

unsung heroes

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service 2008

April 2009



The Beacon Friends Newsletter

Local MP Mark Hunter visits us in Bramhall



Mark Hunter visited our Bramhall offices recently. We had just received news of our Stockport Council funding for our new service in Adswood and he was particularly keen on hearing about that. James also brought him up to date on our Wythenshawe project and B2, as well as information on our adult and schools services.

Mark told us that he was very happy for us to ask him to be a referee for funding applications and also offered to write a letter of recommendation for certain projects. They also talked about raising Beacon's profile, a priority the next year, and he said he would be delighted to support us in any way he could.

Manager James remarked later "I'm very grateful to Mark Hunter for taking such an interest in us and offering his support. It really means a lot to a small charity like Beacon and we look forward to him remaining a "Friend of Beacon" well into the future".

Future changes to our Newsletters

To spread our net a little wider, and endeavour to keep the content of our Newsletters interesting and up to date, we intend in the coming issues to feature particular aspects of Beacon's work that haven't been covered before. Look out for features about each of our satellite counselling venues and stories about the volunteer counsellors and receptionists who work in them. Future editions will also have a focus on B2 (Counselling for Young People), our Schools Counselling Service, and on the progress of our new Adswood Project.

So here we go - our first in-depth look brings you everything you were curious to know about our **Barnardos/Beacon Wythenshawe Project**

The project involved:

- ⇒ An innovative idea working in partnership with a national children's charity – Barnardo's
- ⇒ Working outside the Stockport area in one of the most deprived areas in the UK
- ⇒ Facing new challenges
- ⇒ A struggle for funding

Overview & background info

The pilot started in October 2007 in two areas – Woodhouse Park and Benchill, in partnership with the national children's charity Barnardos. We offered counselling in 2 of their Children's Centres and the majority of our clients are the young parents of the children who attend the centres. At outset a pot of money was provided by Barnardos to help two of our volunteer counsellors to provide 3 hours of counselling per week together with Barnardos admin support.

Now after 18 months in operation we are able to evaluate some important data. Consistent recording and monitoring has been routine throughout this period enabling James to now produce his second Wythenshawe report on the results. Overall, this shows that we are making a significant difference in the lives of our clients by improving key aspects of their mental health and well-being. It further demonstrates that we have quickly become established and trusted, and that our service is valued by those who use it.

Its history: James writes about its birth.....

Supervisor Margaret Parker suggested I contacted Helena Richards from Barnardo's Parental Outreach. This resulted in a meeting with her along with Centre Manager Debbie Koroma, and from the start we realised that we shared the approach and values around wanting to make a difference in local communities by focusing on people's needs rather than being caught up in politics. We agreed to work together in principle and to find a way to set up a counselling service for parents.

Within a couple of months counselling started with 2 volunteer counsellors; Kirsty Hill and Wendy Dwan working in Woodhouse Park and Benchill, and in April 2008 Fiona Douglas took over from Wendy at Benchill. Our counsellors very quickly realised that their work was quite different to what they were used to because it tended to be much more emotionally demanding. This is because, whilst any client can present with depression, domestic and other abuse, family difficulties, or child protection issues, clients at Wythenshawe tend to present with each of these issues *all at once*, and their lives are often more chaotic and challenging as a result. Our

counsellors need to be able to hear some very difficult things, not be overwhelmed by the weight of issues, and remain focused on therapeutic work rather than getting lost in a maze, and this is something that both Fiona and Kirsty are very able to do. More than this, both counsellors work autonomously since there is no other Beacon presence at either venue, and they are able to work with the staff on Child Protection issues when necessary.

Saying all of the above, I know that Fiona and Kirsty find their work there tremendously satisfying, and are passionate about the difference Beacon is making. I also found last year very fulfilling since the project has ironed out some administrative difficulties and is developing very nicely into the finished article, and most importantly, the benefits and improvements we are seeing in many of the clients lives makes it all worthwhile. I want to thank Fiona and Kirsty (and Wendy) for their hard work in making this project such a success.

