



PRESS RELEASE

Coronavirus fund grant helps counselling charity tackle increase in stressed out mums

A COUNSELLING charity is warning that the full emotional toll caused by months of lockdown has yet to be seen – and stressed out mums could be the biggest sufferers.

Help Counselling Service, which provides affordable therapy for hundreds of people a year in west and north Wiltshire, has been awarded a grant from the Wiltshire Community Foundation's Coronavirus Response and Recovery Fund to help cope with the rise in its caseload.

The charity has received £6,200 from the fund, which has raised more than £1.1 million and distributed more than £750,000 to 190 groups.

Help Service Manager Amanda Wilkes said the charity based in Mill Street, Trowbridge, which has been running since 1983, has already seen a 19 per cent rise in cases. "We have 60 people in counselling at the moment when we usually have between 40 and 50 and another 43 on the waiting list, which is twice what we usually have," she said.

She, her colleague Eva Ashmore and her team of volunteer counsellors expect those numbers to rise after schools go back. "I think we are yet to see the full fallout from the lockdown. Potentially we will see more women, particularly mothers who have been holding it together while the children are at home," said Ms Wilkes.

"Where you have couples working at home, men are very good at creating their own boundaries and having their own undisturbed workspace while the children are running round the house and the women are trying to hold the family together and work at the same time. I think we are going to see some really stressed out mothers very, very soon."

The group has also recruited a counsellor with domestic abuse expertise after seeing a rise in clients suffering at the hands of partners. "Out of the 60 clients we have, seven of them are in an abusive relationship and we have other clients who are on the waiting list - that's more than we would normally have," said Ms Wilkes.

"Many of the women in these relationships have already left their partners and we think this is because the intensity has increased during the pandemic. They may have stayed longer but the lockdown has brought them to breaking point."

The Wiltshire Community Foundation funding paid for training for counsellors who had to switch from face to face sessions to online or phone work with clients. It also funded some staff after other funding was lost. "There was a real shortfall for about a month and a half when we simply didn't have any money coming in and I was really getting worried," said Ms Wilkes.

She paid tribute to her 'amazing' counsellors who have been confronted with a whole range of emotions. "In the first six weeks there was fear but that subsided," said Ms Wilkes. "Later we saw real isolation with people feeling very lonely. We saw an increase in calls, especially from older people who didn't want counselling, they just wanted to talk to somebody.

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“What we are noticing now is that people who have been shielding or on furlough and are going back to work are suffering intense anxiety about returning. Some people have been shielding since the beginning of work and the anxiety of re-entering the community makes it so difficult for them.”

Clients are only asked to donate what they can afford for sessions that would cost at least £50 privately. “People give what they can, sometimes just a few pounds. But we never turn anyone away,” said Ms Wilkes.

Find out more about the group and its services at helpcounselling.co.uk.

Wiltshire Community Foundation interim co-chief executive Fiona Oliver said: “We are so pleased to fund this vital work. We know from the many applications that we receive that groups will be in demand because of the pandemic for some time to come, which is why our fund is so badly needed.”

To donate to the Wiltshire and Swindon Coronavirus Response Fund or to find out how to apply for a grant, go to wiltshirecf.org.uk.

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Pictured: Help Counselling Services CEO Amanda Wilkes, right, with some of her counselling team

EDITOR'S NOTE:

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