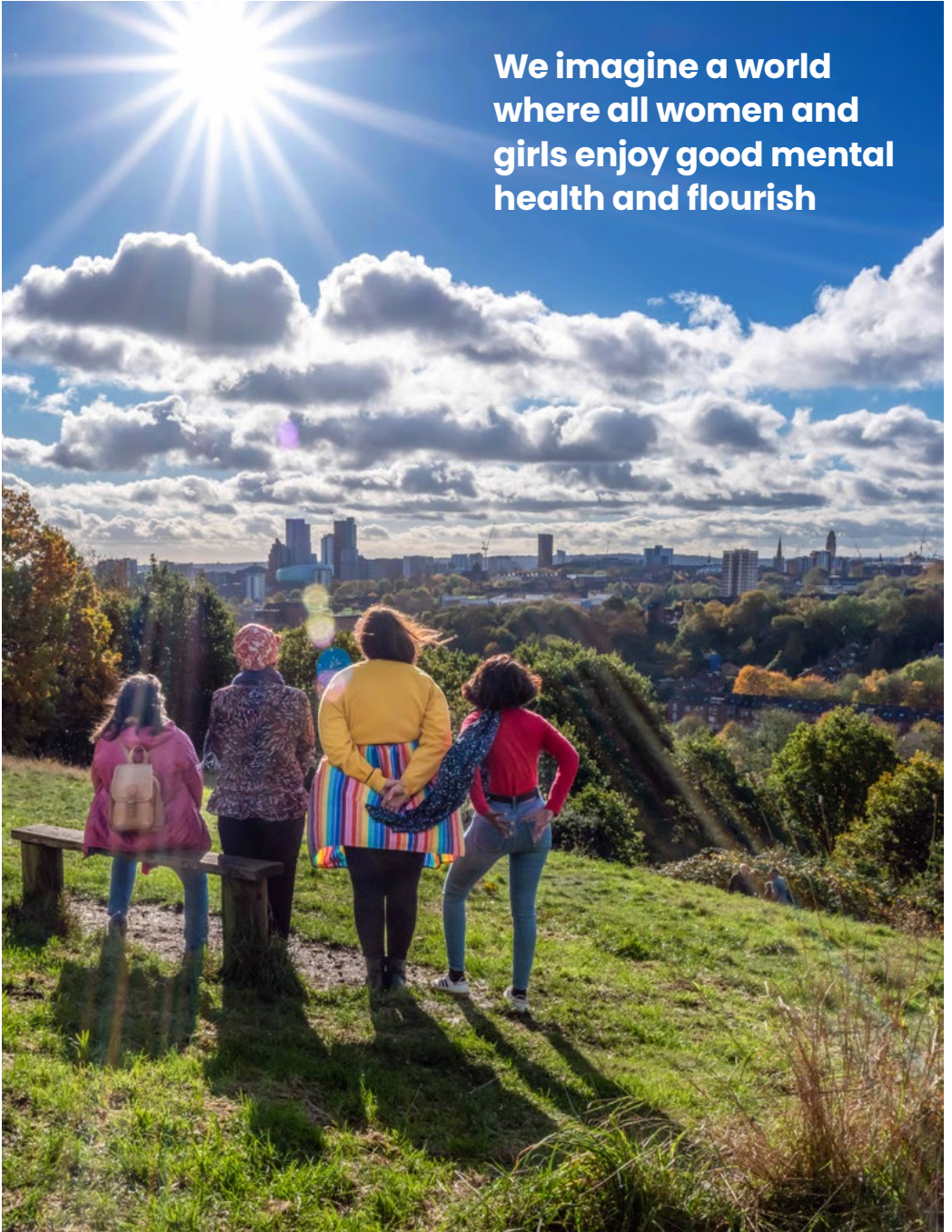





**We imagine a world
where all women and
girls enjoy good mental
health and flourish**



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**“These sessions
have been life
changing for me”**

Annual Report from the Chair and Chief Executive

The Charity's 41st year was positive with more women and girls receiving support than ever before. We were delighted to work with both consistent and newer funders such as **Leathersellers Foundation**, and with mental health and voluntary sector partners across Leeds.

