

Annual report 2022 – 2023

# BWFC

*Needed now, more than ever*

Brighton Women's Centre  
*Empowering women since 1974*  
womenscentre.org

BWC (Brighton Women's Centre) is run for women by women. Women's lives are important to us – every one who visits us and every one who works in our team.

Our team must be strong, to fight the inequality we see around us. We help women build their own inner strength, so that they can go on to live independent, successful and happy lives.

In 2022 – 2023 we supported 869 women and 32 children face-to-face, online and by phone. This was a 23% increase on the previous year.

869

women supported

32

children supported

↑ 23%

increase on previous year

# Inspire

As part of the new CRS contract with the Ministry of Justice, Inspire is in its second year and made impressive progress highlighting the quality of support delivered to clients.

The team worked hard to meet KPI's as well as fostering and maintaining relationships with probation practitioners across Sussex. A pilot with Crawley Probation was established to discuss referrals in depth.

Casework, as well as emotional well-being workshops, was delivered online and in person. One-to-one support took place at women-only hubs in Eastbourne, Hastings, Worthing and at our central building in Brighton.

Due to recruitment issues team members worked exceptionally hard to fill fundamental service gaps and facilitated group workshops to support a greater number of clients.

The From Court to Support pilot project, working with women who were at risk or in breach of their community order, ended in March 2023. An external evaluation has been commissioned.

**190**  
women supported

**85%**  
of women felt optimistic about the future

**88%**  
of women were able to deal with problems well

“

I wouldn't have got to where I am today without my caseworker and Brighton Women's Centre. Without them, I wouldn't have been able to look forward and I can now think about my needs when I couldn't before and reach out for support when I need it.

Inspire client

”

## Musculoskeletal (MSK) Link Worker Project

The Musculoskeletal (MSK) support service offers emotional and practical support for women living with MSK conditions such as fibromyalgia and chronic pain.

Women referred to the service by Sussex Musculoskeletal Partnership (SMSKP) Practitioners and the MSK Social Prescribing Team received support across areas such as housing, benefits, relationships, children and family, debt, mental health and well-being. They were offered up to 10 sessions, either remotely over the phone or face to face at BWC.

72 women were referred to the MSK service this year, representing a 23% increase in demand. The service delivered 197 support sessions to women in Brighton & Hove, Crawley, Horsham and mid-Sussex CCG.



**I feel that I have somebody to help me to try to move forward with my life. I have had help in dealing with some of my problems.**”

**34**

women supported

**70%**

of women reported a positive change in being able to respond to their own needs

**70%**

of women reported a positive change in their ability to access support services

## Support Services

The service continued to deliver the weekly Well-being Hub, with consistently positive feedback. A core of regular attendees saw the Hub as an important part of their weekly routine.

Two Support and Information Phone Line sessions were also delivered per week. Women used the phone line for a variety of reasons including: emotional support; practical information; access point into other BWC services (e.g. foodbank, peer groups, counselling, accommodation support); signposting to specialist support services; support with domestic abuse; harassment; accessing benefits and applying for emergency grants.

Due to the cost-of-living crisis and food shortages, delivering the Foodbank service grew ever more challenging as

the year progressed, most noticeably between October and March. Additionally, volunteers were forced to leave the service to find more paid work and recruitment to fill posts has been difficult.

The Mental Health Support Coordinator started casework support for women with mental health needs as part of the UOK partnership.



**Thank you very much for your support. Your phone call really made a difference to my life.**”

**285**

women supported

**90%**

of women who used our volunteer supported services, said the service made them feel more positive

**81%**

of women said the service helped them to cope with changes

“

It's very small, personal and nurturing. My daughter even asks to go in on the weekends and when on holiday. The team are very loving and responsive to the children and supportive to parents. My daughter loves it.

ToyBox parent

”

## ToyBox Early Years

The service experienced positive growth during the year. Due to demand for early years education in the area, it was not possible to reduce the ToyBox waiting list and it had to be closed to new families.

