



**"I no longer feel I
am living in the
fog I was before.
I feel more in
control of my own
life and confident
within myself and
with others."**



"We are proud of our approach, our reputation and grateful for the privilege of making a difference.

I look forward to launching our new post pandemic strategy later in the year focusing on where we can impact the most in Leeds and wider West Yorkshire."

Jules Blackwell

Contents

A welcome from our Chair	3
Chief Executive's report	4
Overview and stats	6
History in the making	9
Highlights from a journey across four decades	10
What we do	14
Improving outcomes for 40 years	16
Funding sources and expenditure	18
With thanks	19

A welcome from our Chair

In 2022, the Women's Counselling and Therapy Service (WCTS) celebrated 40 years of supporting women and girls in Leeds who have the need for specialist psychological support. Whilst this is an enormous achievement and something to celebrate, the reasons behind this need have not changed and have become more complex with changes in the digital landscape and more recently the pandemic and cost-of-living challenges.

Agenda research **"reveals one in 20 women have experienced extensive physical and sexual violence as both a child and an adult"**. WCTS is a vital response to this.

It is difficult to capture 40 years worth of contributions that WCTS has made, here are some of our successes:

- Long-term professional counselling and therapy with thousands of beneficiaries.
- A team of practitioners passionate about our mission who offer the highest support to women.
- Expertise that extends to wider mental health and social care colleagues.
- Hosted the 2nd national conference on "Feminism and Psychotherapy".
- Publishing evaluations, articles and reports across the sector, sharing key lessons through training and networking.
- Founding partner of Women's Lives Leeds a successful alliance of women's organisations.
- Founder and host of Visible Project

I am thrilled to be part of the story going forward.

Jules Blackwell
Chair



Chief Executive's report

In this 40th anniversary report, I would like to recognise and pay tribute to the thousands of women and girls who have sought and/or offered support in the Service. Each one has played a part in the WCTS of today – a thriving charity with over 25 staff achieving seriously good outcomes year on year and receiving great feedback from clients.

There is a uniqueness in women coming together to effect change in themselves and each other. A way of being together that has cooperation, of moving towards where you can best be of use, of friendship, respect and kindness at its core.

We take this way of working into our partnerships, seeking to work with others with whom we share a vision of all women and girls enjoying good mental health and flourishing. And there are many such organisations in Leeds from the statutory – Leeds Community Healthcare, Leeds and York Partnership Foundation Mental Health Trust, Leeds City Council – to the smaller niche enterprises such as Basis and Asha Neighbourhood Project and individual GP practices such as Oakwood Lane Medical Practice. We value each relationship we have and thank you for the opportunity to work with you.

Likewise, our funders, such thoughtful groups of people sharing vital expertise and support, make our work possible. We would not be here without you!

Tessa Denham
Chief Executive



"I feel sistership with previous leaders of WCTS and immense gratitude for the opportunity to lead this fantastic organisation' during its thirties. I look forward to seeing the emergence of a new strategy for our forties."

Tessa Denham

"Thank you for giving me this opportunity to work on myself. I can honestly say you saved my life. Keep helping people."

Overview and stats

The second year of the pandemic continued to show us the incredible resilience and adaptability of the women who access our services.

Women found ways to use the support in striving to make real positive differences to their lives and those of their children and families. We were able to carry on helping improve women's psychological distress and mental health problems with our gender specialised holistic approach.

Transforming futures

457

women and girls were helped by us this year in a return to pre pandemic levels.

Three quarters with mental health needs normally seen in secondary care mental health setting.

Engaging with BAME women

31%

of women and girls we helped are from BAME communities in Leeds.

Our success at engaging with these groups as part of our wider commitment to inclusivity is clear.

Real change

63%

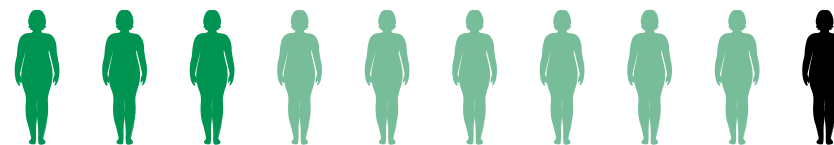
Of women and girls leave our counselling "recovered or with statistically significant improvements" after six sessions or more.