The year enabled us to work in more areas that are core to our mission. For example, working with **Leeds Women's Aid** looking at psychological therapy support for women in refuges and re-starting our work with 16/17 year olds following the pandemic. We continued to host the Visible Project who were the originators of the city's **Trauma Informed Charter** adopted in the year.

Next year we will be finalising the review of our strategy. Our society still holds too many everyday challenges for women and girls, particularly those experiencing deprivations and it has been great to use an increasing bank of research on 'what works' from agencies such as the **Agenda Alliance** and funders such as **Pilgrim Trust**. This along with feedback from the women who use the service helps to keep us on track and gives us the energy to continue our work.

As we end the year we are delighted to have been chosen as the **Lord Mayor's Charity of the Year** for 2023/24. Councillor Al Garthwaite has been a dedicated passionate supporter of women's services for many years – it is an honour to work with her during her year as Lord Mayor.

Jules Blackwell
Chair of Trustees

Tessa Denham
Chief Executive

Women and girls using the service

The year to March 2023 saw us regain our full capacity after the main years of the pandemic. Reaching more women than ever before. The women who use our Service can find it hard to access or improve with more mainstream services, which can have limited flexibility to meet their multiple needs.

558

Reaching further

women and girls benefited in 2022–23.

Having an average of 21 sessions over eight months. Offering a longer-term therapeutic relationship supports work progress at a manageable pace for women with complex trauma histories.

53%

Addressing health inequities

of women and girls live in the lowest 13% of areas in the multiple deprivation index, Leeds' most deprived areas

100%

Real change

of women and girls leave counselling saying their relationships have improved, 97% feeling they cope better with their feelings and 94% agreeing they tackle difficult situations better.

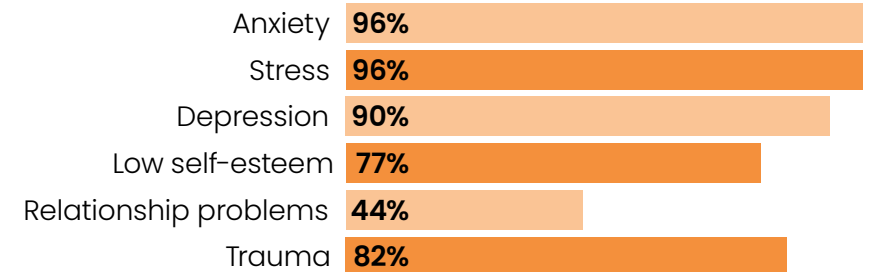
72%

Increase in hope

of women feel less despairing / more hopeful after counselling. Over two thirds are significantly less distressed by unwanted images or memories and feel a greater sense of Well-being.

Nine out of ten women and girls have longstanding 'clinical' mental health problems affecting all areas of their lives

With an average of six long lasting problems:



Severe at 18%, then Moderately Severe at 25% and Moderate at 33%, Mild 19%, with non-clinical 5%

Trauma specialised

We take account of the potential impact of severe and/or long-term adversity on development, resilience, and the capacity to form relationships. Our work addresses the frequent **mislabelling** of women and girls with histories of trauma as 'uncooperative, hard to engage, non-compliant or treatment resistant, needy or aggressive'.

Our focus is in supporting women and girls' **holistic** relationship with experiences of trauma and its impacts and consequences. 82% of women and girls' have trauma histories. Including those with experience of sexual violence – as an adult (59%) or child (56%) with two in five beneficiaries experiencing both. We work with the traumas of wider gendered violence, multigenerational poverty, discrimination and social injustice, relationship abuse.

We invest significant resources in trauma training such as **EMDR**. Essential casework support around wider health and social needs enables women to use the specialised therapy we offer to maximum benefit.

