

Southmead Project

Special Edition

30th

Annual Report
2023-24

Counselling
and support for
survivors of abuse
and addiction
across Bristol and
surrounding areas

Healing is possible

www.southmeadproject.org

southmeadproject



30 years of Southmead Project

1994

Southmead Project was founded by Mike Pierce MBE, in response to local concerns around drug and alcohol use

1995

Our work focused on the link between abuse and addiction. NSPCC helped to set up an abuse specific counselling service

1997

Drug relapse prevention initiative launched, offering training and employment opportunities to Southmead Project clients

2005

Successfully raised the funds to purchase our building, providing greater capacity for our services

2006

As a result of drug services recommissioning, Southmead Project focused on causal factors not just presenting issues. "No-one ever asked me why I started taking drugs" Southmead Project client

2007

Produced the working model 'Cycle of harm' to highlight the link between abuse and subsequent self-harming behaviours, such as addiction

2010

The charity launches a 30 week programme in conjunction with Splitz, aimed at reducing domestic abuse

2011

Multi-year Lottery funding allowed an expansion of our counselling service, including group work

2015

Provided a Caring Fathers, Safer Children group in conjunction with NSPCC

2017

Paddle to Parliament in order to raise awareness of abuse and the need for services such as the Southmead Project

2019

The charity launched its Active Recovery Project

2020

The charity closes its office due to Covid and transitions to providing remote counselling and Active Recovery Sessions

2021

Active Recovery expanded to provide weekly sessions and the Southmead Project, Womankind, The Bridge, SARSAS and Kinergy formed the sexual violence alliance, to improve access to services for adults who have experienced sexual violence or abuse

2022

Launched our 2 year strategic plan, focusing on increasing the number of counselling sessions offered and looking to improve our work on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

2023

Partnership developed with Ara, to provide Nexus counselling to clients within their housing provision

2024

We celebrate our 30th year of providing vital counselling and support services to clients across Bristol and surrounding areas



Chair's report



Simon Craker, Chairman of the Board of Trustees

This year marks the 30th anniversary of our commitment to providing life-changing services for survivors of abuse and addiction. Over three decades, we have evolved and developed, yet our unwavering belief in our clients, the power of connection and our dedication to offering meaningful support have remained constant.

Staff changes saw our CEO Imogen McCabe go on maternity leave and Emma Bull step in as Acting CEO. We also welcomed Clare Jones as our Head of Therapeutic Services and the board and I would like to thank Emma and Clare for all their work supporting the organisation this year together with Head of Finance, Pete Wraith.

Tara Robinson and Kat Wojciechowska joined our long-term counselling service and following our strategic plan, we increased the number of long-term counselling sessions. As demand for our services grew, we successfully ran 6 pre-counselling groups for individuals on our waiting list,

providing them with support and psychoeducation. Sheerin Adle-Ghadjar joined us as our counselling administrator, managing all counselling appointments and assisting with our communications.

We have explored collaborative working and organisational partnerships, establishing a working relationship with Ara to provide Nexus counselling to clients in their housing provision and welcomed Leonie Amadi to support this expansion.

We worked closely with our partners in the Sexual Violence Alliance (SARSAS, Womankind, Kinergy, and The Bridge SARC) to enhance accessibility and improve services across Bristol and the surrounding areas. This collaboration enabled us to offer counsellors additional training in trauma processing techniques, ensuring the continuation of high-quality, trauma-informed therapy.

Reflecting on the last 30 years, we are extremely thankful to our dedicated staff team, Board of Trustees and partner organisations for enabling us to provide these services and to the many survivors who have entrusted us to work alongside them. We are honoured to be part of your journey towards healing and recovery. We would also like to thank our funders whose generosity and belief in our vision have been instrumental in the delivery of our services. All contributions from large funders to individual donors have enabled us to enhance our services and innovate in ways that we could not have imagined 30 years ago.

Our team



How we support healing and recovery

Pre-counselling groups

We ran pre-counselling groups from January 23 - January 24, providing additional support to those on our waiting list for counselling.

The groups were facilitated by two experienced trauma informed therapists and each group ran for 8 weeks. The groups covered a large range of topics, including how trauma impacts the brain, body and mind, establishing healthy boundaries and identifying and managing trauma symptoms. Unlike group therapy, participants did not discuss individual trauma experiences, but were supported by others who had lived through similar experiences.

Last year we ran six pre-counselling groups and supported 48 members.