Supporting families

2/3

of our clients are mothers, with over half having responsibility for children under 16, and 5% having had children removed into care.

Meeting complex needs



Nine out of ten of our clients presented with highly 'complex' needs (more than one issue or difficulty affecting mental, physical, emotional, social or financial health or wellbeing).

Six out of those nine were suffering from at least seven problems, including addictions (17%), anxiety and stress (100%), depression (95%), low self esteem (77%), interpersonal problems and (77%), trauma/abuse (80%).

Addressing poverty

100% of the women we worked with were on low incomes or in poverty (DWP definitions).

Over half live in most deprived 10% areas (including 21% in lowest 3%)

In short: we're reaching the women who need us most.

Holistic approach — all-round improvements

- 98% of clients feel that they understand themselves better
- 93% feel that their relationships with others have improved
- 93% feel that they've been coping better with their feelings
- 96% feel that they can tackle difficult situations better
- 98% feel that they look after themselves better

"I had my first appointment after losing my baby. The support during this time and whilst in lockdown was an invaluable lifeline. It was so reassuring that someone was there to hold space for me and help me make sense of things."

History in the making 40 years of support

WCTS in its 40th year of supporting women and girls in Leeds is part of a long history of women's rights activism and feminism dating back to the suffragette movement including the extraordinary Leonora Cohen (1873-1978) a Leeds suffragette and later magistrate.

Women like Leonora paved the way for others such as the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group active in the 1970s and 1980s. This Group advocated for the importance of women-only spaces and identified male violence against women and girls as a keystone in the oppression of women. They organised the first UK Reclaim the Night march in 1977.

This public activism seeded in the early 1900s through the 1970s continues today. In 2021 Leeds Millennium Square saw hundreds of women lay on the ground in protest and to honour the memory of Sarah Everard and others whose lives have been lost to violence and calling for systemic change.

WCTS plays a pivotal role in this proud history. Decades of support for women and girls' recovering from the trauma and consequences of gender-based violence and abuse, empowering them to live fulfilled and self-meaningful lives. WCTS has consistently advocated for women and girls needs across the city and wider, facilitating policy and decision makers in hearing their voices.



Highlights from a journey across four decades

1982

Founded by West Yorkshire County Council offering individual and group therapy.

1984

Awarded Mental Health Foundation grant for women's self-help project.

1986

Publish *Finding Our Own Solutions* in the *Women in Mind* book.

1987

Host national conference on feminism and psychotherapy.

1989

Start group therapy for women with eating disorders.

1990

Drop-in Service begins. One year 'Working with Women' course receives accreditation.

1992

Drop-in service offered to Black women.

1996

Start external consultancy and clinical supervision for sexual abuse. Community Chest funds training for black female professionals.

1995

Begin the Young Women's Project.

1994

Receive Joint finance to host workshops on same and cross-cultural counselling issues.

1993

Psychotherapy with abused women in a women's agency was published in the Journal of Social Work Practice.

1997

Featured in Harper's and Queen as one of 12 reputable national therapy agencies.

1998

Launch *The Impact of Race on Mental Health Services* report.

2000

Receive funding for services in languages other than English.

2004–05

Service expanded to work with 100+ women at any one time.

2006–07

Begin group therapy for women with learning disabilities.

Highlights from a journey across four decades continued

2009

Listen to me project shares learning with the event *Listening to Women City-Wide Developing a Culturally Sensitive Counselling Service*.

2010

Leeds City Council Adult Social Care service review finds "WCTS is providing high quality support to its client group".

2011

Win British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy 'Outstanding Research Project Award'.

2012

Start *MumsTalk* counselling in communities with Bramley cluster.

2013

Begins specialised work with refugees and asylum seekers funded by Comic Relief.

Begins *WomensSpace* self harm pilot.

2018–19

Work with 16 and 17 year old girls begins.

Diversity and Inclusivity Award from the Maternal Maternity Alliance.

Specialised work with women 50+ at risk of violence funded by Comic Relief.

2017

Develops A Service User led Theory of Change for CSA with Basis and Getaway Girls with grant from Centre of Expertise on child sexual abuse.

2016

Founding partner *Women'sLivesLeeds*.

Founder and host of Visible Project.

2015

Starts Lottery funded outreach service *WomensCircle* working with BAME community organisations.