Impact of cost of living rises on women

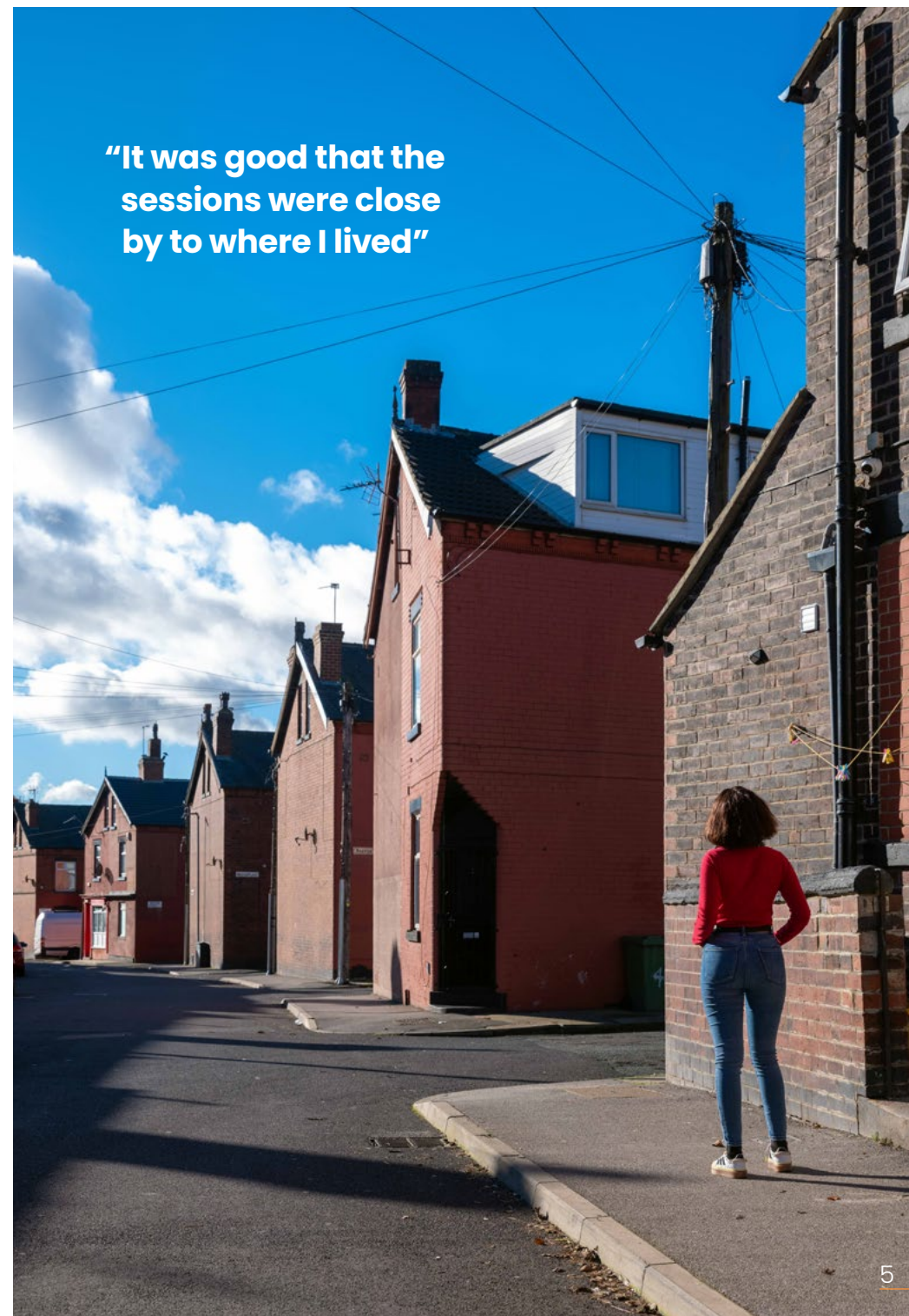
In 2022 the cost of living started to rise steeply. By 9.6% in the year to October 2022 – the fastest rate in four decades.

Parliament in launching a new enquiry recognised that **"the rising cost of living disproportionately affects women, with existing inequalities worsened by the pandemic"**¹. Research from an Agenda Alliance pandemic survey identified financial problems and poverty as key drivers of mental health issues in women and girls. **"The cost-of-living crisis is exacerbating these existing systemic problems, increasing the vulnerability of women and girls already living in poverty."**²

Women are more likely to be in low-paid work. We usually take on the majority of caring responsibilities, so struggle to work more hours as things cost more. We can act as the "shock absorbers" of poverty, going without food, clothes, or heating to protect family. There are more impacts for women from ethnic groups with higher rates of poverty, disabled women and survivors of domestic abuse.

