



To support
educate
& bring
everybody
together

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

Gratitude Tree



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Messages from the Chair of the Board and the CEO

Hello

It has been an unusual year for everyone. We are currently experiencing a situation that hopefully none of us will have to experience again: a worldwide pandemic, lockdowns, home schooling, home working and furlough at a grand scale, greater isolation and loss in various shapes and sizes.

Adults have been expected to change working environment and educate their children at the same time; expected to manage restrictions and financial difficulties. Children and young people have been expected to learn and achieve as before without falling behind. Teachers have been expected to deliver training in unusual and inventive ways. Nurses and doctors have been expected to work around the clock with greater risk to their own health. Other essential workers have been expected to put their own needs and even health aside to provide for others.

However, Battle Scars has really come into its own during this difficult time.

Every day there are news articles about the increase in people suffering from mental distress leading to increased rates of self-harm, depression and suicide. Throughout this, Battle Scars has been there to help and its increased involvement is shown by the rise in participation in our various group meetings. The requirement that they have to be held virtually on zoom has in many cases been beneficial as people from all over the country have been able to take part. Our training work with professionals has similarly expanded across the country as it has become easily accessible without the need to travel. Battle

Scars can now truly call itself a national organisation.

Conversations about mental health have opened up in society and people are becoming more willing to discuss mental health issues, however, mental health remains woefully underfunded in the NHS. It accounts for 23% of the burden of ill health but just 11% of the NHS budget (source Sunday Telegraph 16.5.21) so finding help can be hard, but Battle Scars has stepped in to fill the breach for so many people.

We continue to expand and widen our forms of support to meet the rising demand for our services. Jenny, our CEO, has been very active and very successful in applying for funding for new projects and extra staff. Even though it didn't happen until the new financial year, we now have six new part-time staff working on new projects. Our Addiction Workbook has been launched and well received. We have expanded our networking and working partnerships.

As we look to a hopefully brighter, yet uncertain future, Battle Scars is proud to continue to offer a vital service in challenging times.

Jean Birch
(Chair of the Board of Trustees)

I am finding the connection so helpful

Service user

And hello from me

The impact this pandemic is having on mental health is already noticeable with much greater impact expected over the next few months and years. The future is still full of unknowns. So much loss of control is resulting into the inevitable increase in self-harm. No matter what the root of someone's self-harm is, the desire to regain some level of control is present across the board, even if it's not obvious.

Same as other organisations we had to adapt to provide support in these difficult times. To help people feel less alone, to make sure they have safe spaces where they can be themselves with no fear of judgement, with total acceptance, with understanding and compassion. To support our existing services users, we started by converting as many of our existing services into virtual, fully aware of the shortcomings and problems of this delivery but having no other options due to our size and setup. We soon experienced high demand from people outside of Leeds and Wakefield and before we knew it, we were offering support to people anywhere in the UK.

This pandemic has put Battle Scars on a slightly different path, the path of a national

I have been with Battle Scars now for coming up to 2 years. It is a safe place to share and you're welcomed especially at the moment with the virtual groups. I have also attended the normal groups, which are just as good!! Everyone is listened to and respected. And it is like a family community and everyone looks out for each other, even on the fantastic Facebook page too. I would suggest anyone to give it a try. You won't feel out of place, we all share the same thing!!!

Service user

organisation, a path we hadn't expected to walk on for a while yet. Despite the negative impact of this pandemic, our charity is coming out of it much stronger than we went in, with services we wouldn't have developed otherwise, new volunteers and service users who no longer need to be local as well as becoming much richer in connections and friendships.

Jenny Groves
(Chief Executive)

Our aims

Battle Scars was created to support anybody affected by self-harm. Based on our broad definition covering physical (external and internal) self-harm as well as psychological self-harm (see *Our definition of self-harm* on the next page), we aim to help those who struggle with self-harm as well as those who support them.

We aim to educate and break down the stigma surrounding self-harm. We are truthful, open and honest, explaining that self-harm can affect anybody of any age, gender and background.

To meet our aims, we provide various survivor-led services as well as publications and resources on our website.

Our objectives – what we are doing and why

We live in a society where the aspiration/wish/desire to be a “perfect” human being (successful, beautiful, intelligent etc.) is trying to co-exist with talking honestly about our mental health. Two concepts that clash and create confusion. We insist that our mental health is more important than our academic results, career developments and financial wealth. But there is no reduction in pressure, stress or demands that would allow us to look after our mental health and as a species we cannot adjust fast enough to this way of living.

