

**cygnus**  
support

**Grant Evaluation of Year 1 and Year 2  
'Counselling Education Change' Project**

**Funded by  
Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities  
2017 -2020**

*"Cygnus is a life saver"*

*"My counsellor helped me realise my life is worth something"*

*"A wonderful service where you can speak to someone in confidence who can give support, guidance, and honesty to help you through a difficult time"*

**Independent Evaluation Consultant: Sue Vaughan**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Cygnus Support**

#### **Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities grant evaluation of Year 1 and Year 2 'Counselling Education Change' Project 2017 -2020**

##### **Background Information.**

Cygnus Support, formerly Women's Health and Advice Centre Ltd is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee based in Ashington. The charity has been providing mental health and well-being services to people in Northumberland for over 30 years including counselling, psychotherapy, education and training.

Cygnus Support received a three-year grant (2017 – 2020) from the Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities Programme. The purpose of this programme is to help communities and people most in need. The grant was awarded to support a 'Counselling Education Change' project to develop and deliver high quality counselling services to people living in Northumberland. The grant of £496,736 over three years supports the core costs of Cygnus Support including the appointment of a Development Counsellor to lead on four areas of work:

- Establish permanent bases across rural Northumberland to clients facing multiple barriers including social and rural isolation using a Hub and Spoke model of delivery.
- Support the ongoing counselling service
- Develop Drop In support group
- Develop an Educational Programme of activities.

##### **During 2017-2019 Cygnus Support:**

- Delivered 1,978 counselling and assessment sessions
- Received 406 referrals
- Facilitated 1,112 hours of work carried out by 24 volunteers

The project has in most cases exceeded its outcomes and outputs of the grant remit.

Outcome 2 showed that the numbers were less than expected, this may be due to the low response rate of feedback forms sent out to clients after counselling sessions end.

Feedback comes at the end of a block of counselling sessions; on a one to one basis followed by the organisation sending out a feedback form to the client three months after the sessions end. The response rate from these forms is 25%. This response rate is not unusual in projects of this kind as people have either moved on and feel better, forget or cannot be bothered to take the time to respond.

Qualitative data collected and anecdotal evidence from clients show they report being more in control of their lives, are able to plan ahead and, have improved relationships locally and feel part of the community.

### **The Northumberland Hub and Spoke Model.**

The Hub and Spoke delivery model was developed throughout Year 1 and 2 of the project. The Hub being the main offices of Cygnus Support in Ashington and the Spokes being outlying areas including rural Northumberland: Hexham, Berwick, Alnwick, and Blyth

The majority of clients who are referred to Cygnus Support come from Ashington and Blyth the major centres of population in SE Northumberland. Referrals from the North, West and Central parts of the county, that are the most rural and isolated areas with much smaller populations, have the least number of referrals.

As a new project working in a very rural area it would be expected there would be an initial low take up of services until it became established and gained a reputation with both professional and local people. Over the first two years of the project the service has developed and there has been a steady uptake of referrals.

### **The Campervan Tour**

During 2018 Cygnus Support carried out an outreach consultation over the course of a week. The 'Campervan Tour' was designed to assess the accessibility and awareness of mental health and wellbeing services in rural North and West Northumberland. The purpose of the consultation was to:

- Meet people in their own communities,
- Discuss what services are currently available to them
- Discover whether there is a need for the services Cygnus Support offer
- Determine where services could best be delivered and how people will access them.

### **Counselling Services SE Northumberland Hub:**

2017-2018 brought a 12% increase in clients being referred into the service. It takes referrals from a number of sources including individuals who self-refer, partner charities, Victims First and the Police, Northumberland County Council, NHS Services, GP's and other services including the Bridge Project.

Total clients seen at the Hub in Ashington between February 2017 and January 2019 was 336.

The majority of referrals are in the 26-40 and 41- 60-year-old age bands.

In 2017/18 there was a significant increase from 16% to 25% of young people's referrals. These figures reflect national statistics on the rise in the number of young people experiencing mental health problems and not receiving an appropriate intervention early enough.

The main referrals are for women but there has been increase in referrals of male client referrals doubling from 30 in year 1 to 61 in Year2.

More recently referral agencies for example Cruse Bereavement Care and Tyneside and Northumberland Mind are referring clients from Northumberland into Cygnus Support.

The demand upon Cygnus Support for counselling services is such that they have experienced increased waiting times for client assessment. There are longer lead in times to see a counsellor with clients having to deal with problems on their own and increased anxiety levels.

Staffing for the counselling service is predominately supported through volunteers with Cygnus Support employing one member of staff as a Counselling Manager to coordinate the service. Whilst this model does deliver added value and increases the number of counselling hours available there are some drawbacks. Volunteers often have other calls on their time, family or work commitments which they fit their counselling around. The limited availability of volunteer time restricts the number of clients Cygnus Support can realistically take on.

### **Education Programme of activities**

The Education Programme consists of a range of courses and health promoting events. Courses have included, Tai Chi, Yoga and Mindfulness with attendance being small in numbers. This service was reviewed in 2018 and Cygnus Support now looks to signpost clients to other services.

### **The Drop In.**

This group meets on a Friday morning in the main Cygnus Support office. It is a support group for people who have attended counselling. The group is quite small (6-10), welcoming and has enabled friendships and networks to develop.

