

Counselling for broken People

How Paristamen helped Street Connect to equip staff & volunteers with counselling skills to make them more effective in helping broken people turn their lives around

When we proposed for some of our staff and volunteers to do a counselling course to help us respond to the mental health crisis following Covid, we easily got funding for a course (from the Rapis Response & Resilience Fund) but we were scratching our heads wondering how on earth our staff would find time to study when they were already up to their ears in support work. At the time Paristamen was offering funding for **Christian Hope in a post-Covid Scotland** and we thought – this could be the perfect fit! We are a Christian organisation helping people stuck in addiction to turn their lives around. We work in partnership with local churches in areas of multiple deprivation, offering a holistic support model – bio-psycho-social support and something extra - spiritual support. We believe there is a spiritual dimension to recovery from addiction and other life-controlling issues and the fact that many of our staff and volunteers have personal lived experience of the transformational impact of the Christian faith on their recovery journey is a key strength of Street Connect. For many of our participants it's the spiritual element which makes the difference and is the turning point for their recovery.

Covid made the situation of people still stuck in addiction so much worse. When Covid came, it brought such an increase in mental health problems we realised we needed to have trained counsellors on the ground and have professional level counselling embedded in our support systems to tackle this huge pandemic of poor mental health, which is still impacting lives after most people have stopped dying directly from Covid. Equipped with counselling tools we would be much more effective in spreading Christian Hope post Covid, using counselling alongside that Hope to combat the deeply ingrained fear that settled into the nation's hearts during the pandemic.

We called our Project **Counselling for Broken People**

We were so thankful when Paristamen said Yes to £10,000. Together with money from Pret Foundation and the Glasgow Communities Fund it was enough to pay a new full-time female support worker to take the strain & release 2 female staff to study. We also used the Paristamen grant to pay for extra hours for 2 part time male support workers so they could have paid study time too.

12 people were selected for the course – 4 volunteers, 4 support work interns and 4 staff members. We were set to go and most of the 12 started their Certificate in Counselling, delivered on-line through the Institute of Counselling, in May 21. The course is credit rated with 20 points at SCQF level 8 (2nd year BA/BSc) so it was quite a challenge. We set up a study morning on a Thursday so students could study together and help each other. As it was a go-at-your-own-pace set up, some raced ahead, giving them time to help others who didn't take to academia so naturally. Here are some comments from course participants:

It is helpful learning about the different theoretical approaches as it means I don't need to figure everything out on my own. Theory helps to understand people better, so we can help them move forward.

I really enjoyed the counselling course. I hope to use the skills I have learned to be a more effective support worker and really engage and form a good rapport with the participants. I am more aware of using my skills on a day-to-day basis and this is very encouraging as it makes me more confident in my working role.

All the support workers on the course continued with their one-to-one caseloads during their studies, so this allowed them to transfer their learning directly into experience:

Active listening & empathy are the 2 most relevant things I have learnt. It is helping me to be more mindful of how I interact with participants in a 1-2-1 setting. I am now consciously making an effort to block out other distractions while listening to a participant.

Active listening is so important it shows that you are genuine and not thinking about other things. Also, challenging people and setting goals for change is a key factor - all part of the Person-Centred Approach. The Person-Centred Approach is so important, how it breaks everything down. Having empathy is first and foremost for support workers

We also asked some service participants if they had noticed a change:

Appears more interested. Listens well.

Q: How has your support worker helped you?

Helped me heal

Has helped me by listening, setting goals and challenges, giving me good advice, being a friend interested in my life and wellbeing and health, phoning the d's on my behalf, assisting me in applying for a new home as I struggle with forms. Has encouraged me to grow in my creative skills of writing poetry and making creative objects.

Q: What was the most important thing they did that helped?

Recognised I am worth something

Caring & being interested in my life.

How was the funding used?

The total cost of the project, including the fees for the Counselling Certificate course (which we had raised from elsewhere) was £23,225. The main cost met by Paristamen was toward the salary costs of extra hours for our 2 PT male support workers and an extra female support worker so that the 2 male & 2 female outreach & support staff undertaking the counselling course could study during their work hours without participants missing out. In summary, the funds were used as follows.

12 Certificate in Counselling courses from the Institute of Counselling	£2,880
Laptops to enable students to study at home including internet access (for those who did not have such facilities)	£1,532
Extra hours for male support workers - 20hpw for 12mths	£12,055
1 female replacement support worker - 12hpw for 12mths	£6,758
TOTAL COSTS OF PROJECT	£23,225
Grant from Paristamen	£10,000
Grants from other sources (Rapid Response & Resilience Fund, Pret Foundation, Nationwide and the Glasgow Communities Fund)	£13,225
TOTAL INCOME FOR PROJECT	£23,225

NB You'll have noticed from our previous report that the replacement female support worker we employed was actually FT. We were able to afford those additional hours thanks to additional funding from GCF allowing us to expand our support work on top of covering the counselling course study hours.

What difference did the project make?

The course has already made a big difference. Person-centred support is a core element in the Scottish Government Rights Respect & Recovery Action plan, so we are particularly pleased this side of our recovery work has been enhanced through this course and that both our workforce and volunteer force have been upskilled.

This will help us make a real impact, sharing Christian Hope in Post Covid Scotland. While the Covid threat recedes (but has not gone) and its after-effects are still with us, there is now the cost-of-living crisis adding to the pressure of daily life for people in distress so I think the hope we offer will continue to be so relevant as mental health issues soar under all these pressures.

Thank you for this grant which has enabled us to make a greater impact as support workers & volunteers have learned to really listen. That's when participants open up & share, when they see we really care & this opens doors to hope and especially to hope in HIm.

Thank you