James Harper

Some facts & figures

Clients have been referred to us by:

- Health Visitors (45%)
- Barnardos SureStart (38%)
- Other professionals (17%)
- 95% of our clients have are female, which is a far higher proportion than the 60% that Beacon finds in its other services. This higher percentage could be expected given the fact that clients are all service users of SureStart Children's Centres
- 88% of our clients are unemployed, while only 3% are working – an indication that our service is being offered where it is needed most, since unemployment and parenthood are two significant factors in the likelihood of experiencing mental and emotional distress.

The main issues brought to counselling

Depression and anxiety have been the primary issues which together made up over half of the problems brought to counselling. However, a surprising 12% of clients came for help with sexual abuse issues which is a far higher percentage than we experience elsewhere.

Monitoring forms

A number of our clients in Wythenshawe have limited literacy and language skills and many have found our monitoring forms too time consuming. However, these forms are an essential tool for us to evaluate our service and so we are considering ways to minimise the "form filling".

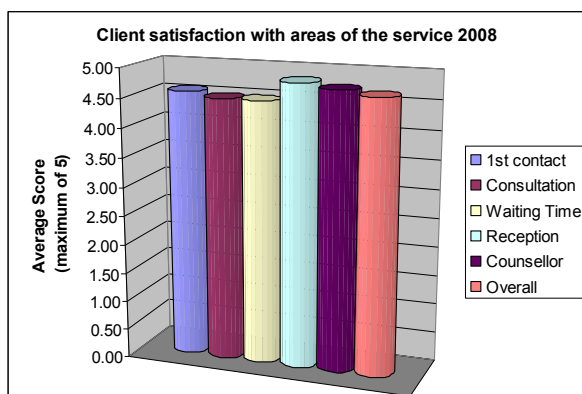
"Beacon Friend" raises funds for our Wythenshawe project

One of the original founders of Beacon 25 years ago, and a long time enthusiastic "Beacon Friend" Ann Sejrup has been raising funds to help us with this project. She has recently talked about our Wythenshawe service to 3 groups of people at Bramhall Methodist Church and received the fantastic amount of £702.31 in donations which she has given to us to help run our service. Fantastic news! A huge thank you to Ann - and also to everyone at the Bramhall Methodist Church.

What our clients think of us

According to our monitoring, our clients found the overall service welcoming and non-judgemental. The counselling helped them to think more clearly, understand their situation, relax and find calm, and they also valued the confidentiality it offered. Other outcomes showed that 75% of clients who responded said they would recommend our service.

To demonstrate this more clearly, below is one of James's famous "charts" which shows client satisfaction in Wythenshawe during 2008. The chart shows the outcomes (or benefits) of the project. Six key areas of mental health are assessed: self-confidence, self-esteem, ability to cope in the future, improved relationships, stress levels and self-knowledge. Clients were asked to rate how counselling at Beacon had improved, (or not improved), these areas in their lives and the chart shows the average score in each of the areas.



On the chart scale, the maximum is 5 which equates to excellent, with 3 being satisfactory and 1 being poor. As you can see, in each area, the project is making a significant difference to the mental well-being of the service users and this shows that people coming for counselling at Wythenshawe can be confident of receiving some benefit.

One obstacle has proved difficult – 20% of parents have struggled to access our service through lack of childcare. However, with the new funding from this month, SureStart will offer childcare facilities to these parents. We will continue to monitor this area to see if providing childcare moves the barrier identified from our monitoring to date.

How we fund this special service

This has been a sticky issue to tackle. James spent a lot of time last year developing and building a relationship with the Manchester Primary Trust. This eventually led to Debbie and James making a presentation to the Mental Health Commissioners (basically the people who buy mental health services, such as counselling) for 3 year's funding to continue and expand the project to cover the 5 Children's Centres in Wythenshawe. So far, there has been no response, and with the recession impacting on PCT budgets, it's hard to see if we will get the funding. However, we are not downhearted!