### **Main Findings**

Main achievements of the Counselling Education Change project

- The work of the organisation receives overwhelming positive feedback from clients and partners
- It has ensured the continuation and growth of counselling services in Northumberland
- People who have received counselling from Cygnus Support report improved confidence and self-esteem. The stories they recount are compelling
- “The Campervan Tour” received good face to face feedback and identified a range of issues that are barriers to people who need counselling.
- Raised awareness of a free counselling service within Northumberland.
- Offered a rural counselling service for people living in the west and north of Northumberland in isolated places
- More organisations across the county have become more aware of Cygnus Support and the services it provides.

- Client engagement has reduced the number of missed appointments
- The new role of a Development Counsellor has helped to increase the referral rate of clients to the service and develop the service in isolated rural areas.
- Two recruitment drives increased the number of Volunteer Counsellors, this in turn has helped reduce the waiting lists.

### **Recommendations**

1. The Hub and Spoke model has taken time to embed. If the service is to continue further expansion of the Spokes will add pressure to the service and may dilute delivery that Cygnus Support can realistically offer.
2. If the Hub and Spoke model is to continue Cygnus Support should explore a model that includes the offer of telephone, Skype/Facetime and One at a Time counselling as part of a consultation. This should be offered as an alternative communication method taking into account given the difficulties of accessing the internet in some rural areas and given that people do still prefer face to face contact.
3. Cygnus Support needs to address the issue of the increase in client referrals as it will find it unsustainable to carry on taking referrals at the increased rate at present. Cygnus support should consider the following:
  - Reinstate a Triage system for referrals with an offer of advice or signposting while waiting for longer term support
  - Explore a new model of delivering counselling. The model of a single-session and one-at-a-time therapy that has been developed nationally and internationally to provide a response to need and to reflect the fact that the most frequent number of sessions a client need is 'one'.
  - Define the capacity of the service it can realistically offer to clients.
  - Decide how many volunteers it can manage and support?
  - Look at how many paid counsellors are needed to operate a minimum service?
  - Look to employ paid counsellors to manage the referral workload in a consistent manner
  - Decide what is the maximum number of clients that can be seen?

Once Cygnus Support defines its remit it can use these measures to manage expectations and capacity i.e. routinely close the waiting list when it is at capacity.

The Drop In: To develop support for this group further Cygnus Support would need staff input and support which at present it does have not the resources to undertake. The area has other support groups to which clients could be signposted.

### **Funding:**

The funding landscape has changed significantly and is much more competitive. Future large grants of the scale and size previously awarded from funders particularly for core costs are few and far between with a high level of competition for these resources.

Cygnus Support will need to look at sourcing funding for chunks of its work rather than relying upon one major funder for its core costs in future and prioritise where it wants or needs to place its resources.

It could split its work into the following chunks to apply for funds these being;

1. Continuation of the Hub and Spoke Model
2. Continuation of its present and ever-expanding Counselling Service
3. Look to employ more Counsellors rather than relying solely on volunteers
4. Develop work with Young People and Children.
5. Continue work supporting people suffering from domestic abuse and sexual violence
6. Explore models of other counselling organisations who undertake similar work to Cygnus Support and who have decided to offer a paid counselling service to those who can afford to pay privately.

## **Cygnus Support**

### **Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities grant evaluation of Year 1 and Year 2 'Counselling Education Change' Project 2017 -2020**

#### **Introduction**

Cygnus Support, formerly Women's Health and Advice Centre Ltd is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee based in Ashington. The charity has been providing mental health and well-being services to people in Northumberland for over 30 years including counselling, psychotherapy, education and training. Over this time, it has expanded its services, supported more people and worked in partnership with other organisations.

Cygnus Support received a three-year grant (2017 – 2020) from the Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities Programme. The purpose of this programme is to help communities and people most in need. The grant was awarded to support a 'Counselling Education Change' project to develop and deliver high quality counselling services to people living in Northumberland. The grant of £496,736 over three years supports the core costs of Cygnus Support including the appointment of a Development Counsellor and four areas of work:

- Establish permanent bases across Northumberland to support clients facing multiple barriers including social and rural isolation using a Hub and Spoke model of delivery.
- Support the ongoing counselling service
- Develop Drop In support group
- Develop an Educational programme of activities.

The expected outcomes of this work would be:

Outcome 1: Vulnerable adults with multiple complex needs will experience improved mental health and well-being as a result of support.

Outcome 2: Participants in the project will have improved confidence and self-esteem due to health and awareness skills.

Outcome 3: People in rural areas and those who feel excluded will feel less isolated and feel more in control of their lives.

This evaluation was undertaken between January and April 2019 by Sue Vaughan, Consultant who operates as an independent consultant in the charity sector in the North East of England. With extensive experience of working on a wide variety of projects and assessments with small to medium charities across the region.

#### **Methodology**

The key objective of this consultancy work is to undertake an evaluation of Years 1 and 2 of the project and the impact which Cygnus Support's services have had on people requiring counselling support across Northumberland.

The evaluation will:

- Assess delivery, progress and impact against the priorities of support for the beneficiaries
- Identify the difference the project has made
- Ask “has the project achieved its outcomes?”
- Analyse the scope and value of the support provided
- Identify best practice and challenges
- Identify a series of recommendations for the future

A number of key issues will also be considered as part of the overall evaluation:

- The perceptions of beneficiaries
- The views of beneficiaries and active participants
- The impact of specific services on the lives of beneficiaries
- Longer-term benefit for clients.

