



## **Annual Report 2024/25**

***'The counselling has had a great impact on my life. The kindness I experienced and the feeling of being completely honest about my experiences and trauma has been really healing for me.'***

***'I have felt stronger and more equipped to face what challenges may lie ahead with the journey of grief.'***

***'Anyone who has suffered such an unfortunate loss, may find ways to help themselves through Acorn.'***

***'I'd like to thank Acorn - particularly my counsellor, for helping guide me through my grief. Mentally I am in a much better place than I was before counselling. I couldn't thank you enough.'***

These are quotes from four of the counselling clients we have seen in the last year. Our schools team have also received great feedback from students and teachers, for example:

***'Great lesson.'***

***'Students are offered a full range of options and choices with no ulterior motive/design.'***

***'Information and non-judgemental. Kind and honest responses to normal teenage questions.'***

***'Acorn provide the school with invaluable support – they are a superb source of information and meet the statutory guidelines.'***

### **Acorn is 30!**

In March 1995 Acorn first opened its doors to the public offering free counselling to those who became unexpectedly pregnant. Over subsequent years Acorn developed its service to offer counselling to those who experienced pregnancy loss and provision of sessions to students in local secondary schools covering relationships and pregnancy.

Since that time nearly 1000 women and men have received counselling, and some 36,000 young people have attended Acorn sessions.

A celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary was held on 29 March at River of Life Church, Worthing where Acorn had its first home. The event was attended by many who have been involved in Acorn over the years. It was opened by Bob Smytherman the town crier and various speakers included a counselling client, a teacher, Liz Slaughter one of the founders of Acorn, and its patron Tim Fooks High Sheriff of West Sussex. A memorable occasion.

## Pregnancy Counselling

Clients continue to be offered a choice of face-to-face, telephone or on-line counselling alternatives.

86 clients made contact with us during the year of which 29 came to appointments. 3 of these were for crisis pregnancy counselling, with some 26 clients seen for up to 12 weeks of pregnancy loss counselling sessions each (predominantly miscarriage and abortion). In total 221 x 1 hour sessions with clients were held.

The main sources of referral in 2024 were:

- 25% NHS West Sussex Talking Therapies
- 13% Website/social media
- 13% GPs
- 13% Friend

Over the year 16 different sources have referred clients to Acorn. In all, over the past seven years some 43 different sources have referred clients to Acorn emphasising the breadth of Acorn's profile but also the commonality of loss.

The average age of our clients last year was 29. This is at the lower end of the average age over recent years which has varied from 29 to 33.

We continue to see men as well as women although we believe there are many more men who could benefit from the service Acorn provides. We are making efforts to expand our contacts with other organisations who focus on men's needs and have created a separate page on our website devoted to men.

The counselling team has remained Gillian, Roz and Wendy and we are very grateful for their dedication, professionalism and kindness as they respond to the needs of Acorn's clients.

During the year we said goodbye to Angela Watt who has supervised the counselling team over the past 7 years. We wish her well for the future. Supervision is now provided by Dr Judy Harris, an experienced practitioner who has built good relationships with the team members.

## Schools Work

Our schools team, led by Steph Spanner has continued to do a great work providing 79 sessions in some 9 schools during the year. The schools who have welcomed us again are Angmering, Bohunt, Davison, Durrington High, St Andrews, Shoreham Academy, Sion and The Littlehampton Academy. This year we have also visited Robert Woodard for the first time.

Many thanks as always to Steph and the team who remain passionate about the schools work. We may never know the full impact that this will have on many lives.

## Premises

We continue to be based from our office and counselling room at Pilgrim House. We remain thankful for these excellent premises including the availability of the upstairs conference and prayer rooms which we use for meetings including our forthcoming AGM.

## Finance

Income received grew as a result of grants provided by Sussex Community Foundation, Worthing Community Chest, Emmaus Trust, Souter Charitable Trust and Worthing Crematorium Metal Recycling Scheme. We are grateful to all these organisations and in addition to the staff at Bupa who did a charity raffle in support of Acorn and obtained matching funds from their employer.

Whilst overall income is up, as in the previous year regular giving has reduced which now represents under 40% of our annual budgeted expenditure. We do appreciate those who commit to give in this way usually by monthly standing order. It helps massively as we seek to budget for future outgoings knowing we have the support of regular donations. We would love to increase the number of people and organisations who give in this way.

We continue to receive donations from some schools and clients and also from those who use Easyfundraising to pay for goods and services (please see the link on our website for this simple way of providing more funds for Acorn).

Our expenses also rose as planned as a result of the full year impact of establishment of the paid counsellor and the social media and marketing roles.

Overall income was higher than expenditure partially covering the previous year's deficit.

Many thanks to our finance team of Patrick Woodward (Treasurer), Adrian Vyse (bookkeeper) and Adrian Spann (independent examiner). During the year Debbie Squires and Andrew Kean (bookkeeper and independent examiner) stepped down. We are grateful to them both and to Adrian Vyse and Adrian Spann for taking over these roles.

## Centre Management

After over 7 years in the role of Centre Manager Angela Geach retired in July. We have greatly appreciated what she brought to the charity over those years.

We were delighted to appoint Christel Coram as our new Centre Manager. She has taken over the responsibility from Angela with enthusiasm and diligence and we are very pleased to have her.

As always the part time Centre Manager role involves juggling a wide variety of tasks with a constant need to prioritise given the limited time available each week (12 hours). It remains a crucial position in the charity as the first point of contact to both clients and any others seeking involvement with it.

### Trustees and Patron

During the year there have been 5 trustees – my co-trustees being Paul Cross, Pam Denman, Patrick Woodward and Gillian Woodward. Paul's 3-year term ends this June and given his move away from the area he will not be seeking re-election. We are grateful for all he has done for Acorn and for his and Chris' continued prayer support for the work.

We are pleased that Lucy Worsfold agreed to be co-opted onto the trustee board in February and will be put forward for formal election as a trustee at the forthcoming AGM.

The trustees meet at regular intervals through the year and exchange views and information at any point as the need arises.

Tim Fooks continues as Acorn's patron. We are grateful to have him in this role as a wise and experienced reference point.

Acorn continues to be registered with the Fundraising Regulator and remains a member of the National Council of Voluntary Organisations and of the British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy.

### Communication/ Marketing

Communication of the service provided by Acorn to the local community remains a key focus for us.

Over the year we have done presentations at River of Life Church and Maybridge Community Church. We have also had a stand at the Worthing Lions Summer Festival and at the Bupa staff charity fundraiser event. We would love to be able to present the work of Acorn to more organisations throughout the area.

Charlotte Bailey has continued in her role as social media and marketing officer and has posted a variety of content on social media to enhance the profile of Acorn in that arena.

We continue to develop our website content as we realise this is an important window to explain the charity's services with a page specifically for men added during the year being one example of this.

Our monthly mailing continues to keep supporters up to date and our quarterly newsletters available for download from the website are also sent to former clients who wish to keep in touch.

The monthly prayer meetings are attended by a committed core group and we also have a WhatsApp group to keep those interested in praying for the work of Acorn more immediately up to date with needs.

We remain closely in touch with other similar West Sussex-based pregnancy counselling groups holding regular meetings with them.

### Conclusion

Celebrating 30 years of Acorn in March was a good reminder that many people have been involved in the charity over the years. Indeed, one of the positive things about Acorn is that it does not revolve around any one person but is a broad alliance of like-minded people committed to serve the community in this way.

We take seriously our responsibility for overseeing the work and look forward to future celebrations of the charity's beneficial impact on the lives of individuals.

Richard Marshall  
Chairman  
April 2025