

Strategy 2025–2028

Women's Counselling
and Therapy Service



**Women's Counselling
and Therapy Service**

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"I think that being
a women-only
service is a part
of WCTS's success.
It is its strength"

"I understand
myself more
and have made
changes that will
last a lifetime"



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“I lived week for week for my counselling session”

A welcome from our chair

It is a pleasure to introduce the strategy outlining our aims and aspirations for the coming three years.

This strategy builds on the excellent work our organisation has achieved during an incredibly challenging time due to the pandemic and recent cost-of-living crisis, a time that has reinforced how women are more adversely impacted by such events. We will strive to continue developing innovative services for women and girls who need support.

We will work collaboratively with others to ensure WCTS remains responsive, relevant, and at the forefront of service delivery, leading and contributing to women-centric service developments across the city.

Jackie Whittle
Chair

Our impact

Women's risk of self harm and/or suicide reduces to non-clinical levels

9 in 10

Every year more than **nine in 10** women giving feedback told us that counselling helped them understand themselves and other people better, cope better with feelings, deal with problems, and tackle difficult situations, and/or look after themselves better.

80%

of women describe major improvements in their close relationships, with mothers reporting a marked increase in their ability to parent effectively.

3 in 4

of women having 11 or more counselling sessions make significant improvements in recovering good mental health and wellbeing (over half from the starting point of long-standing moderately severe difficulties).

See our annual impact reports for more details:
womenstherapyleeds.org.uk/resources

Our offer

We support disadvantaged and marginalised women and girls facing complex health and social situations to recover from experiences of abuse, violence, neglect, and trauma, and to thrive through female experiences of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and mothering, and menopause.

Through our 2019-2024 strategy, we achieved great progress:

- **Working with well over 400 women and 16–17-year-old girls each year** helping them to stop feeling suicidal, reduce self-harming behaviours, feel better about themselves, make choices right for who they are, feel better about their relationships, get a first job or a better job, be happier with their parenting, and achieve important goals.
- **Strengthening our relationships with community partners** working together to make more of a difference. Becoming part of Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service accessed by 17,000 people a year.
- **Hosting Visible – a cross-sector partnership improving health and wellbeing** for adult survivors of child sexual abuse. We are a leader in Leeds' trauma-informed city work.
- **Being part of Women & Girls Alliance Leeds**, a group of 12 women and girls' organisations, empowering women and girls to influence and shape life in Leeds and supporting those with the most complex needs.
- **Weathering the Covid-19 pandemic continuing support to women and girls** via keep-in-touch calls and online counselling. Engaging with the Black Lives Matter movement examining and improving our thinking and practices. Supporting women in the cost-of-living crisis.



Women's context

"Across the country, women at the sharpest edge of inequality are being systematically failed by the systems and services that should be supporting them. Women experiencing multiple unmet needs face intersecting disadvantages, many of which are shaped by long-term experiences of poverty and deprivation, as well as trauma and abuse. Many of these women have experience of homelessness, substance misuse, contact with the criminal justice system, child removal, domestic and sexual abuse, and poor mental health. Disadvantage is further compounded by systemic discrimination based on characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, religion or belief."

The introduction to Agenda Alliance's Transforming Services for Women's Futures report

There are **over 90,000 women** and **16–17-year-old girls** living in the Leeds areas ranked amongst the **most deprived 10% nationally**.

Leeds Public Health Needs Assessments note both the well-understood **relationship between poverty and inequality**, and **poor health and wellbeing outcomes**. Also that the proportion of people experiencing mental health issues increased during the pandemic, with some groups particularly affected such as young adults and women; shielding older adults; adults with pre-existing mental health conditions; and Black, Asian and ethnic minority adults. Leeds Observatory

Looking forward, Leeds city is **focusing on reducing mental health inequalities**, improving mental health across all ages, and working to promote flexibility, integration and responsiveness in service provision. We are part of these ambitions.