The following approaches were employed to review delivery, targets, and impact:

- Desk-based research using documentation relating to the project’s development and delivery, interim reporting, and other relevant material
- Face to face and telephone interviews with; beneficiaries, staff, representatives of external partner and referring agencies and Trustees
- Case studies

The above were analysed and form the basis of this evaluation.

### **Limitations of the Evaluation.**

The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation are based upon the information received and represent an accurate and honest interpretation of the findings.

### **Background: About Cygnus Support**

Cygnus Support, formerly Women’s Health and Advice Centre Ltd is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee based in Ashington.

The charitable objects of Cygnus Support are:

- To preserve and protect the good physical and mental health of adults and children; and
- To advance the education of adults and children about all matters concerning their health and well-being.

**Trustees:** Cygnus Support has six Trustees who have a wide range of skills and experience from across health, public, private and voluntary sectors including; leadership and management, finance, human resources / organisational development and governance

**Staff:** The Reaching Communities Programme grant is used to fund the posts of; Chief Executive Officer, Counselling Manager, Development Counsellor, Office Manager and Administrator.

Additional posts are funded through

- The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner; two part time counsellors who work with adults and young people who have experienced domestic abuse and sexual violence.
- The Bridge Project, a partnership of organisations who work with people who face the biggest barriers and challenges, to connecting or reconnecting with education, training, volunteering and work. The partnership is funded by The European Social Fund and the National Lottery, through the National Lottery Community Fund which aims to support people who are furthest away from the job market. Cygnus Support is a partner and employs a full time Counsellor and Coach who work with clients who need extra support to enable them to overcome multiple and complex barriers and problems that are keeping them from entering the job market. In addition, Cygnus Support also host a Bridge Worker on behalf of the wider partnership.
- Northumberland County Council Housing Section (Homelessness) also funded a part time counsellor, this funding came to an end in November 2017.

Alongside the paid staff Cygnus Support is a clinical placement setting for student counsellors and psychotherapists who require clinical hours towards their accreditation. Presently there are 24 Volunteers Counsellors and Psychotherapists who are recruited through a partnership with the Northern Guild of Psychotherapists, TyneMet College, Sunderland University and Ashington College. Each volunteer sees, on average, three clients per week.

**Cygnus Support offers:**

- An emotional and wellbeing service
- A free and confidential service to men, women, young people and children with mental health issues.
- Counselling services across the whole of Northumberland for people experiencing mental health problems, this includes services to those affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence.
- Outreach services across the more rural north and west of Northumberland.
- Education programmes to help improve mental and physical health.
- Drop-in support group

As Women's Health Advice Centre the charity predominately supported women in situations of domestic abuse and sexual violence. It has continued to offer services in this area making use of its well-developed expertise and reputation. It continues to use The Recovery Toolkit a psycho educational course designed for any individual who has experienced domestic abuse to help build confidence and self-esteem. As well as delivering the course

independently Cygnus Support has also worked in partnership with local agencies to deliver the Toolkit, for example with local Children’s Centres.

**Evaluation of the delivery of the Northumberland Hub and Spoke Model.**

The Hub and Spoke delivery model was developed throughout Year 1 and 2 of the project. The Hub being the main offices of Cygnus Support in Ashington and the Spokes being outlying areas including rural Northumberland.

The majority of clients who are referred to Cygnus Support come from Ashington and Blyth the major centres of population in SE Northumberland. Referrals from the north, west and central parts of the county, that are the most rural and isolated areas with much smaller populations, have the least number of referrals.

<b>Hub</b>	<b>Total clients seen at Hub 01/02/2017- 31/01/2019</b>
Ashington	336

As a new project working in a very rural area it would be expected there would be an initial low take up of services until it became established and gained a reputation with both professional and local people. Over the first two years of the project the service has developed and there has been a steady uptake of referrals.

Initially there were some issues for the organisation to overcome. Cygnus Support staff were based in SE Northumberland travelling to and from Wooler or Berwick, Rothbury and Hexham. The operational aspects of this work proved logistically challenging in terms of finding counsellors who were available locally or able or willing to travel. Driving time from Ashington to Wooler is an hour, for a 50 minute counselling session with a return trip of an hour. Planning counselling sessions to fit with the need of the client, finding suitable venues and matching an accessible time for both the counsellor and client proved difficult. By Year 2 of the project Cygnus Support has two volunteer counsellors based in the north of the county who can cover the Wooler and Berwick areas.

Spokes	Total clients seen at Spokes 01/02/2017- 31/01/2019
Hexham	57
Berwick	12
Alnwick	14
Blyth	62

### **The Campervan Tour 2018:**

During 2018 Cygnus Support carried out an outreach consultation over the course of a week. The 'Campervan Tour' was designed to assess the accessibility and awareness of mental health and wellbeing services in rural North and West Northumberland. The purpose of the consultation was to:

- Meet people in their own communities
- Discuss what services are currently available to them
- Discover whether there is a need for the services Cygnus Support offer
- Determine where services could best be delivered and how people will access them.

The information would build on the intelligence that Cygnus Support has already collated regarding delivering services in rural areas and be used both to develop internal services and externally with partners to form a basis of future discussions around collaboration.