Successive Removals of children into care work begins.

2020

Digital inclusion programme established during the pandemic and new resources for women developed to use remotely.

2021

Awarded a new Leeds City Council five-year contract for core counselling service.

2022

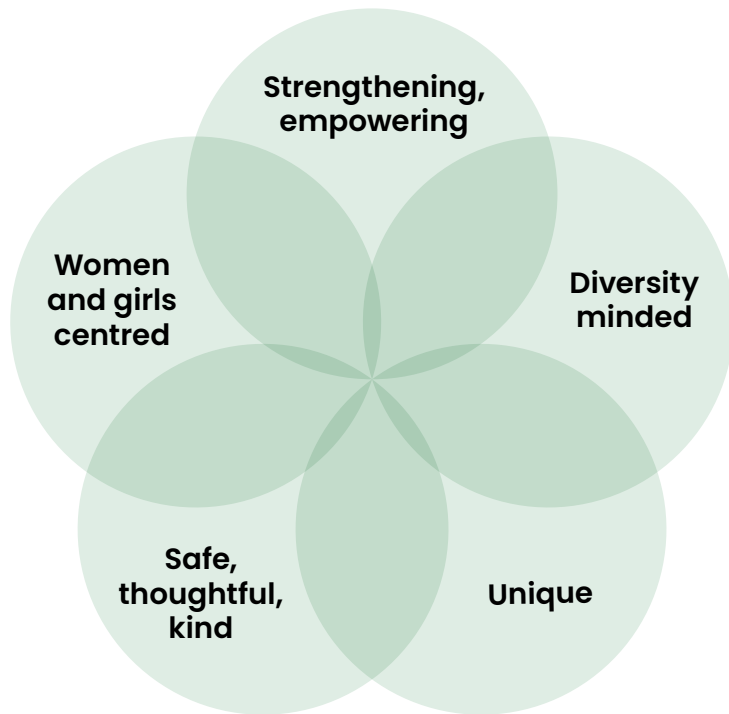
WCTS turns 40 years old.

New initiative with Leeds Women's Aid piloting psychological therapies with women living in refuges.

Visit womenstherapyleeds.org.uk/history to find out more.

What we do

The values at the heart of the Service



The impact we have

Improved mental health and wellbeing
Better resilience – responding well to life's setbacks
Healthier choices
Increased self-confidence, self-esteem and self-care
Effective, loving parenting
More positive thoughts, feelings, understandings

"The counsellor was really good at remembering individual issues we were facing and highlighting methods of handling these as we came across them for each individual."

Improving outcomes for 40 years

Changing women's lives forever

We've always made it our mission to work with those who most need support but who wouldn't normally get it. That means women and girls with highly complex long standing mental health needs, whose identity or circumstances make it unlikely that they'll ask for help.

It's a privilege to work with these women, and the severity of their issues means we're typically able to make a significant difference to their everyday lives. Usually, we can dramatically improve their psychological and emotional health and well-being, and often we can help them completely turn their lives around. Sometimes, we literally save their lives. Always, though, we offer them a powerful mix of long-term care, holistic support and specialist woman-centred therapy: one they can't get anywhere else in Leeds.

The women we work with

We work with some of the most marginalised and disadvantaged women in Leeds, all of them living in poverty. Often, their mental health issues are underpinned by a background of sexual abuse or domestic violence, leading to debilitating trauma and challenges like substance misuse, suicidal thoughts or self-harm.

We also provide specialist support to mothers who are struggling, women with learning disabilities and members of LGBT communities. Working with community partners we're unusually successful at reaching BAME women and girls too, whose contact with mental health services can be particularly limited by cultural factors or stigma and shame.

"I can allow myself to acknowledge that I have been through trauma, that it does and may still affect me in some way, but that's ok."

Our approach and how we work

Our approach is through a multi layered 'intersectional' lens, looking at the bigger, interconnected picture and all the many factors that contribute to a woman's psychological distress. These factors might include her identity (things like ethnicity or sexuality) or her experience (like a history of sexual abuse, unemployment, or being coercively controlled).

We respond with a holistic therapeutic intervention, unpacking, exploring and addressing these factors and, crucially, the interplay between them. We work confidentially and sensitively at a pace that suits our client, collaborating with trusted agencies whenever it will help her recovery.