See Agenda Alliance's report for more details:
agendaalliance.org/our-work/projects-and-campaigns/transforming-services-for-womens-futures

Our values

Empowering

We provide support to help women and girls recognise their inner strengths, build self-confidence, and cultivate resilience. By encouraging informed decisions rooted in their own values and aspirations, we empower their true self and taking control of their future.

Strong and kind

We co-create a safe space where women can confront challenges with courage while feeling supported and valued. Offering a balance of strength and compassion enables healing and growth.

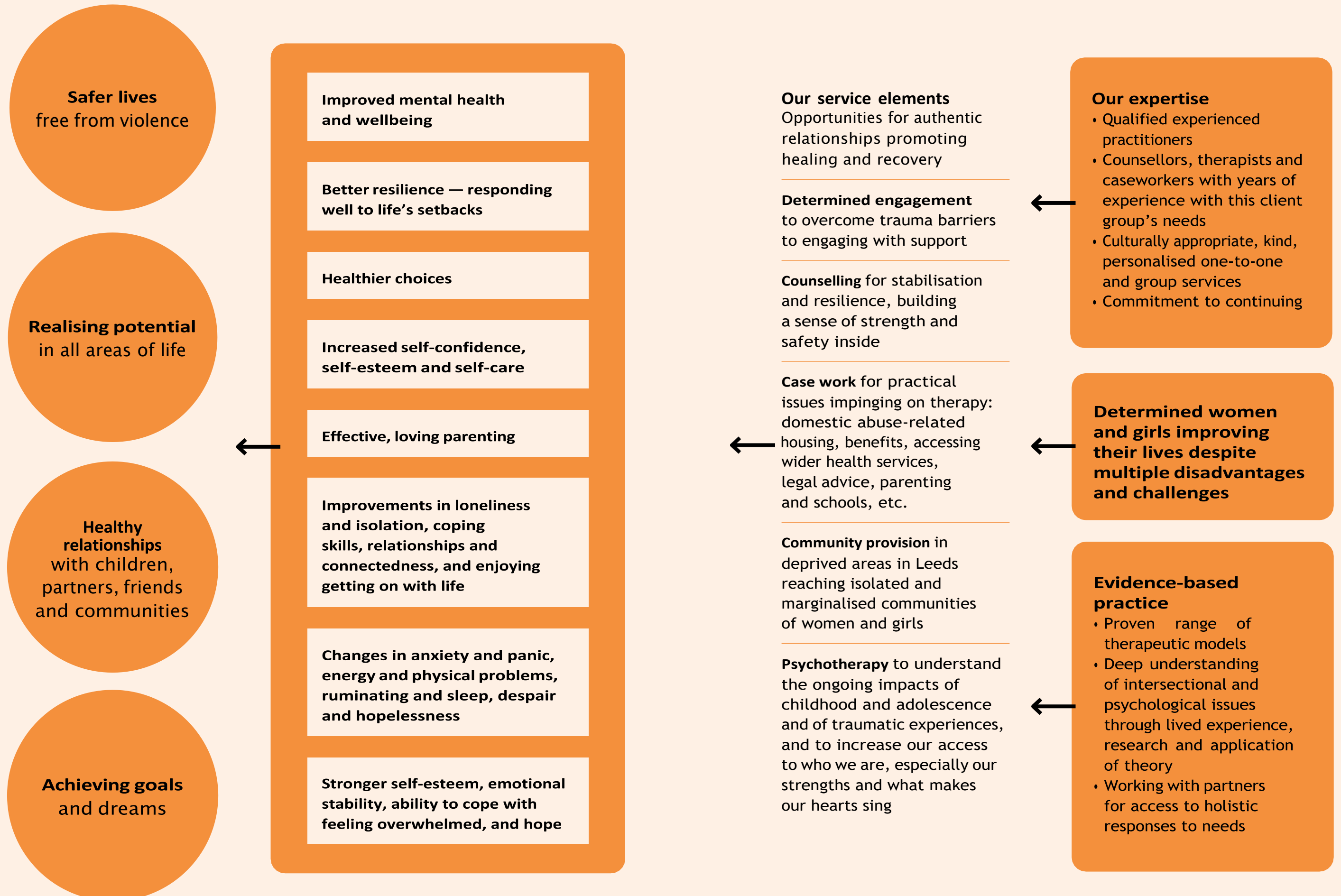
Inclusive

We work to ensure that everyone feels welcomed and respected. By valuing diversity, we create a supportive community where all voices are heard and everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