### **Methodology:**

The focus of the Campervan Tour was to reach remote and potentially isolated communities, particularly some of the smaller settlements located close to and within Northumberland National Park, which covers a large part of the county.

### **Campervan Tour - Results and feedback**

The Campervan Tour identified the challenges and opportunities of working across a large rural area and the issues faced by communities when accessing services.

### **Accessing Services - Transport**

One of the biggest issues faced when accessing services was the limited, or lack of public transport and the time it takes to get to and from main towns. This was further exacerbated, for those on low incomes, by the cost of public transport. In all of the communities visited people relied on their own transport or those of family and friends to take them to appointments outside their own villages.

## **Communications**

Part of the consultation was designed to look at ways of delivering services in a way that meets the needs of individuals but also provides a cost-effective delivery mechanism for Cygnus Support. The majority of people who responded (67%) said that using video and voice technology would make services more readily available to them. However, there were a number of issues surrounding this, including:

- Mobile technology and phone signal in many of the rural areas is problematic and varies according to the provider.
- Broadband is improving in the areas visited but there are still some areas with poor or no connection.
- Access to IT equipment was also raised as a problem. Not everyone can use IT equipment or be in a financial position to buy a computer and using public access computers would not be appropriate for counselling support.
- Many people spoken to stated that although they would access services via the internet and mobile technology, they would prefer to speak to someone face-to-face for mental health issues.

## **Knowledge of Services**

The consultation included a significant number of comments regarding information available about services in rural areas, the main information sources were GPs and churches.

Other services that were mentioned were:

- Talking Matters was the service most recognised and this was largely due to people seeing their information in GP surgeries.
- Health and Social Care services were referenced: Helping Hands, Health Visitors, and District Nursing.
- Bereavement services were available in Wooler and the Rothbury/Coquetdale area.

## **Accessing Services – excluding transport**

During the tour, a number of potential locations were identified as possible venues for Cygnus Support to consider delivering services from. There was, however, a concern from consultees that if the community knew services were being delivered from a particular location, at a certain time, then this would deter people from going. The concerns raised were around confidentiality and stigma. This would also be applicable to partner organisations which offered specific services.

## **Provision of Wellbeing Services & Classes**

There were some good examples of wellbeing initiatives within communities. There were classes in yoga, tai chi, and mindfulness and walking groups run by a range of organisations in local village halls and community venues.

## **Social Issues**

Unsurprisingly the Campervan Tour found many of the social issues common to rural areas and poor mental health; high levels or pockets of deprivation, difficulties accessing services, higher costs and isolation. Specifically, the consultation found:

- Many of the communities visited were inhabited by a large number of retired people.
- There is high unemployment in some areas, particularly Wooler where work is often seasonal.
- Farm workers also make up a significant part of the population which has a culture of long hours and low pay.
- Young people in particular face limited employment opportunities with no apprenticeships in the local area and poor transport links.
- Housing was also highlighted as an issue many homes were now holiday lets and this is beginning to impact on schools.

Domestic abuse and sexual violence were raised as significant social issues. In the survey 44% of respondents said they were aware of a need for domestic abuse services in their area. This came with a caveat with people saying 'there will be a need but I don't have any specific knowledge of incidences'.

## **Conclusions from the Campervan Consultation.<sup>1</sup>**

The information gathered during the week of the tour provided a snapshot of the issues people in rural areas have in accessing services.

The main issues being:

- Lack of information about services available in Northumberland
- Availability of transport to enable people to access services
- Access to computers and the internet if this is the only way of delivering services
- Locations to deliver services to ensure confidentiality

## **Counselling Services SE Northumberland Hub:**

2017-2018 brought a 12% increase in clients being referred into the service. Cygnus Support is very well networked across SE Northumberland, this is due in part to its well-established reputation locally and long experience of working with victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse. It takes referrals from a number of sources including individuals who self-refer, partner charities, Victims First and the Police, Northumberland County Council, NHS Services, GP's and other services including the Bridge Project.

Total clients seen at the Hub in Ashington between February 2017 and January 2019 was 336.

The majority of referrals are in the 26-40 and 41- 60-year-old age bands.

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<sup>1</sup> Campervan tour report available from Cygnus Support.

In 2017/18 there was a significant increase from 16% to 25% of young people's referrals reflecting national statistics and feedback on the rise in the number of young people experiencing mental health problems and not receiving an appropriate intervention early enough.

The main referrals are for women but there has been increase in referrals of male client referrals doubling from 30 in year 1 to 61 in Year2.

More recently referral agencies such as Cruse Bereavement Care and Tyneside and Northumberland are referring clients from Northumberland into Cygnus Support.

### **The Counselling Process**

Once referred to Cygnus Support the client receives an initial assessment with a counsellor and is then allocated to a counsellor for up to 7 counselling sessions of 50 minutes each.

At the beginning and end of the sessions clients fill in two assessment questionnaires The Mental Health Recovery Star and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale to assess their mental health, wellbeing and progress.

The Mental Health Recovery Star was designed for people living with a long term mental health condition, to support and measure their progress in living as well as they can. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale was developed to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing. The items are all worded positively and cover both feeling and functioning aspects of mental wellbeing. Both of these tools are commonly used within mental health settings.

