

FREE YOUR MIND.

Free Your Mind CIC: Impact Report 2023 Child & Young Persons Domestic Abuse Nonprofit

Our 2022-23 Impact: This year we had 298 referrals for our therapeutic one-to-one service from April 2022 - March 2023, that's an over 15% increase from last year.

PARTNERSHIPS

Birmingham: In November 2022 we opened a satellite office in Birmingham, as part of a developing partnership with Birmingham Children's Trust/Birmingham City Council. We have taken on 24 service users referred to us via their social worker team in Birmingham, each of these service users has received one-to-one therapeutic sessions, of which we provide eight weekly sessions. There were 5,933 concerns raised to Birmingham Children's Trust/Birmingham City Council, about a child relating to Domestic Abuse from January 2022 - September 2022 (data from Birmingham Children's Trust) therefore we recognised a need for service like ours to be established here.

Box Up Crime: We continued our Box Up Crime partnership, where we place a dedicated Youth Mentor who visits every Thursday to their open sessions for young people and children to take part in boxing training, providing a safe space for young people there to receive the support they need. Box Up Crime provide open boxing sessions for young people in our local area of Redbridge, to help build their confidence and provide a much-needed healthy release. We spotted a vital opportunity to combine both physical and mental outlets for children and young people who may be suffering in silence due to complicated home lives.

WRAP-AROUND SERVICES

Holiday Programmes: We have developed group programmes during the summer holidays, which involved us holding interactive activities for children we have previously supported through our one-to-one therapeutic sessions. This additional support provides an opportunity for our service users to meet new people, form new friendships, learn new skills and keep busy during their time away from school. Activities included, face painting, video game tournaments, arts and crafts, card games and on one occasion: a cooking class held by a MasterChef 2022 contestant. We've received amazing feedback from both the children and their parents/guardians about these programmes.



These programmes provide a safe space outside of school, as child and young victims so often feel isolated at home, with lots of time to reflect upon their trauma. These activities allow for our service users to gain a sense of connectedness with others, and enables them to learn new skills and build their confidence.

Additional Support: We have been continuing to offer additional services for families of service users and have expanded upon these, due to the Cost of Living Crisis exacerbating the needs of those who are already suffering from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who are often who make up our service users. These services include supporting those fleeing domestic abuse, by way of directing them to housing support funds, providing Tesco and Love to Shop vouchers, white goods via BBC essentials, food bank referrals, boarding school opportunities via Buttle, and other funding opportunities.

Safe Space: We have recently collaborated with Tipi coffee shop on George Lane, South Woodford, a quick two minute walk from our office. We have been providing a safe space there for domestic abuse survivor parents to seek advice; on housing information, mental health information; access to our additional support - as listed above including, white goods, such as beds, wardrobes, TVs, books, laptops for children as they rebuild their home; access to food banks and retail vouchers.

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FEEDBACK

We collate feedback verbally, anonymously with child-friendly feedback at the end of our sessions and after every session we carry out wellbeing scales ensuring we check in with children and their progress. Additionally, we gather feedback from the families of our service users to obtain a broader understanding of the improvements in their wellbeing. FEEDBACK INCLUDES:

"When my child started these sessions, he would come out a little stressed and anxious and looked like he had a lot on his mind. Now, after sessions it's like he's visibly mentally lighter and happier. A little chatterbox. He's also smiling again (his nickname at school, before his dad's breakdown, was Mr Smiley Face) which is amazing. I am beyond grateful"
Parent of 9 year old.

"I have really enjoyed coming and doing activities every week and having someone to talk about my feelings to". "I

wish that we could have more sessions and I'm sad that this is the end".

"Thank you for the sessions, it has made me see that counselling is not bad and can be fun"

"I have enjoyed doing sessions with you and will miss coming here"

FOCUS GROUPS

We've increased our focus group sessions, as a means for us to include the voices of our service users into our every corner of our work. These are carried out during school term time holidays, to make it easier for children to attend. They are focused on ensuring children have a say on our primary focus: our therapeutic service, as well as helping us to better include their voices in our campaigns, and other work. These workshops always end with fun activities and games which help the children to get to know each other and have a good time.



CAMPAIGNS

We declared every June from 2022 onwards as CDA (Childhood Domestic Abuse) Awareness Month. 1 in 7 children and young people under 18 years old will have lived with domestic violence at some point in their childhood (Pritchard, University of Bournemouth). It is our mission to bring these children to the forefront of the important social issue of domestic abuse, as they are often forgotten about. We engaged in a social media campaign as well as outreach to local schools in Redbridge where we are based, by sending special campaign packs with information on Childhood Domestic Abuse and who we are.

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CASE STUDY 1

The name in this case study has been changed for safeguarding purposes but consent has been obtained to share.