Originally, Barnardos was so keen to start the service that they managed to find a small pot of money to get it going and now, a year on, they have found another larger amount to ensure it continues for a further 12 months. This has given us a much needed piece of stability to the project and also time to gather more evidence of the outcomes that we need to convince the PCT and other potential funders that it's a project worth investing in. 2 counsellors will remain in Wythenshawe for now, and James will be working on obtaining extra funding wherever he can get it!

A poem written by one of our Wythenshawe clients

*I feel like a flower, on my own in a weed filled garden,
I know how pretty I look amongst those ugly weeds,
But the more it rains the bigger the weeds grow,
I am lost in a forest of big weeds waiting to be picked,
But as the days go by, I am no longer visible.*

*The weeds are taller than me now; they take all my sun,
The wind is picking up now,
Every time it does, another petal floats away,
My stem is weak; I hate them weeds so much,
Soon I have no petals.*

*I don't feel like a flower anymore,
My stem does not reach high,
Instead it sags down to the cold, wet mud,
I don't want to be picked; I don't hate the weeds,
I haven't the strength.*

The sun goes down and so do I.



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**Comments from a
few of our
Wythenshawe
clients.....**

*"Made me
see I can do
whatever I
want to in
the future"*



*"Helped with
school" (attendance and
relationship with staff)*

*"I have been able to enjoy
things more and not self
harm as much if at all. To
try and find other ways
to relax and calm down"*

*"My counsellor really
helped me. I would like
to see her every week.
Thanks for your help,
you've been a star"*

*"I have talked about my own
self and how to talk to people
on how I feel"*

Our 2 Counsellors write about their work in Wythenshawe

We have been working as Beacon counsellors in a collaborative project with Barnardo's to provide a counselling service in Wythenshawe, based out of two SureStart centres in Benchill and Woodhouse Park.

There is a well recognised need for a counselling service in Wythenshawe, made even more noticeable after the closure of BESS, a counselling charity similar to Beacon, in 2007. In particular, Benchill and Woodhouse Park are amongst the most deprived areas in the UK; it has some of the highest levels of depression, anxiety, and very high levels of unemployment, with 50% of households in Benchill not having any family member in work. These statistics tell one story, but the other is the lack of hope and levels of despair that many who live in Wythenshawe feel, which makes improving lives a far more difficult task.

We take referrals from a number of different sources including health visitors, Barnardo's workers and midwives. We manage our own caseload, which involves carrying out initial assessments on clients, managing the waiting list, providing information to help monitor the service we offer, and seeing clients on a weekly basis. We work alongside caseworkers to enable clients to attend their counselling sessions, and a Barnardo's administrator books the appointments.

For us it all started back in 2007 when James asked for counsellors to work in this area. We both jumped at the chance. Kirsty has been there since the beginning of the project in October 2007, and Fiona joined in May 2008. From the outset we were determined to work as a team, giving each other

support. Fiona previously worked for BESS for 2 years in Benchill and Woodhouse Park, whilst Kirsty had volunteered at Bramhall for several years, and welcomed this as a new experience.

From the outset we both recognised how different it would be from working in Bramhall. We really value each other's input and know we can count on each other for support whenever we need it. We both feel this, and the quarterly meetings with James have played a large part in our success in now having a smooth running service with two – relatively – sane counsellors!

Working in Wythenshawe is proving extremely challenging due to the nature of the issues our clients bring. One of the main issues we talk about to each other is how our clients see the level of abuse, deprivation and violence as an everyday part of their lives, and have no recognition that it can be any different. However you would have to take us both kicking and screaming out of Wythenshawe as we meet the most amazing people, and feel so rewarded by the changes we see in our clients. We hope in the future the service will be expanded, and that more Beacon counsellors will be able to join our team.

We hope this has given you a glimpse into a little known project within Beacon, and to end we would like to share one of our client's poems about how it is for her to live in Wythenshawe (see page 3).

Fiona Douglas and Kirsty Hill

The future

Our service has already worked through one or two teething problems, and there are a couple more minor issues to iron out. However, the clear focus from now on is gathering more evidence on the outcomes and impact of the Wythenshawe service. This will present a much stronger and more convincing case to potential funders to enable them to feel confident in investing in this service.