The number of sessions for clients is flexible some clients feel confident to have a reduced number of sessions whereas some need more support. Each client is different and requires a different level of input and the Counsellors are flexible in their approach to the number of sessions needed. Where a client presents with more complex issues Cygnus Support will offer an assessment and up to 20 sessions of psychotherapy.

### **Referral and Time to a Counselling Appointment.**

The demand upon Cygnus Support for counselling services is such that they have experienced increased waiting times for client assessment. There are longer lead in times to see a counsellor with clients having to deal with problems on their own and increased anxiety levels.

Staffing for the counselling service is predominately supported through volunteers with Cygnus Support employing one member of staff as a Counselling Manager to coordinate the service. Whilst this model does deliver added value and increases the number of counselling hours available there are some drawbacks. Volunteers often have other calls on their time,

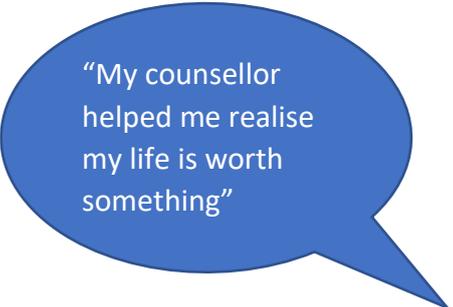
family or work commitments which they fit their counselling around. The limited availability of volunteer time restricts the number of clients Cygnus Support can realistically take on.

The number of live cases for counselling when the evaluation began in January 2019 were 280. The time from referral to assessment stood at 4 weeks for under 18's and 12-16 weeks for adults. The time from assessment to counselling is 12 weeks for under 18's and 4-6 weeks for adults.

These times are variable and dependant on factors such as geographic location area, priority, availability and client preference for a male or female counsellor.

The increased pressure on the service has led Cygnus Support to conclude that the present system is not working as efficiently as it could be, with too long waiting times for clients. A triage system is now being explored. In addition, new models of assessing and offering counselling are being actively pursued including the single session or one at a time counselling model. An introductory session for staff and volunteers with Professor W. Dryden, Emeritus Professor of Psychotherapeutic Studies at Goldsmiths University of London and one of the leading practitioners and trainers in the principles and practice of single session and one at a time therapy has already taken place. Further training is planned for which will allow Cygnus Support to put this model into practice.

### **Feedback from clients on the Counselling Service.**



“My counsellor helped me realise my life is worth something”



“Cygnus is a life saver”



“A wonderful service where you can speak to someone in confidence who can give support, guidance, and honesty to help you through a difficult time”

**Case study 1<sup>2</sup>:**

A DWP supervisor referred AB to Cygnus Support for counselling. This is his story.

I was my wife's carer for 25 years up until she died. After this I was unemployed, had no family support and I started to drink heavily. I was referred to counselling as part of my preparation to help get me back into work. I did not know what counselling was. I was so scared I went to the pub first before my first session.

My counsellor listened to me, I could say what I wanted, it was easier to talk to them, my family did not want to know, I was not judged, and I had privacy. They understood.

My counsellor helped me to set goals and ways to plan ahead to help me reduce my drinking and smoking. I was frightened about Christmas coming up, I was worried about getting drunk. I made a plan and I stuck to it. I had the odd drink, but I was never drunk.

I now drink less, I don't smoke, I have friends and I have bought a dog. The dog needs to be looked after, I take him for walks, I meet people and I get exercise and I enjoy being outside.

I now tell everyone "You need to go to counselling. Don't be embarrassed, they helped me to help myself".

**Case Study 2:**

AC is a woman in her mid 30's who accessed counselling for support following the trauma of being in an abusive relationship. She lives in a small close knit community in a rural area in the far west of Northumberland and reported facing many barriers to reporting the abuse and asking for help. These were:

Fear of her abusive husband

Fear that members of her community and family may find out about what was happening

Issues around trust, the long term trauma she had experienced caused AB to mistrust others

Practical difficulties in accessing services especially around transport and child care

Cygnus Support worked hard, and over a considerable time period to build trust with AB and to find a venue for sessions that she could travel to without arousing suspicion from her partner. Counselling provided AB with the confidence to report the abuse to the police, to gain a non-molestation order against her partner and to go ahead with court proceedings around the care of her children. AB told Cygnus Support "Without your help I'd still be stuck and frightened of what might happen to me and the kids. I couldn't have done the things I've done without you and I just feel happier, more confident and safer. Thank you!"

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<sup>2</sup> Cygnus Support anonymise all client case studies

### **Case study 3**

AD is a client in her 50s who was referred for counselling to address symptoms of anxiety. She found it difficult to go out much or leave her home town, unless she was accompanied by a family member. MB attended for 14 sessions between September 2017 and July 2018.

In her first few sessions, MB spent time exploring the origins of her anxiety. We discussed ways in which she could challenge herself to try to expand the range of activities she would participate in. Towards the end of her first set of 7 sessions, MB began to do more things including travelling to Newcastle on public transport. When we reviewed her progress, MB decided she would like to return to counselling after a break to allow her to address the trauma she experienced as a result of childhood abuse.

In the second set of 7 sessions of counselling, MB told her story of childhood abuse and explored her feelings about this. She identified a current relationship where the person reminded her of her abuser, and we discussed ways in which she could protect herself from emotional harm from this person.

In her initial assessment, MB scored 23 on the WEMWB and this increased to 65 in her final session. As we reached the end of her sessions, MB was regularly travelling independently to various places around the county to visit relatives, attend several social groups. The day before her final session, MB was faced with an unexpected incident which she coped with extremely well which demonstrated an increase in her emotional resilience.