"Really well run group and definitely made a difference to my recovery from trauma"

Family support group member

Nexus counselling

Our Nexus counselling service provides up to 12 sessions of counselling for clients who have experienced abuse and who currently have an addiction to drugs or alcohol.

Referrals are made by drug and alcohol treatment agencies, combining support around an individual's substance misuse and the impact of trauma, as we understand that survivors of abuse will often use drugs or alcohol to help them to cope with their trauma symptoms. Sessions provide support and practical strategies to enable clients to deal with anxiety, depression, flashbacks and other symptoms of trauma. Psycho-education is used to explain how the brain processes trauma and supports clients to better understand post traumatic stress disorder and associated feelings and emotions. Counselling sessions take place at The Southmead Project, Bristol Drugs Project, Hawkspring (Drug and Alcohol Support) in Hartcliffe and at ARA in Bristol City Centre. Nexus sessions are also held remotely to ensure we are accessible to as many clients as possible. During 2023/2024, our Nexus service supported 63 clients and offered a total of 451 sessions.

"I felt seen, heard and valued by (my counsellor)"

Nexus counselling client

Long-term counselling

We support survivors who have experienced any type of abuse (including sexual, physical, emotional and domestic abuse and neglect), aged 18 and above, of all genders, who live in Bristol, South Gloucestershire, BANES and North Somerset.

We believe in giving people a meaningful chance of recovery from past abuse and therefore in July this year we responded to client feedback and increased the number of counselling sessions we offer each client from 24 to 30. In September, we employed a counselling administrator to coordinate the booking of counselling appointments and help with service enquiries. We offer counselling in person at the Southmead Project, online and by phone.

We continue to encourage the professional development of our counsellors and this spring, as a result of our partnership with the sexual violence alliance, 5 of our counselling team completed Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) Training (recommended trauma treatment in NICE guidelines). This year we have offered 2,096 sessions to 159 clients within long term counselling.

Family support group

We run a family support group every week for people who support someone with an addiction to drugs or alcohol. or for anyone who is affected by someone else's addiction.

This unique group provides support like no other in the city and has been running for 16 years. It is facilitated by Emma Summerill, a qualified substance misuse specialist, and provides a confidential and nonjudgmental space for people to share their experiences. People can attend as many sessions as they wish. It takes place every Wednesday evening from 7-9pm at the Southmead Project

Active Recovery

Our Active Recovery Project offers weekly activities in the community for clients of the Southmead Project.

This year we have delivered 43 sessions and have had 75 members in our Active Recovery community. Our fantastic members have taken on the challenge of a wide range of activities using Active Recovery as a safe and trauma-informed place to practise the skills they have learned in long-term counselling. We continue to improve and develop our service, by listening to our members' needs and ensuring they have a voice and their choices are heard and responded to. We have introduced a new app for members to help with logistics and we produce monthly newsletters to help create the sense of connection that is a vital part of the healing power of community. We were delighted to welcome two former members as volunteers this year, each of them bringing enormous wisdom and skills and providing our members with a vision of hope for the future. We also ran our first successful reunion session for former members. Demand for the service continues to be high with large numbers of referrals.

"I felt very safe and being part of a group where everybody treats each other with respect is a new and great experience for me"

Active Recovery Member

our impact

222
clients received counselling

49
family support groups delivered

43
Active Recovery sessions took place supporting 75 members

48
clients attended 6 pre-counselling groups

76% counselling clients saw a reduction in their trauma symptoms

78% counselling clients saw an improvement in their overall well-being

85% of family support members had decreased feelings of isolation

85% of pre-counselling group members said their experience exceeded their expectations

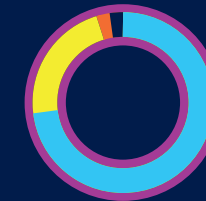
89% of Active Recovery members reported always or often being able to find joy

"Group is a place where we can open up to another person who understands and cares. It can be an Oasis in times of stress"