Tahara, aged 9 years was referred to our service in 2021, by her mother as she was struggling with her emotions. Her mother was emotionally abused by Tahara's father and she witnessed this happening on many occasions. It was affecting her sleep, behaviour at school and home. Tahara was finding it very difficult to express how she was feeling and was becoming very overwhelmed by her anger.

Tahara expressed that this was the first time she had been given the opportunity to speak about her experiences in a safe and nonjudgmental place. She was worried about upsetting those she loved and wanted them to be happy.

It was important to firstly build her trust and to create a safe space that enabled her to feel calm, relaxed and listened to. We began all our sessions by using our FYM Health & Wellbeing scaling questionnaire which enables us as practitioners to quickly assess the needs of each individual child and to tailor their plan to ensure that they receive support that will enable them to move forward holistically.

It was apparent that Tahara's communication needs required the use of visual aids to support in helping her recognise the many different emotions, feelings and behaviours that she was experiencing and then provide a practical support aid that she can use anywhere at any time to express these emotions to those around her. This was in conjunction with tools/techniques such as journalling, visualisation, mindfulness techniques and by bringing her mother into the sessions to enable them both to explore their relationship.

By applying the skills of solution-based counselling and restorative practice both mother and Tahara were able to express their needs and hopes, for the first time, that allowed them to process their trauma in a safe space and allow for a much stronger connection without shame or guilt.

Due to the positive experience Tahara had in 2021, her mother re-referred her back to our service in January 2023 following a breakdown in contact between Tahara and her father. This had a significant impact on Tahara as she was grieving the loss of contact with her father, who she misses a lot. Tahara shared that she needed someone who would listen, be consistent and that she needed a space for her to cry as well as laugh. We looked at how her family had changed, the grieving process of loss, her strengths, recognising and honouring her sadness and then we looked at self-soothing techniques that can support her in building emotional resilience.

We worked together on establishing what a healthy and unhealthy relationship looks and feels like, setting boundaries, conflict management, emotional regulation, self-expression and her finding out her many SUPER POWERS!

The following feedback was provided by Tahara:

After our sessions she felt happy and glad she came back, and felt sad when sessions ended. The best thing for her was that she felt more open to express her feelings.

One thing she will remember in her last session was that we played her favourite song.

She has found our sessions helpful.

Her mother shared that she had seen a change in Tahara's self-confidence - she is now able to speak up for herself and have her needs listened to and she feels all children who are victims to domestic abuse should have access to a service like ours.



CASE STUDY 2

The child in this case study has been renamed for safeguarding purposes but consent has been obtained to share.

For years Lola experienced and witnessed violent incidents which would occur between her parents and involved her father being physically and emotionally abusive to her mother, her and her sister. This behaviour began to be normalised in the household and led Lola to believe that physical chastisement is a 'valid' form of discipline for children. The physical abuse left Lola with physical scars and the emotional abuse clearly had a severely negative impact on Lola's emotional wellbeing; she always felt on edge and unsafe. This also had a significantly negative impact socially on the way she interacted with other children; she would make excuses for bad behaviour and when she was mistreated she would internalise this and blame herself.

Using trauma-informed Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and solution-based counselling we approached her treatment holistically. We worked with Lola to help her understand that no one should have to experience what she had gone through and explained that we wanted to help her understand her feelings by providing a safe space where she could reconnect with her voice and use the tools she had learnt in our sessions as coping mechanisms. First we did some work on self esteem and positive healthy relationships to help her recognise that she does not deserve to be mistreated by her parents as a form of discipline. We had open conversations about the abuse and did some focused work on coping mechanisms to help her deal with challenging and overwhelming emotions. We worked to identify her triggers and created a safety plan so that she knows what to do to keep herself safe when an incident occurs.

Lola's sessions with FYM were a space for her to share her thoughts and feelings about her experiences without any interference or influence from her parents/family/school etc. She said that the sessions were a fun and interactive safe space for her to speak openly without fear of consequences. Reflecting on our sessions, Lola told us that her experience with FYM was one that she will never forget. She mentioned that although in her heart she knew that the sessions were coming to an end at the right time, she was very sad to be leaving and wished she could have had more. All Lola wanted was to speak to someone about the abuse she had witnessed, who would believe her when she talked about her experiences.

With FYM Lola felt that over the eight weeks we had with her, that we were able to build a trusting relationship and she was pleased to have had her sessions with someone who showed her unconditional positive regard from someone that genuinely wanted to support her with what she was going through. Lola expressed that she did enjoy attending sessions every week which is reflected in her attendance, and that it was hard for her when they came to an end, often children feel abandoned when leaving the service as it becomes a routine for them to attend counselling once a week. However, the support did not stop there, we worked very closely with Lola's mum and her school to ensure she was still receiving support even after leaving FYM through school counselling.

Lola now has the tools she needs to continue her journey of healing from the abuse and through the focused work we did, she is now able to process the abuse she went through and understand her emotions better. We are very proud of Lola and hope that she continues to use the tools she learned in our sessions to support her emotional wellbeing for the rest of her life.

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