568 childcare sessions were delivered. Child-led activities included Food Adventures to promote healthy eating, and Planting and Watching Things Grow, as well as outings to the beach, local parks and the market.

In its latest Ofsted inspection, ToyBox was graded Outstanding. Feedback highlighted the 'excellent teaching', 'outstanding support in language development', and called the service 'a safe haven for not only the children but the families too.'

Since the pandemic there has been greater demand for ToyBox staff to provide parenting consultation, funding-support and advocacy resulting in service delivery moving beyond childcare into wrap-around support for families.

The cost-of-living crisis has caused an increase in referrals to foodbanks and child-specific charities for some families. ToyBox have continued to top up children's lunch boxes and provide fruit and vegetables at snack times for children who don't have breakfast or lunch.

32

women and families supported

## Women's Accommodation Support Service

After disruptions caused by Covid, the Women's Accommodation Support Service (WASS) team focussed on rebuilding and strengthening the Women's Hubs. Specialist professionals and organisations were encouraged to co-locate again at the Hubs to improve access to services that women struggled to engage with.

Weekly hubs were delivered in Eastbourne, St Leonards-on-Sea and Worthing. Women requested support around multiple and intersecting areas, but typically around accommodation, domestic abuse and / or sexual violence,

finances, children's service involvement, trauma, physical and mental health, social isolation, substance use / dependency and sex working.

“  
Amazing. Kind. Friendly. Very helpful. There when I need her. Honestly she is the one who has been there through bad, good and still here with me on my journey. I honestly couldn't ask for a better support worker.”

**183**  
women supported

**93%**

of women felt safer as a result of domestic abuse interventions and healthy relationships and working with their WASW on their own safety plan

**76%**

of women reported an improvement in their accommodation situation

## Women's Counselling and Psychotherapy

The service provided a combination of talking therapy and movement psychotherapy four days per week. Sessions were offered online or in person with the majority of clients opting for in person sessions.

The creation of a new Senior Therapist and Clinical Assessor role resulted in improved flow of new client assessments and allocations. Eight new therapists were recruited.

New funding enabled therapy sessions for women with mental health issues as well as those who experienced domestic and sexual violence.

“  
Therapy has been transformative and I think maybe life changing. I feel like I've grown up and maybe understand myself now.”

**44%**  
women received therapy

**83%**  
of women reported overall improved well-being

**72%**  
of women had reduced anxiety or panic

## Women's Peer to Peer Support

The existing peer groups, and 50+ peer groups, continued in person and online during the year. A new peer group began in Shoreham following a detailed Community Needs Assessment (CNA) co-produced with one of the peers. A monthly Menopause Group was started by a long-standing Peer Facilitator in December 2022.

SHIFT Happens, a six-month creative programme to explore themes of change, was developed for service users by artists Sarah Cole and Annis Joplin with funding from the Arts Council. Weekly sessions created a collaborative and supportive space where significant changes in participants lives were witnessed.

In addition to SHIFT, the peer service ran a self-kindness course and emotional regulation workshops.

A restructure of the Ageing Well coalition resulted in the end of funding for the 50+ group.

An Engagement Officer was recruited in December 2022 and began creating a framework for Service User involvement and co-production in BWC services through a Service User Forum.

Engagement and partnerships with Together Co Befriending Partnership, Changing Futures Lived Experience Network, Good Things Foundation, Health Education England (HEE) and Sussex Peer Network (Principled Ways of Working) enabled the Peer to Peer service to develop connections across Sussex, as well as provide resources and training for peers.

**133**  
women supported

**72%**  
of women felt an increase in self confidence

**90%**  
of women felt their sense of belonging increased

“ This group has been life changing for me. I can't express just how much support I have received, from other service users as well as facilitators. I've also been put in touch with other organisations for support. ”

Women's Peer to Peer Support service user

All our team members are women, so are best placed to understand the challenges women face. We do our best to be here for them for as long as they need us. So even if everything else in a woman's life feels uncertain, we hope she can always rely on us.

And we rely on the generous support of our partners and funders to be able to provide support to women living with multiple disadvantages.

We gratefully thank all of our partners and funders.





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