We work hard to make sure women can access counselling. Rebuilding the places we work from. We offer support with travel and childcare costs. Our caseworkers help women to access wider support around the impacts of cost of living rises.

Women and girls tell us that these are uniquely safe, culturally sensitive spaces where they can speak openly and fully about their experiences, feelings and thoughts. Crucially, that this is something they usually cannot access in any other area of their lives. In a society becoming more understanding about the prevalence and harmful and impacts of for example racism, misogyny and multi-generational poverty, these types of spaces are vital to mental health and we offer this to those with unmet needs who cannot afford private counselling



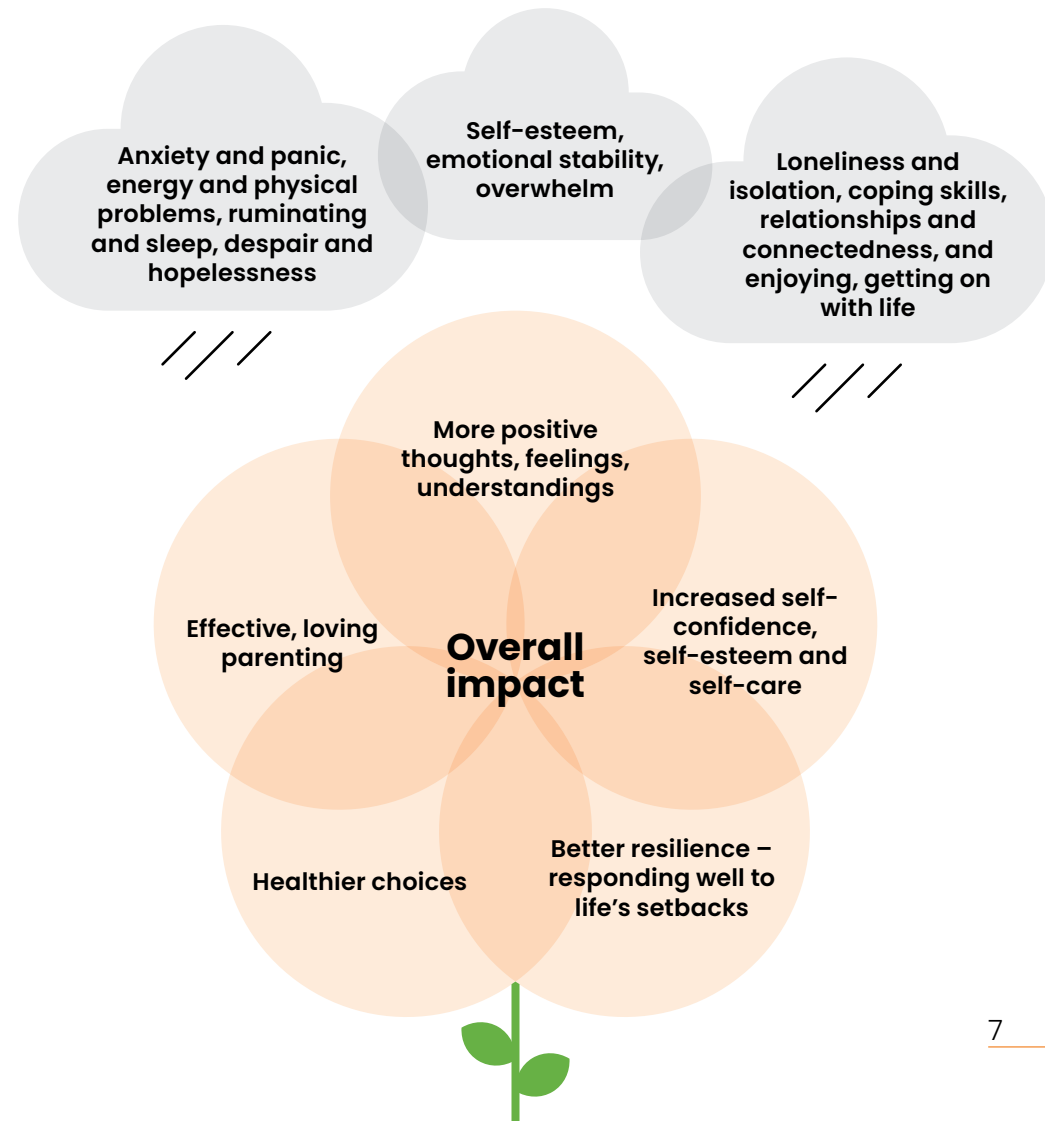
“I can now deal with my son's behaviour in a positive way and understand better when things are too much for him”