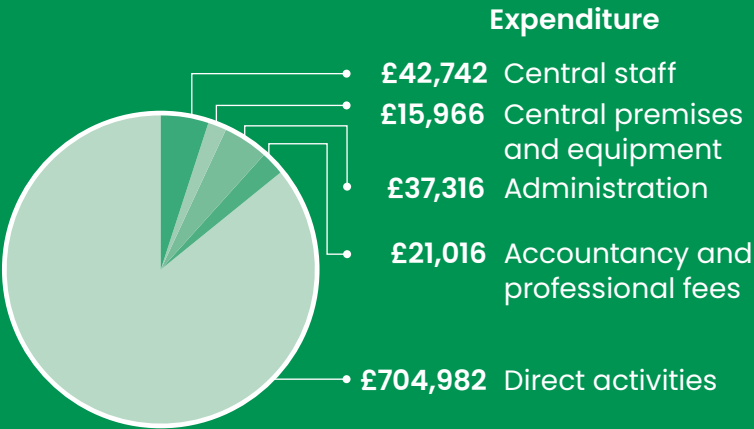
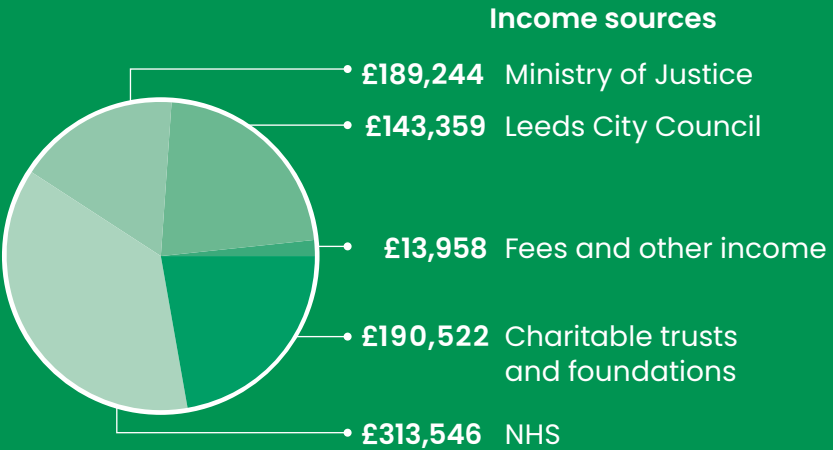
What makes us different

- We offer the long-term support other free services can't, providing specialist psychotherapies for up to two years for women whose complex needs require it.
- Our paid female therapists are specialists in their chosen fields, and are also highly qualified, fully accredited with an average of 10 years' experience.
- We're a women-only service with gender-specific personal and professional expertise, providing interventions and support which addresses the particular needs of anyone who identifies as a woman.

Visit womenstherapyleeds.org.uk/resources to find out more.

Funding sources and expenditure

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



With thanks

We want to recognise our partners over the years for their vital work and look forward to re energising our relationships after the disruption of the pandemic.

Partner organisations

- Armley One Stop Centre
 - Asha Neighbourhood Project
 - Bangladeshi Centre
 - Basis Yorkshire
 - Bramley Children’s Centre
 - East Leeds Health Centre
 - Hamara Centre
 - Leeds City College
 - Leeds Women’s Aid
 - Middleton Health Centre
 - Oakwood Lane Medical Practice
 - Stocks Hill Hub
 - Together Women Project
 - Westfield Medical Centre
- Thank you to all of our partners in:
- WOMEN’S LIVES LEEDS**
Empowering Women and Girls in Leeds

Funders



"Satisfaction amongst WCTS clients is very high. Clients greatly value a women only service. Stakeholder satisfaction is also high, with key partner agencies highly valuing the service. Staff are highly skilled, knowledgeable and passionate about the service they deliver."

Leeds City Council

Service Review Report

"Best thing I've ever done to help myself."

Thank you to our talented and passionate trustees and staff — all pillars of strength in WCTS' work.

Staff team

Abi Rowan
Alisha Chady
Alison Herbert
Andrea Campbell
Angela Higgins
Anwaar Mahmood
Ayla Greaves
Donna Cremin
Emma Marsh
Fazeelat Ali
Freya Hirst
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Jacinta Kent
Jaswinder O'Reilly

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