**The Drop In.** This group meets on a Friday morning in the main Cygnus Support office. It is a support group for people who have attended counselling. The group is quite small (6-10), welcoming and has enabled friendships and networks to develop.

The women who attend the group reported it was a lifeline for them, some were bereaved, lonely, isolated and had lost confidence. The group offered a safe place to meet, a place where they could meet others who were in similar situations. They reported they had made friendships and met outside of the group to do things together.

One client said the group had offered her friendship "I could go to the park on my own but its not the same as going with a friend."

"I used to sit at home on my own watching the TV, I didn't go out. But I now cook lunch for a friend, I get to share my home-made food, eat properly and get to talk to another person. The days can be very long when you live on your own."

Both clients and staff are aware that the group needs some renewed energy, direction and re invigorating. The group certainly serves a purpose but needs staff input to develop it. At present there are not the staff resources to support this group.

## **Education Programme of activities**

The Education Programme consists of a range of courses and health promoting events. It has provided a small number of opportunities to help support the emotional wellbeing of clients. The programme aimed to reduce social isolation and increase self-sufficiency and personal resilience.

Courses have included, Tai Chi, Yoga and Mindfulness with attendance being small in numbers.

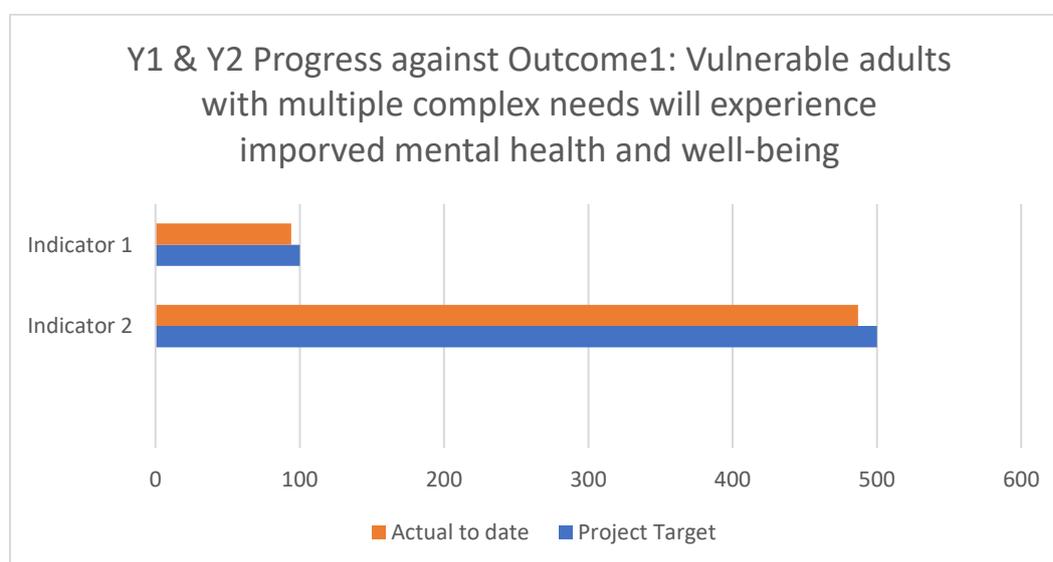
This service was reviewed in 2018 and Cygnus Support now looks to signpost clients to other services nearer to where they live offering similar classes, therefore avoiding duplication on the part of the project.

## **Project outcomes:**

During 2017-2019 Cygnus Support delivered:

- 1,978 counselling and assessment sessions
- 406 referrals
- 1,112 hours of work carried out by 24 volunteers

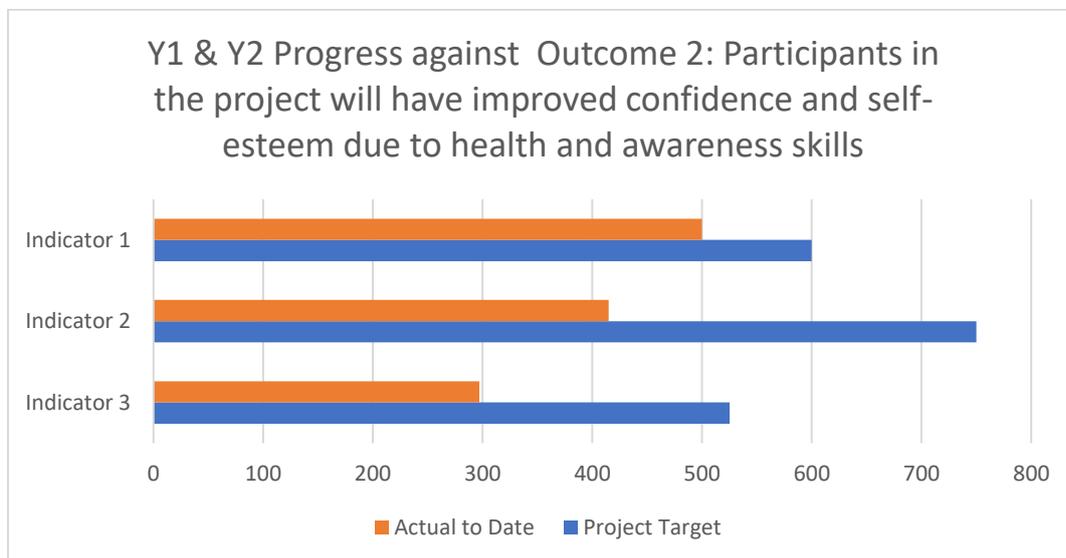
## **Outcome 1: Vulnerable adults with multiple complex needs will experience improved mental health and well-being as a result of support**