Family support group member

Who we supported

Gender



68% Female
26% Male
3% Non-binary

Other and rather not say 3%

4% identified as Trans*

*An umbrella term used to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth

43% identified as having a disability

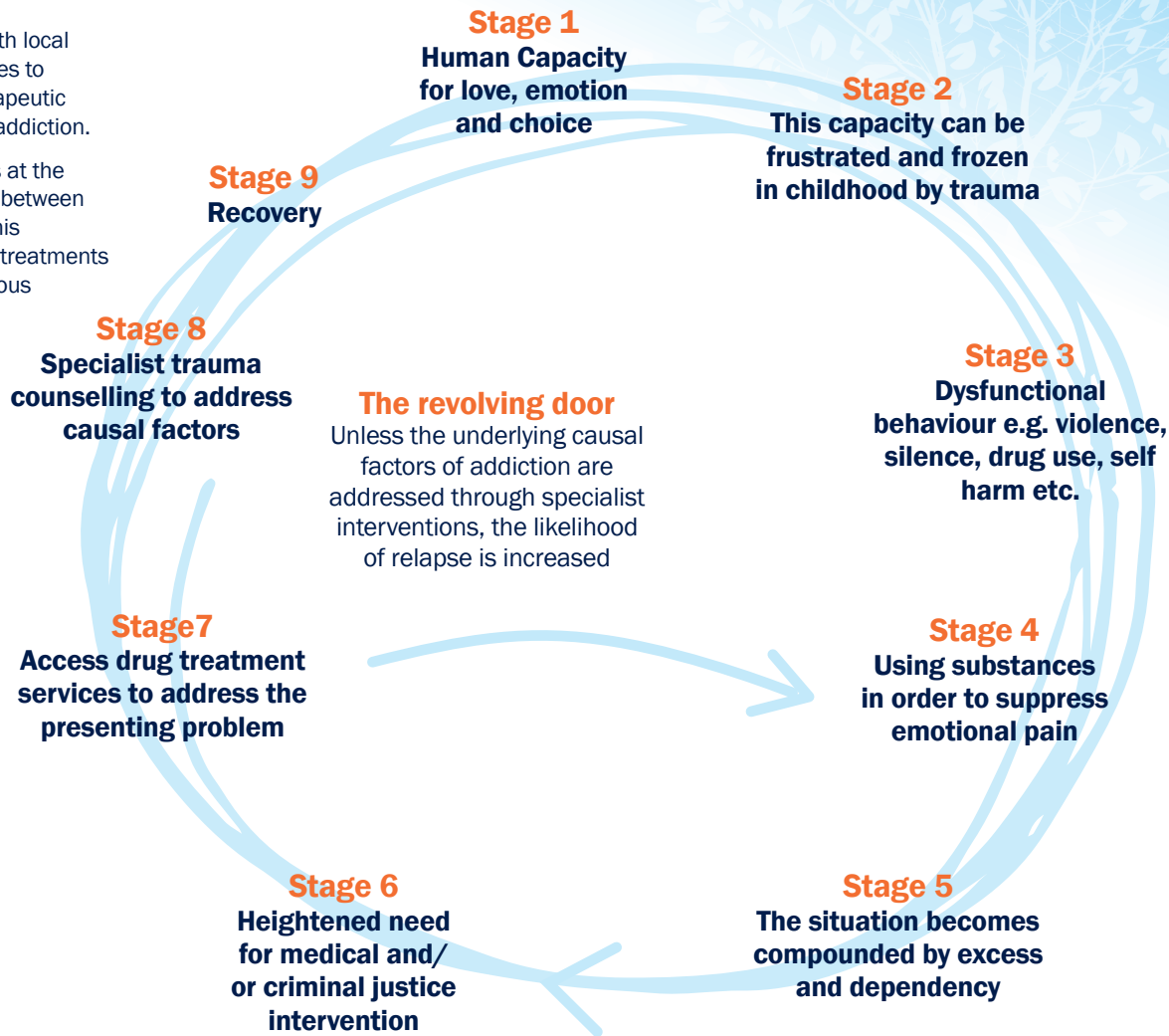
1 in 7 clients were from an Asian, Black African, Black Caribbean or mixed ethnicity background

1 in 4 clients were from the LGBTQ+ community

A spotlight on the link between abuse and addiction

Our Nexus service works closely with local drug and alcohol treatment agencies to provide vital trauma informed therapeutic support to survivors of abuse and addiction.

Our founder, Mike Peirce MBE, was at the forefront of understanding the link between trauma, abuse and addiction and his experience helped shape effective treatments and services for recovery from various forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, and domestic abuse. Over the years, our charity created a working model, the Cycle of Harm, which illustrates how trauma and abuse often lead to addiction and self-harming behaviours as individuals try to manage their emotional pain.



