



Someone to talk to when you need it most

# IMPACT REPORT

2024/2025

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# Thank you for your support

**The Harbour is a small charity with a huge vision - that everyone has access to the crucial emotional support needed when they are facing death and navigating grief. We help people affected by life-threatening illness to live well with grief when facing their own death or the death of a loved one, or when they have been bereaved. We have been offering this specialist counselling to help thousands of people, in and around Bristol, to live well with grief since 1992.**

Grief is a public health issue. It significantly impacts mental and physical health; and has a knock-on impact on economic productivity, and health and social care spending.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, in the UK, there is inadequate access to grief support with a lack of service provision. This is compounded by our social attitudes – because, when it comes to bereavement we struggle to talk.<sup>2</sup>

Thanks to the generosity of many donors, we have been able to provide in-depth emotional support to individuals, couples and groups.

The Harbour is the only organisation in Bristol providing professional grief and bereavement counselling to adults (bar those under hospice care). Subsequently our service is in high demand.

Despite this we receive less than 25% of our funding from the NHS and continue to rely on Trusts and Foundations as our primary source of income. This has enabled us to provide our specialist support to those who need it most.

***“The Harbour was set up to work with people diagnosed with HIV and Aids in 1992, at a time when this was likely to be life limiting. We therefore have a long history of working with communities who face discrimination and are disadvantaged and excluded.”***

<sup>1</sup>Bereavement Commission 2021   <sup>2</sup>Marie Curie 2022



# Our Key Successes

**With limited resources it is difficult to strike a balance between the demand of clients on our waiting list and reaching out to those who experience barriers to access. Over the last year, we're pleased to report on several different developments. We have achieved all this with a small team of 6.7 full-time equivalent staff and volunteers and we could not have done this successfully without the support of our funders.**

## Last year we supported 190 clients

We are proud that year-on-year we achieve significant impact for our clients with our committed team of qualified and trainee therapists. We improved the mental health of as many as 83%, which we think is remarkable when you consider the nature of our service, working with death and dying. And, for every person we help, there is a ripple effect of unquantifiable impact on their family and friends.

## We restarted group bereavement therapy

After a gap of almost a year, with discrete funding from trusts and foundations, we've been able to recruit a skilled practitioner to restart group therapy. In this group we support bereaved clients who are in the earlier stages of grief, with sessions running up to two years. Group therapy helps members explore the impact of bereavement within a confidential and safe space. It gives a sense of community and belonging and counters loneliness. Meeting others going through similar challenges helps people understand that feelings of isolation, sadness or confusion are common.

It gives opportunities to witness and learn from how others manage grief, to build coping strategies.

# Our Key Successes

## We began addressing inequity in our service provision

We worked in two areas of multiple deprivation in Bristol. We've continued working with Knowle West Health Park which serves areas which are in the top 10% of multiple deprivation in England. And we used our outreach model to develop community links in Lockleaze; which includes areas in the top 15% of multiple deprivation in England.

In 2023, Lockleaze Neighborhood Trust talked to 110 residents and found bereavement was in the top 4 presenting issues (alongside buses, finances and family issues). Our 'way in' to the community has been dominated by positive links with the local church and community centre, with helpful introductions to the breakfast club and food bank. We began identifying potential clients, with the help of community workers and leaders, GP surgeries and social prescribers. We ran community drop-ins, where people could find out about our work without committing themselves. And we started delivering counselling sessions in the community in March 2025.

In 2025/2026 we'll be working in two further areas of multiple deprivation, making links with racially minoritised communities. In preparation for this we have provided our team with equity, diversity and inclusion training and are working on action plans across the organisation. We will reach sensitively and with humility into these communities.

## We invested in our technical and physical infrastructure

At the beginning of the year we found we needed to make big changes to our confidential client database, because the platform on which it was hosted was no longer suitable. The CRM is an integral tool for our work used for all client information, including assessments, session notes, client feedback and evaluations. We also use it for our reporting and impact measurement. This turned out to be a significant piece of work at a significant cost, requiring external support to rebuild the CRM on a platform which is well supported to future-proof our work. We also had to carry out essential repairs on our office building; with leaking guttering and penetrating damp. We are lucky enough to rent a building in a central location, but our lease arrangement means that we must pay for all the repairs. And, on an old building, that quickly mounts up.



# Our Key Successes



## We relaunched the Bristol Bereavement Network

We took the lead in re-establishing the Bristol Bereavement Network, which stopped during Covid. It consists of about 20 organisations (3rd sector, NHS, hospices) providing services across Bristol. Its purpose is to share information and best practice, provide support, avoid duplication, look at gaps in provision and prepare joint working plans. Getting this network back on its feet has been warmly welcomed within the sector.