**Indicator 1:** Beneficiaries using the service will report reduced need for interventions from statutory services. Year 1:41; Y2:53

**Indicator 2:** Beneficiaries using the service will have better coping strategies in place, be more emotionally resilient and able to take action to prevent future problems. Year 1:201; Year 2:286

**Outcome 2: Participants in the project will have improved confidence and self-esteem due to health and awareness skills.**

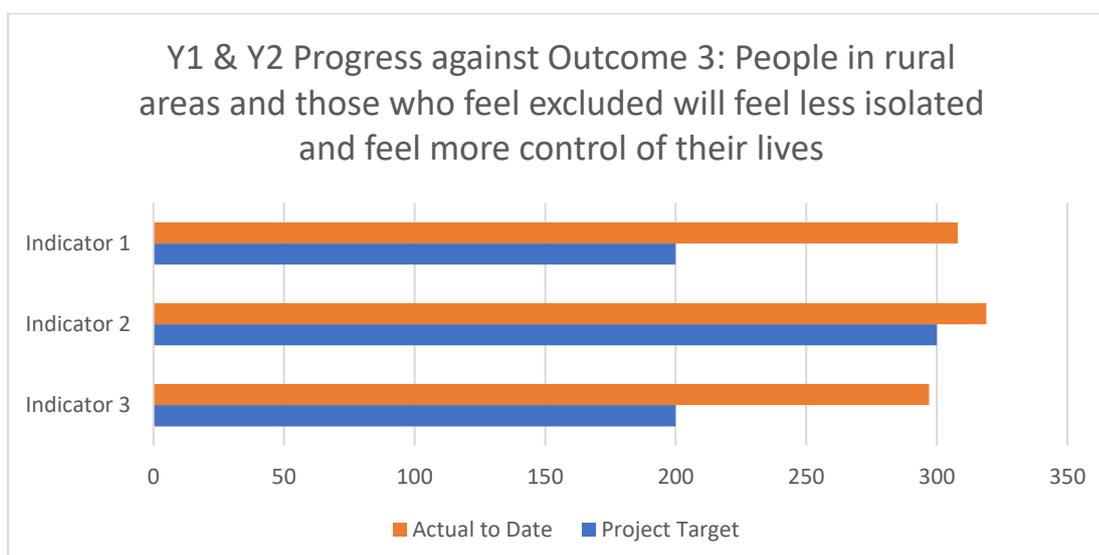


**Indicator 1:** Beneficiaries using the service will report feeling more confident, able to plan for the future and have the tools to manage future challenges. Year 1:191; Year 2:309

**Indicator 2:** Beneficiaries using the service will report self-esteem and emotional well being Year 1:179; Year 2:236

**Indicator 3:** Beneficiaries will be able to create happier and stronger relationships, including family relationships. Year 1:123; Year 2:174

**Outcome 3: People in rural areas and those who feel excluded will feel less isolated and feel more in control of their lives.**



**Indicator 1:** Beneficiaries using the service will report feeling less isolated and lonely. Year 1:109; Year 2:199

**Indicator 2:** Beneficiaries using the service will report being more in control of their lives and be able to plan ahead. Year 1:128; Year 2:191

**Indicator 3:** Beneficiaries using the service will have improved relationships locally and feel part of the community 1:101; Year 2:196

The project has in most cases exceeded its outcomes and outputs of the grant remit.

Outcome 2 showed that the numbers were less than expected, this may be due to the low response rate of feedback forms sent out to clients after counselling takes place.

Feedback comes at the end of a block of counselling sessions; on a one to one basis followed by the organisation sending out a feedback form to the client three months after the sessions end. The response rate from these forms is 25%. This response rate is not unusual in projects of this kind as people have either moved on and feel better, forget or cannot be bothered to take the time to respond.

Qualitative data collected and anecdotal evidence from clients show they report being more in control of their lives and are able to plan ahead and have improved relationships locally and feel part of the community.

### **Main achievements of the Counselling Education Change project**

- The work of the organisation receives overwhelming positive feedback from clients and partners
- It has ensured the continuation and growth of counselling services in Northumberland
- People who have received counselling from Cygnus Support report improved confidence and self-esteem. The stories they recount are compelling
- “The Campervan Tour” received good face to face feedback and identified a range of issues that are barriers to people who need counselling.
- Raised awareness of a free counselling service within Northumberland.
- Offered a rural counselling service for people living in the west and north of Northumberland in isolated places
- More organisations across the county have become more aware of Cygnus Support and the services it provides.
- Client engagement has reduced the number of missed appointments
- The new role of a Development Counsellor has helped to increase the referral rate of clients to the service and develop the service in isolated rural areas.
- Two recruitment drives increased the number of Volunteer Counsellors, this in turn has helped reduce the waiting lists.