"Very lucky to receive the outreach support and therapy"



Women's goals



Safer lives
free from violence

Realising potential
in all areas of life

Healthy relationships
with children,
partners, friends
and communities

Achieving goals
and dreams

**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

**Improvements in loneliness
and isolation, coping
skills, relationships and
connectedness, and enjoying
getting on with life**

**Changes in anxiety and panic,
energy and physical problems,
ruminating and sleep, despair
and hopelessness**

**Stronger self-esteem, emotional
stability, ability to cope with
feeling overwhelmed, and hope**

Our service elements

Opportunities for authentic relationships promoting healing and recovery

Determined engagement to overcome trauma barriers to engaging with support

Counselling for stabilisation and resilience, building a sense of strength and safety inside

Case work for practical issues impinging on therapy: domestic abuse-related housing, benefits, accessing wider health services, legal advice, parenting and schools, etc.

Community provision in deprived areas in Leeds reaching isolated and marginalised communities of women and girls

Psychotherapy to understand the ongoing impacts of childhood and adolescence and of traumatic experiences, and to increase our access to who we are, especially our strengths and what makes our hearts sing

Our expertise

- Qualified experienced practitioners
- Counsellors, therapists and caseworkers with years of experience with this client group's needs
- Culturally appropriate, kind, personalised one-to-one and group services
- Commitment to continuing

Determined women and girls improving their lives despite multiple disadvantages and challenges

Evidence-based practice

- Proven range of therapeutic models
- Deep understanding of intersectional and psychological issues through lived experience, research and application of theory
- Working with partners for access to holistic responses to needs

Our approach

Our approach is to be:

Adaptive

In our complex work at depth we take an adaptive approach to move forward with focus and flexibility.

Innovative

We collaborate with others to develop and test new ideas. We pursue long-term goals and look for innovation. We work creatively with art as part of our offer.

Interdependent

We believe every part impacts the whole; we work with others.

"Life is still hard but I have more skills and strategies to cope with it"

WCTS in a nutshell

WCTS has been providing a service to the women of Leeds for over 40 years. The needs of women and girls for support through deep listening to their experiences of trauma, discrimination and violence is as high as ever. Society is waking up to the reality that everyone has mental health needs. We are determined to continue offering a safe space to those with long-term challenging problems impacting on many, if not all, aspects of life, giving opportunities to heal, recover, grow and achieve goals big and small.

WCTS's trustees, staff and volunteers are lucky to have many, many allies in this work, including wider women's services, mental health services, our landlords and suppliers, many individuals, funders and commissioners.

Strategic Goals 2025–28

Reaching women and girls who need support the most

Increasing access to long-term support
- by at least 10% annually; working across all of Leeds' population, including greater diversity of ages

Prioritising prevention and early intervention
- re-establishing our fast access 1-4 sessions work by 2027

Raising awareness and publishing self-help mental health resources
- at least one each year from 2025

Building more holistic support by working with others

Addressing wider health and social impacts on mental health - doubling our casework capacity by 2026; building at least one additional health partnership

Increasing our innovative outreach community partnerships
- by working from at least one more location each year and expanding our geographical reach

Building lived experience leadership with service users and others
- developing a monthly ex-service user peer support group in 2025

Growing stronger and more sustainable

Expanding and diversifying our funding base
- doubling funding for core and pilot services from trusts and foundations by 2028; balancing with statutory funding from a range of agencies

Securing and retaining the best people; ensuring their wellbeing and development at work and in trustee volunteering
- undertaking a full review of benefits, terms and conditions in 2025; building a more holistic approach

Piloting services for unmet needs; influencing commissioning
- starting at least two substantive pilots in 2026