**BRINGING AN END TO MENTAL HEALTH MISERY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MERTON, SUTTON AND CROYDON**

Off the Record is a free and confidential counselling and support service for young people aged 11-25 who live, study or work in the borough of Croydon, Sutton and Merton. We believe that young people have a wealth of strengths, abilities and talents within them. We want to support them in realising and using these resources to meet life’s challenges. The Charity provides a safe space where young people can receive support and encouragement to deal with whatever challenges or difficulties they are facing.

Through 2018/19 the charity continued to deliver its core activities and services - Counselling Services (incl. online counselling) in the London Boroughs of Croydon, Sutton and Merton. Outreach work through our Black Minority Ethnic Community Development Work, Refugee & Asylum Seeker Counselling Service and the Croydon Young Carers Service.

**ANNUAL REVIEW 2018/19**

**WE'RE BRINGING AN END TO LONG WAITING LISTS**

We are shifting the axis of Off The Record and while we already work in the community across the three boroughs we are wanting to continue to extend our services into a variety of different community settings, making ourselves available to as many young people as possible and bringing an end to long waiting lists for support.

At our Croydon Counselling service we are very conscious of the importance of young people receiving help when they need it most and from September 2019 we will be starting a new duty system, which will walk in appointments and building sessions to young people waiting on four consecutive days each week. This will enable young people to access assessment as immediately as possible and help us to use our clinical resources more effectively, so that we are able to offer regular sessions to clients with less delay.

**BRINGING AN END TO MENTAL HEALTH INEQUALITIES**

We continue to see young people from a broad range of diverse communities in Croydon with 62% of young people accessing counselling defining their ethnicity as non-White British, which is a further 4% increase from 58% in the previous year.

A key objective of the online counselling service is to enable access into mental health services for young people who might otherwise not receive any support or who may struggle to attend face-to-face services. The service therefore particularly targets young people from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background, LGBTQ+ young people, young people with disabilities and looked after children. Accordingly, 55% of online clients come from a BAME background, 27% report as LGBTQ+. 9% identify as having a disability and 6% identified as Looked After Children.

**WE'RE BRINGING AN END TO EXAM STRESS**

The online counselling service allows young people to write about their problems rather than talking face-to-face, meaning they can have their weekly counselling sessions entirely online. To complement this one-to-one support, targeted workshops are delivered at key points throughout the year, providing practical help and information about issues young people might be struggling with eg exam stress.

This year we have shared information with all Merton schools around support available during the exam period. Our outreach worker also support within schools at this stressful time.

**WE'RE BRINGING AN END TO MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA**

Our BME Mental Health Community Development Workers act as a bridge between statutory mental health services and local BME communities, raising awareness of mental health issues, identifying barriers to accessing services, improving service experiences and outcomes for BME children and young people.

Recent projects developed and launched are two new innovative mental health outreach projects targeting BAME young men - ‘Thrive Not Just Surviving: Young Men and Mental Health’ and ‘Chris’ after receiving a grant from Comic Relief.

**WE'RE BRINGING AN END TO LIMITED SERVICE CHOICE**

Off the Record have extended our offer to young people by giving more choices and options for service provision.

In Merton, to increase our counselling provision, we extended the age range of young people whom we can support to 11-26; and provide self-harm workshops for parents and employ a full-time outreach worker offering 1-1 and group support in schools and the community.

And Online, through our dedicated secure website (www.talkofftherecordonline.org), we provide free online services to young people aged 11-25 in the London boroughs of Croydon, Sutton and Merton. The online services are offered in two formats - online individual counselling and seasonal targeted online workshops.

**WE'RE BRINGING AN END TO ISOLATION**

Croydon Young Carers service provides an extensive network program which is a key component of our work. Trips and activities take place throughout school holidays and boys and girls groups take place monthly. There have been 40 trips and activities for 7-16 year olds and 19 trips and activities for the 17-25 age group. 18 young carers have also attended Crystal Palace home matches through support from the Freekick Foundation. Our gender specific monthly group have had from 12 to 15 young carers attending over 10 events. One particularly popular event was our family day trip to Brighton, attended by 60 people.

Our parent/carer self-harm workshops in Sutton and Merton offer a supportive space for parent/carers where they can develop their understanding of self-harm, explore why young people might hurt themselves, discuss common myths and misconceptions about self-harm, and look at coping strategies and ways to support.

**WE WANT TO BRING AN END TO WHAT TRADITIONAL COUNSELLING LOOKS LIKE**

Within our Croydon refuge counselling service we have worked with the Virtual School on a pilot project to provide therapeutic interventions to vulnerable over 16’s. This involved us providing a counsellor at their classes once a week and running a psycho-education group as well as short introductions to therapy for those who preferred an individual session.

We put emphasis on building a good relationship between counsellor and client and offering a safe, confidential and non-judgmental space in which the young person can get to know themselves better, value themselves and find clarity and pathways to reaching their potential.

**OUR IMPACT**

In 2019 Off the Record celebrates 25 years of delivering mental health support to young people in South London and we were pleased in March 2019 to be awarded a prestigious national GSK Impact Award recognising the quality and innovation of our contribution to young people’s mental health. Off the Record was chosen as one of 10 charities to receive the award out of a field of 380 applications and we received £30,000, a year on radio and national news as well as the opportunity for ongoing support through the Kings Fund Development Network.

Employing a full-time outreach worker in Merton, allows us to offer 1-1 and group support in schools and the community, just another way of reaching out to young people who may be isolated and going it alone.

**WE ARE A Play therapist at our Young carers service in Croydon provides sessions to primary aged 7-16 year olds and 19 trips and activities for the 17-25 age group. 18 young carers have also attended Crystal Palace home matches through support from the Freekick Foundation. One particularly popular event was our family day trip to Brighton, attended by 60 people.**