

Listening Ear

Statistics vary. Do an internet search for how many people in the UK experience mental health problems and you will get answers varying from 1 in 6 people to as many as 1 in 2-3 people – most sources go for 1 in 4. Whatever we think about statistics, and whatever we think about mental health, it is clear that every year in our country many women and men just like us experience mental and emotional distress. Against this backdrop it is clear why an organisation such as Listening Ear is so important.

Around 22 years ago a group of people at St Nicholas Church in Halewood set out to support others who had been bereaved. Over time this voluntary effort gained momentum and the charity they founded now delivers a highly respected counselling service supporting around 600 individuals each year.

Today, even though Listening Ear has a team of 16 staff, it is still the efforts of around 30 highly skilled and capable volunteers that make measurable positive differences in the lives of others. Listening Ear has achieved a great deal in its first quarter century including

- First counselling service on Merseyside to become accredited with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
- In 2008 the Butterflies project which supports children and young people through bereavement was presented with the Spirit of Merseyside Award by Cherie Blair
- In 2013 won the 'Community Group' category in the Liverpool Echo 'Pride of Merseyside Awards'
- Delivering local counselling services on behalf of the NHS since 2009
- Creating a flourishing occupational mental health service called VIDA

Listening Ear is not the kind of organisation that is content to rest upon the laurels of past achievements. In 2015 thanks to funding from Children in Need there will be an expansion of the Butterflies project and Listening Ear will be working with children and young people across all five boroughs in Merseyside. While Listening Ear has a number of high quality counselling rooms at its base in Halewood, it would really like to have more and a greater choice of venues through which local people could make use of the variety of services on offer.

In common with other local voluntary and community sector organisations Listening Ear faces challenges in the current economic climate. People whose jobs or homes are under threat are at increased risk of anxiety and depression and therefore potentially the demand for services such as reflective listening and counselling will rise. Wide spread reductions in grant making to charities and increased competition in applying to funders makes securing the investment needed to grow valuable projects like Butterflies more difficult with each passing year.

With its disciplined approach to monitoring and evaluating Listening Ear can evidence the impact that its services have which matters in these days of return on investment. Never forget, however, when you look at the impressive statistics that there are real people behind those numbers: real people like the young person who said about his experience with Butterflies

“it’s as if someone is taking this heavy weight off your shoulders and putting it to one side bit by bit”

Listening Ear may have started out as a local charity in Halewood but with inspiration like that who knows how far it may go.

‘Never give up on what you really want to do. The person with big dreams is more powerful than one with all the facts’ Albert Einstein