Trauma and abuse deeply affect self-perception and self-worth. To cope with these overwhelming feelings, individuals may turn to self-harming behaviours, perpetuating a harmful cycle. The Cycle of Harm model highlights the necessity of addressing both addiction and the underlying trauma to break this cycle. Survivors often face a Catch-22: reducing substance use intensifies trauma symptoms, leading to relapse. Effective treatment requires addressing both addiction and trauma simultaneously. Mike Peirce MBE, aptly states, "If you try to remove the emotional painkiller rather than the emotional pain, how successful is the treatment going to be?"

Our approach emphasises understanding the root causes of addiction, whereas traditional treatments often focus solely on addiction, neglecting the underlying trauma.

Through our Nexus counselling service, we provide unique trauma informed support for survivors of abuse and trauma who currently have an addiction to drugs or alcohol. Nexus counselling supports individuals in reducing substance use by helping our clients develop new ways of managing trauma related symptoms such as acute anxiety, panic, flashbacks, disturbed sleep and dissociation. As trauma-related symptoms decrease, the need for addiction and self-harming behaviours diminishes, breaking the cycle of harm. Our clients can then go on to receive long-term trauma focused counselling if they wish, to further support their recovery.

Zahra's story

Zahra, a client in her 40s, was referred for long-term counselling by her GP. She had experienced childhood sexual and emotional abuse, leading to acute anxiety, panic attacks, flashbacks, and recurring nightmares. Despite reporting the abuse to carers and medical professionals, she was persistently not believed and often blamed, resulting in low self-worth, a fear of trusting others and a lost sense of safety.

In recent years, Zahra stopped working in a career she loved due to her trauma symptoms and had become very isolated. She spent weeks at a time not seeing or speaking to anyone and rarely going outside. Zahra found maintaining relationships with family and friends challenging which increased her feelings of isolation.

Zahra's counselling initially focused on building a relationship and creating a trusting and safe environment. Through learning about her trauma responses, Zahra recognised her trauma symptoms such as dissociation and disconnection from her body, as survival strategies. This understanding fostered self-compassion and curiosity towards herself.

As trust grew, Zahra shared other difficult thoughts, feelings and memories, understanding them within the context of her traumatic experiences. Zahra noticed this understanding led to greater self-compassion, which, along with practical strategies, stopped her flashbacks and nightmares surprising her and giving her hope for a future she had never thought possible.

Towards the end of her counselling, Zahra started to attend the Southmead Project's Active Recovery Group as she wanted the opportunity to connect with others and safely practise her learning.

Initially Zahra felt fearful of attending a group, but she found the ARP's structured yet gentle approach reassuring and surprisingly safe. The team's emphasis on kindness and openness created a space where she could be vulnerable without fear of judgement and the sense of belonging and community helped her feel less isolated.

Zahra shared that the skills she learnt on her journey with the Southmead Project helped her to find joy, develop and maintain safe relationships and learn to feel love and compassion towards herself. Occasionally Zahra still has bad days but now there is a voice in Zahra's head that tells her she is loved and entitled to a 'good' life, just like everyone else.

"I've got my power back"

Counselling and Active Recovery client

Supporting local organisations become more trauma informed



1 in 10 people have experienced abuse - could you be doing more to support your staff?

Contains:

- Information on trauma through abuse and its impact in the workplace
- Examples of good practice
- Checklists for managers
- Template emails
- Resources and signposting

Please contact
admin@southmeadproject.com
or visit our website to find out more

Our accounts

Income

Grants	260,551
Donations	11,951
Sale of services	13,000
Miscellaneous	461

Total Income 285,963

Expenditure

Charitable activities	427,237
Raising funds	6,060

Total expenditure 433,297

Surplus/deficit 147,334

Funds brought forward 457,399

Funds carried forward 310,065

Consisting of:

Restricted funds	115,540
Unrestricted funds	194,525

A heartfelt **thank you** to all our supporters who help make our work possible

Make a difference

- support the Southmead Project!

Donate and become a part of someone's recovery journey

£5 - Supports two people to attend an Active Recovery session

£30 - Provides one person with six hours of support from our family group

£50 - Contributes towards one person's specialist trauma counselling

Become a Southmead Project fundraiser

Run a 5k, have a bake sale or spread the word!

Partner with us

and receive your copy of *Becoming a Trauma Informed Workplace*. Contact us at admin@southmeadproject.com to find out more



"Thank you all so much for an incredible and life changing experience which I will always treasure and value"

Southmead Project client

"I'm glad I came to the Southmead project as its emphasis on trauma informed practice is second to none & exactly what I needed & need to both understand & help myself effectively going forward"

Southmead Project client

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