## We began broadening our fundraising base

All charities will tell you that they are experiencing an unprecedented harsh fundraising environment; and it is small charities, like ours, with limited statutory funding that are most at risk. In 2022/23 we introduced a systematic approach for asking for contributions from clients who could afford this. This has now increased to 7% of our income. We don't forecast much further increase, as most clients access a free or subsidised service, which continues to be a priority for us. Financial circumstances will never be a barrier to accessing our vital service, and we continue to offer the same help to all. We've therefore taken steps into community and corporate fundraising; and we have relaunched our website to strengthen this. We are growing our community base, encouraging supporters to take part in sponsored challenges, and ran our first fundraising ceilidh. We also forged a significant corporate charity of the year partnership with Barratts; which we hope will be a model for further partnerships.

## Our organisational excellence was recognised

We were one of 12 charities chosen as a finalist in the Bristol Life Awards. These are a highlight of the city, considered to be 'the most prestigious, most tightly contested awards with the greatest number of local companies involved'. We were judged on 'evidence of organisational excellence' both over the last year and long-term. We are delighted that our work has been recognised, and hope this will lead to a greater awareness in the business community with more supportive corporate partnerships.

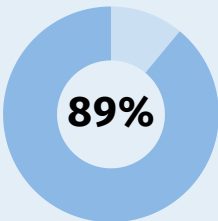
# Our Impact in 2024/25

We work hard to make our services accessible and reflective of Bristol's diverse communities. In 2024/25 10% clients were from minority ethnic communities; 14% identified as LGBTQ+; and 15% had a disability.

We helped our clients when they needed us most: 5% were facing their own death; 27% were close to someone facing; death/dying; 68% had been bereaved in the past 2 years.



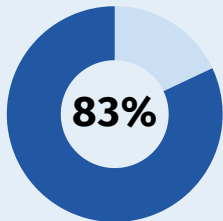
**190 CLIENTS**



sessions provided heavily subsidised or free of charge



**1513 COUNSELLING SESSIONS AND ASSESSMENTS**



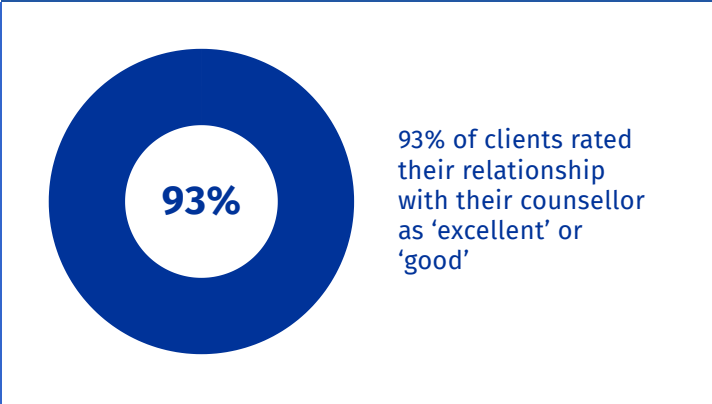
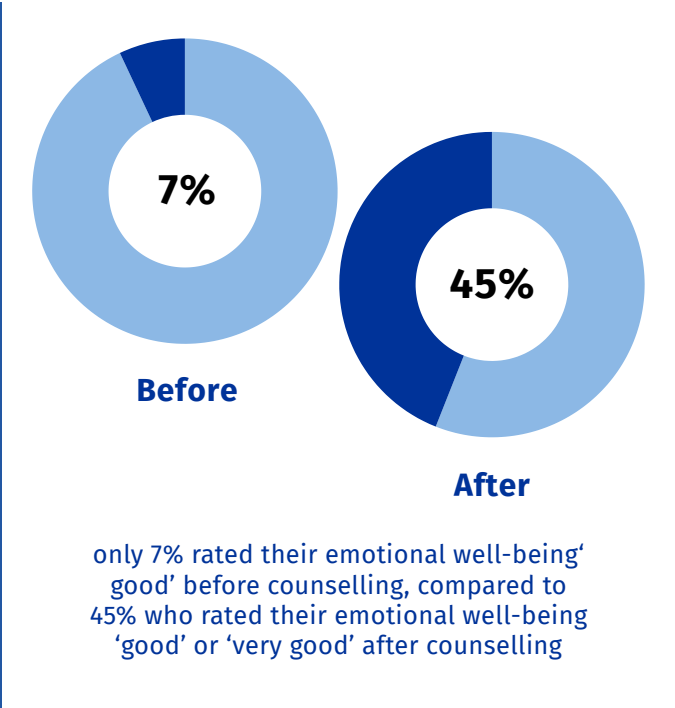
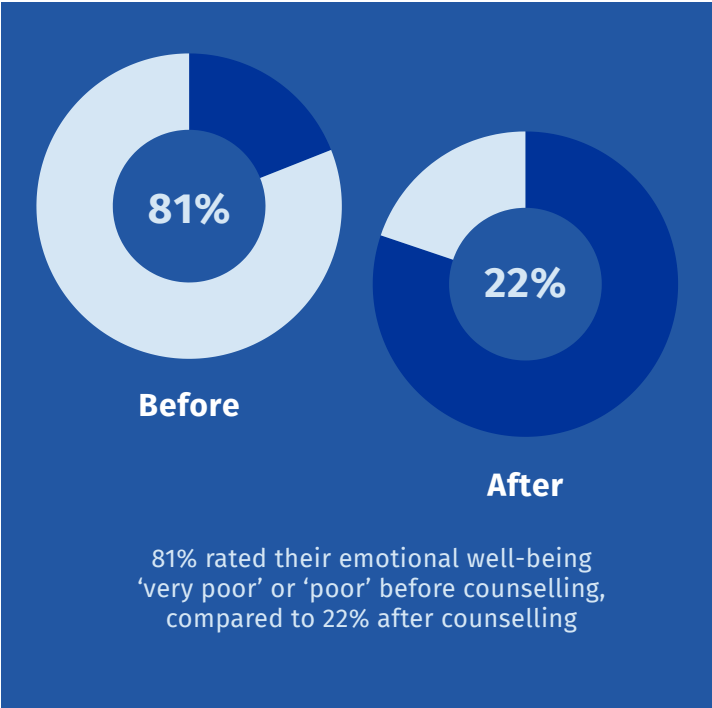
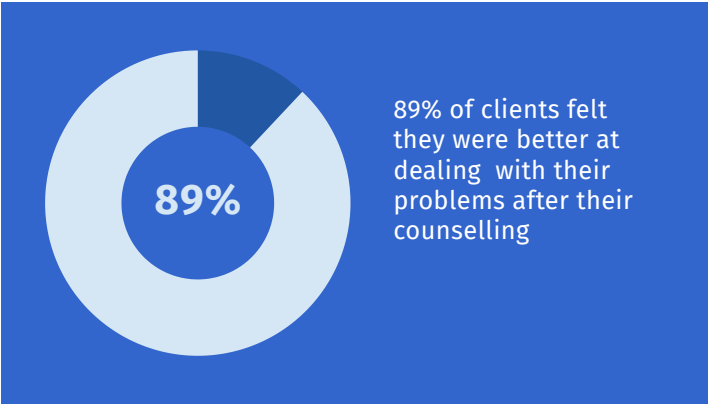
of clients recorded reduced levels of anxiety and depression following their time with us

