% in Eastleigh.
- They were a mix of ages with 19% aged 18-25 years and 13% over 65 years.
- Widowed clients accounted for 6% whilst 16% were divorced, 34% single.
- 95% were White British, 1% Black and 1% Asian

Reasons for needing help were varied. The top five were anxiety, stress, depression, family relationships and bereavement. 28 people were struggling with PTSD, 9 were survivors of domestic violence and 11 were survivors of child sexual abuse. 13 had had suicidal thoughts.

Counselling helps people in multiple ways. Our clients feel listened to and can talk about their experiences, emotions, and their issues in a supportive environment. They start to build their self-esteem, improve their mental health, and feel more able to make any needed changes in their lives. Working with 521 clients since 2019 we had the following outcomes:

- 81% said they immediately established a helpful relationship with their counsellor
- 94% said they trusted their counsellor completely
- 85% said they were able to handle their major problem because of counselling
- 70% said there was an outcome in their life that made counselling worthwhile.

How your money would support us

We anticipate supporting 300 people in 2023, raising 40% of our costs from clients with medium to high incomes and the rest from grants and donations. It costs £43 to deliver one counselling session (a full cost recovery calculation). This incorporates working to help us to provide more counselling to more people in our community who are struggling with cost of living increases and strengthen our resilience and sustainability for the future in line with our Strategy Plan 2020-2025.

As an example a donation of £1,000 will fund 24 counselling sessions and enable people with difficult lived experiences on low or zero income to get help and look forward to a more positive future.

Thank you for supporting us.