## **Findings from the Evaluation Consultant**

The findings of the consultant arise from reading the information provided and listening to those involved either as clients, stakeholders or personnel connected with Cygnus Support

In the two years of the three year grant the project has successfully enabled the following:

Overall the project funded by the Big Lottery Fund has exceeded expectations. Those staff, clients and Trustees involved with Cygnus Support are proud of what has been achieved but recognise there is still much to do.

## **The Northumberland Hub and Spoke Model**

As a project offering a new service in a widespread rural area this project has taken time to bed in. It needed time to become established, make links with local professionals GP's Health visitors, key community champions, community workers, youth workers, church representatives and raise public awareness of its presence. There is more work to be undertaken here and there is an unmet need within the rural areas that is untapped. Cygnus Support has just uncovered the tip of the iceberg.

The Campervan Consultation received good face to face feedback and identified a range of issues that are barriers to people who need counselling these include, time to get to a session, a suitable venue where privacy would be available, transport to the venue when either the client does not have access to their own transport or there is no public transport.

A range of staffing issues have been highlighted when working in a rural area:

Supporting a rural client base has caused some issues such as staff travel time to and finding appropriate venues. This has all had an impact on staff time and carries a heavy cost implication.

There is a need for more counsellors to be located nearer to the rural communities they serve to overcome the travel and time taken for consultations. At present two volunteers are undertaking counselling sessions in the Berwick and Wooler area. This way of working needs development to continue and extend the service.

It should be noted that more IT based methods of communication are now more routinely used in other fields such as GP consultations for example.

## **Counselling Services SE Northumberland.**

The main Counselling Service is based in Ashington; Blyth, with its increase in referrals is putting pressure on paid counselling staff and the volunteers.

The increase in Cygnus Support's work is coming from its success and expertise in the service it offers. Referrals come from word of mouth with an increase from organisations for example Cruse Bereavement and Tyneside and Northumberland MIND that do not have a base in Northumberland.

The organisation has seen a rise in the referral rate for young people, so much so that it has taken the decision to amend its constitution to work with young people.

The Volunteer Counsellors often have paid day jobs and or other external commitments and although are very supportive of the work with Cygnus Support cannot be totally relied upon to offer sufficient time to an ever growing and complicated service.

Cygnus Support should explore ways of employing more counsellors to ensure the ability to offer consistent services. Although the volunteers give their time freely, they cannot always be available when needed.

All of the above has led to an increase in the waiting times for clients from referral to assessment to assigning a counsellor and sessions starting, in some cases from referral to a first counselling session can be 16+ weeks.

### **Educational activities.**

These activities were not supported by as many people as expected and as the activities already exist in the urban areas and in some of the rural area's clients are now being signposted to them rather than duplicating services.

**The Drop In.** This is a small group that meet offering support and friendship to each other who have undertaken counselling, they are often lonely, isolated and not sure where to turn to for help. To develop this group further the group would need staff input and support which at present Cygnus Support does not have the financial or staff resources. The area has other support groups to which clients could be signposted.

### **Recommendations**

1: Hub and Spoke model has taken time to embed. If the service is to continue further expansion of the Spokes this will add pressure to the service and may dilute the delivery that Cygnus Support can realistically offer.

2: If the Hub and Spoke model is to continue Cygnus Support should explore a model that includes the offer of telephone, Skype/Facetime and single session and one at a time counselling as part of a consultation. These should be offered as an alternative communication method taking into account given the difficulties of accessing the internet in some rural areas and given that people do still prefer face to face contact.

3: Cygnus Support needs to address the issue of the increase in client referrals as it will find it unsustainable to carry on taking referrals at the increased rate at present. Cygnus support should consider the following:

- Reinststate a Triage system for referrals with an offer of advice or signposting while waiting for longer term support
- Explore a new model of delivering counselling. The model of a single session and one at a time therapy that has been developed nationally and internationally to provide a response to need.
- Define the capacity of the service it can realistically offer to clients.
- Decide how many volunteers it can manage and support.
- Look at how many paid counsellors are needed to operate a minimum service.

- Look to employ paid counsellors to manage the referral workload in a consistent manner
- Decide what is the maximum number of clients that can be seen.

Once Cygnus Support defines its remit it can use these measures to manage expectations and capacity, in other words routinely close the waiting list when it is at capacity.

The Drop In: To develop support for this group further Cygnus Support would need staff input and support which at present it does have not the resources to undertake. The area has other support groups to which clients could be signposted.

**Funding:** The funding landscape has changed significantly and is much more competitive. Future large grants of the scale and size previously awarded from funders particularly for core costs are few and far between with a high level of competition for these resources.

Cygnus Support will need to look at sourcing funding for chunks of its work rather than relying upon one major funder for its core costs in future and prioritise where it wants or needs to place its resources.

It could split its work into the following chunks to apply for funds these being;

1. Continuation of the Hub and Spoke Model
2. Continuation of its present and ever-expanding Counselling Service
3. Look to employ more Counsellors rather than relying solely on volunteers
4. Develop work with Young People and Children.
5. Continue work supporting people suffering from domestic abuse and sexual violence
6. Explore models of other counselling organisations who undertake similar work to Cygnus Support and who have decided to offer a paid counselling service to those who can afford to pay privately.

**Cygnus Support**

**1 Council Road, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 8RZ**

**Tel: 01670 853977**

**Email: [admin@cygnussupport.com](mailto:admin@cygnussupport.com)**

**Charity No: 1119121**

**Company No: 5987640**