



### **Annual Report 2018/19**

Acorn has been in existence for some 24 years serving people in the Worthing area. Over that time we estimate that we have seen more than **500** clients for pregnancy loss and crisis pregnancy counselling and over **25,000** young people have had the opportunity to consider issues around relationships and about the development in the womb through the sessions we have led.

The impact of the work of Acorn is difficult to measure as much of it relates to changed lives and more informed decisions - details about which we will never learn.

We do however know what individuals say now, and here is some feedback from clients and schools in the last year:

#### **Clients**

'I feel this past 6 weeks has positively changed my outlook on people and my counsellor has been brilliant at listening, remembering and helping me'

'The programme helped me tremendously to devise coping mechanisms. The pain and memory will never go away but now I feel able to try and move on with my life'

'Thank you as I don't think I would have coped without you'

#### **Schools**

'The staff and students have been exceptionally complimentary about the sessions. We are keen to use you'

'Yes we definitely want you. Thank you for your continued support for our students'

#### **Pregnancy Counselling**

Over the past year 68 clients made contact with us (+21%) of which 39 came to appointments (+34%). 7 of these were for crisis pregnancy counselling, 5 for initial assessments only, with some 27 clients seen for up to 10 weeks of pregnancy loss counselling sessions each (predominantly miscarriage and abortion).

Over the past 2 years 70% of clients seen have come for pregnancy loss counselling and 30% for crisis pregnancy.

Clients are referred to us from a variety of sources including:

- 27% from Time to Talk (the NHS Counselling service)
- 16% from GPs
- 12% Friends
- 12% Website

Our counselling service has been provided by a team of 6 counselling volunteers supervised by Angela Watt. We are grateful for the time and expertise provided by the team as they have continued to serve vulnerable people going through a crisis in their lives. The positive, caring, professional impact made by the team is obvious from the comments recorded by clients on their feedback forms. There remains a good blend of experience and skills within the team, 2 members of which are currently completing their Level 4 general counselling qualification. We have part funded participation in an art therapy workshop and safeguarding training has been provided. We say 'goodbye' with our thanks to Trish Chatfield who has served on the team for the last year as she goes to undertake full time work with Turning Tides.

### **Schools Work**

The growth in the schools work has continued in the last year under the enthusiastic leadership of Steph Spanner. We now visit 8 secondary schools in the area which we believe provides the greatest coverage Acorn has ever attempted. In the current year we are taking over 70 x 1 hour Year 10 sessions meaning that around 1750 pupils will have been helped this year to make informed decisions and choices in the future.

We have updated the presentation and the guidelines for presenters and also invested in a new set of model babies helping young people understand more fully about scale and change. We have created a feedback form for teachers and pupils and increasing use of this will help us gain valuable knowledge about the impact of the sessions we are delivering and what areas could be developed further.

Steph Spanner and Pam Denman continue to show great energy and commitment in leading the sessions and we are grateful to them and to the rest of the team who make the schools work happen.

### **Finance**

Whilst there was a small increase in donations over the past year, our financial position has suffered due to significant drop in income from trusts and fundraising. In the previous year our income was boosted by being one of the designated charities within the Co-op Local Community Fund. There is considerable competition from other charities for such funding and we were not selected again although will reapply in the future. In addition, we were unsuccessful in our applications to a number of other grant providers.

This experience has emphasised how vulnerable Acorn is financially when regular donations and Gift Aid thereon only covers around 43% of our annual budget. Clearly this is not a new situation for Acorn, but we must redouble our efforts to gain a broader supporter base whilst continuing to seek grant income from trusts and taking forward various fundraising activities.

## **Communication**

Communication about the services Acorn provides is of course not primarily to seek to attract income but principally to ensure that those who would benefit personally come to us. In the past year we have updated part of our website to enable Google analytical data to be provided to us as we are increasingly aware that in the modern world on line information can be the first port of call for inquirers. We are now getting 12% of all contacts directly from the website and activity levels are increasing. Subject to funding, our aim is to update the whole website in the current year together with our range of literature which still remains a useful means of communicating what we can provide. Let us know if your local GP surgery has run out!

We had a stand at the Mental Health Awareness week in October and will be attending the GP Mental Health Education session in May. Over the years we have held a number of communication sessions with church, counselling students and other groups and are always keen to attend more of these to broaden knowledge of our services in the local area.

## **Centre Management**

Angela Geach, Centre Manager has continued to work as our part time (12 hours per week) employed member of staff. Amongst the key duties she performs is being the first point of contact for all enquiries. These can be more mundane issues relating to the premises but they also include the first contact (usually telephone or e mail) any client makes with Acorn. Her role is key given the way she handles people reflects on what they think of Acorn as a whole. We are grateful for her sensitivity but also organisational ability as she oversees the operational activity of some 20 volunteers.

Included within the volunteers are our cleaners and we are very grateful to them for making sure that the Centre always remains clean and tidy.

Over the next few months a decision will need to be made regarding whether to renew the lease of our existing premises or relocate. A premises sub-committee has viewed a number of alternatives and undertaken a survey of users and we will update you with the current position at the AGM.

## **Trustees**

There have been 5 trustees over the last year – my co-trustees being Mary Parish, Patrick Woodward, Wendy Marshall and Steph Spanner and we also have the support of Acorn's Advisory GP Dr Becky Richards who has attended a number of our trustee meetings. Mary will be standing for re appointment for a further 3 year term at our AGM. The trustees meet formally 4 times a year although given that the role involves both governance and operational matters there is a regular weekly stream of e-mails.

We have tackled many different matters over the year including the development and approval of several policies. We have attended a number of external events and courses in particular run by Community Works. We recognise the importance of training and peer engagement at trustee level to ensure good governance. We continue to be registered with the Fundraising Regulator and remain a member of the National Council of Voluntary Organisations.

## **The Future**

Our clients, be they teachers and pupils at schools or those coming for counselling due to a crisis pregnancy or pregnancy loss, tell us that the work of Acorn is vital. As we move into our 25<sup>th</sup> year we will continue to ensure we are able to meet this demonstrated need.

- We will encourage, support and develop our team
- We will provide appropriate premises for those who come for counselling and for the work to be undertaken
- We will improve the ways we communicate the service we provide so that users and referrers are aware of it and supporters can engage with us
- We will fundraise, seek grant providers and grow the regular supporter base
- We will develop the ways we seek to evaluate the service we provide both to improve it but also to demonstrate to all who are or who could become involved, the impact Acorn has on the lives of the people it serves

Richard Marshall  
Chairman  
May 2019