Women's achievements

Women start their counselling experience, at WCTS, with average Moderately Severe psychological distress. Severity usually seen in secondary services. This distress reduces to Mild on average; with two thirds of women and girls experiencing clinical and/or reliable improvements

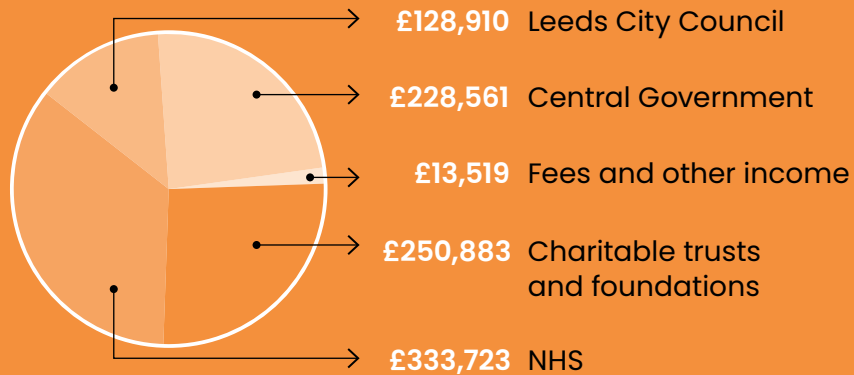
Women make improvements in areas such as:



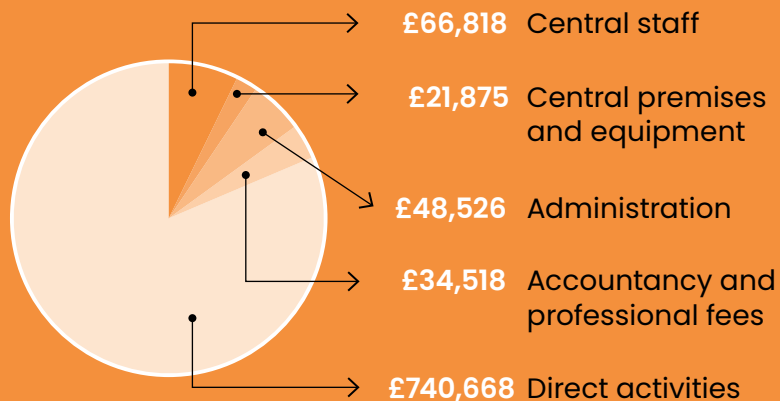
Funding sources and expenditure

The Service is fortunate to have a diverse funding base through the support of committed and enlightened funders.

Income sources



Expenditure



Thank you

We appreciate working in a city with vibrant diverse organisations. Thank you to all our partners and funders over the year.

Partner organisations

- Armley One Stop Centre
- Basis Yorkshire
- Bangladeshi Centre Leeds
- Bramley Children’s Centre
- Community Links
- East Leeds Health Centre
- Health for All
- HomeStart
- Leeds City Council
- Leeds City College
- Leeds Community Healthcare
- Leeds GP Federation
- Leeds Women’s Aid
- Leeds and York Partnership Trust
- Oakwood Lane Medical Practice
- Northpoint
- Touchstone

Funders



Thank you to all of our partners in:



Footnotes

1. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/328/women-and-equalities-committee>
2. <https://www.agendaalliance.org/our-work/policy-briefings>

Photos by Lizzie Coombes
Design by Brand Ethos

Thank you to our amazing trustees who volunteer their time and skills to the charity, and to the committed staff group who offer so much expertise in supporting beneficiaries.

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