## PHQ and GAD

We use standard measures of anxiety (GAD7) and depression (PHQ9) at the beginning, middle and end of counselling. These include questions about sleeping and eating issues, concentration, feeling depressed or bad about yourself, not being able to stop worrying, feeling anxious, having suicidal thoughts. During the year the average PHQ for clients reduced from 12 to 7 - this equates to a shift from moderate to mild depression. The average GAD scores reduced from 11 to 6 - this equates to a shift from moderately severe to moderate anxiety.

# Qualitative feedback adds value to the GAD and PHQ data we gather

Our work prevents complex and severe health problems, reduces health inequalities, and creates less demand on the NHS/statutory services. It reduces anxiety and depression, enabling people to better cope day-to-day e.g. being better parents, being able to get back to work; and more able to contribute positively to their communities.



A woman with blonde hair is sitting in a blue armchair, smiling. She is wearing a grey t-shirt and a black patterned jacket. The room has a wooden floor, a white wall, and a wooden lamp with a white shade. A potted plant is visible in the background.

## In Their Own Words

Our therapists provide a safe space for people to talk and be listened to. For many people, support from family and friends will be enough to help them through their grief. But for others it is not. Through counselling, our clients confront their most uncomfortable emotions about death, dying and bereavement...feelings that can be difficult to share with family and friends.

*“Overall, I am incredibly grateful for this counselling. I feel like I do have a long way to go in some ways but on reflection have also come a long way and that's all due to my time with Claire. Where I felt truly listened to and she helped me work through a lot of things connected to my grief. And that has been invaluable.”*

*“It has been the biggest breakthrough ever in understanding my emotional problems and I am very grateful. I may not be fixed as such but it has explained a lot. I may need more help in the future but it has been a good start.”*



# Our vision: Creating Compassionate Communities

Between 2025–2028, with help from the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund, we are targeting our community outreach in four areas of multiple deprivation in Bristol. We aim to create ‘compassionate communities’ by raising awareness of dying and bereavement support, enabling people to address a taboo area, and encouraging people to reach out and talk more, link up and support each other. In addition to providing counselling, we aim to help our partners set up ongoing and sustainable peer bereavement support through training and networking.

***We’ve developed an outreach model where we work with trusted community organisations in areas of multiple deprivation. Through partnership working our aim is to break down barriers and support people who wouldn’t otherwise ask for help. This follows on from a successful community pilot we delivered in Knowle West in 2023. Our key learning, incorporated into the model, includes:***

- clients were initially distrustful of ‘counselling’, but drop-ins allowed one-to-one conversations which changed their minds
- a local service removes financial barriers of travel and gives easier access in familiar surroundings
- money was a big issue but providing a range of options is important. 50% contributed £10 per session wanting ‘to pay something’
- providing professional grief counselling sends a strong message that ‘your needs matter’
- many are unable to move on despite being bereaved



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