As adults we might be able to make informed, mature choices about what concepts we wish to believe and hopefully accept ourselves. But young people have neither the knowledge nor the experience to make the choice to reject the “perfect human being” idea. As they are grappling with such a contradiction, the world feels even more uncertain and more unsafe. As a result, their anxiety rises, their moods drop and their fears multiply.

Generally, our society is not as accepting as it should be, as it needs to be. There is still a lot of discrimination and judgement in the school or workplace, family environment and community against people who struggle with their mental health and especially against those who use self-harm to manage life. Often people don't reach out early enough and don't wish to discuss their mental health difficulties for fear of being bullied, sacked or sectioned.

We all have a duty to break down the stigma surrounding mental health and as a self-harm support organisation it's our responsibility to constantly chip away at it.

We constantly come across the belief that one needs to stop self-harming in order to achieve, be happy, pursue a career or a romantic relationship etc. We advise the opposite: one needs to pursue their dreams, one needs to achieve despite the self-harm so it gradually loses its function and importance.

Our services' aims are to provide safe spaces (physical or virtual) where people can get support but also where they can be themselves, where they can drop the pretence and not wear the “I'm fine mask”, where they are accepted as they are. That includes our volunteers, staff and trustees.

This year we had to go 100% virtual with our adult groups and training which prove to be a huge success. But due to a number of issues, we had to reduce support for young people to only the Facebook group instead of providing virtual support for this age group.

We also made the Battle Scars 12-step addiction programme workbook available and thanks to funding from the Tudor Trust we were able to print 160 copies. Thanks to the Brelms trust we upgraded our website to accept PayPal payments so we can easily make them available (we only charge a small admin fee and P&P).

Funnily enough though, we still operate out of the CEO's dining room with everybody working from home.

I was signposted to Battle Scars by a pain specialist nurse that I was seeing for my physical health problems. My self-harm began last year after a particularly bad reaction to medication I was prescribed for pain relief and anxiety. It affected me so badly that I was pushed to a very dark place and my self-harm began and with it came the guilt, self-hatred and shame and a whole host of other emotions I struggled to understand. I had to be honest with my GP as I knew I needed help to keep myself safe and with the pain specialist nurse as it involved medication. This is where I consider myself very lucky that she had a good insight into self-harm as she had worked in mental health previously and this is when she told me about Battle Scars.

I was reluctant at first to reach out as I was so ashamed of the fact I was self-harming and struggling to control it and didn't think I would be able to talk to others I didn't know and was worried that although the group is a closed group someone might recognise me within it. I eventually decided to join the Facebook group and am so glad I did and when I posted my worries I was immediately reassured by Jenny and others that it is a strictly confidential closed group and everyone is there for the same reason I was.

It's something like 6 months since I first became aware of Battle Scars and it has been an absolute godsend for me. It has shown me that self-harm is not exclusive and can affect anyone at any time thus helping me deal with some of my negative self-thoughts. The reading resources available have provided me with the information and advice to self-care and self-help.

I have used the Facebook group as a place to express my anxieties when having a bad day, a place that has been instrumental at times in distracting me away from self-harm, a place that feels safe, with a community of people who really do understand what you are going through.

After my initial fears about attending a zoom peer support group I have now attended at least one group every 2 weeks and find it an invaluable hour in a safe place where there is no pressure to participate etc. if you don't feel up to it and there is no fear of judgement. I overcame a big hurdle when I found the courage to join my first group but I was made to feel so welcome and it really doesn't matter who is in the group or facilitating on any given day I always feel supported, listened to and so grateful that I found Battle Scars, which has become an integral part of my support network on this journey I never thought I would find myself on.

Service user and volunteer

Our definition of self-harm

Self-harm inflicted on the body with immediate and longer-term effect. Examples: cutting, burning, scratching, hitting, pulling hair, biting, picking skin, overdosing, self-poisoning, restricting intake of food, calorie counting, restricting intake of liquids (such as water and juice), bingeing, purging, laxative usage, over-exercising, putting self in dangerous situations, risk taking that may result in injury or harm etc.

Psychological harm to the self. Examples: neglect, obsessive negative thinking, sabotaging relationships, continually forming similar damaging relationships etc.

Even though some people (especially young people) prefer the use of the term "self-injury", we use – and will continue using – the term "self-harm" for several reasons:

- the definition of self-injury is much narrower than ours and we've found that more often than not, people who self-injure are also using other self-harm methods, often without being aware of them or realising that they are self-harm;
- the term self-harm carries a large stigma and sometimes the only way to break that down is by calling something exactly what it is;
- we need to openly talk about the various forms of self-harm in order to break down myths such as "self-harm means cutting" which can prevent people reaching out for help.

We are therefore trying to make the term accepted and normalise talking about it.

Our Achievements

Our main achievement this year was adapting. We came to terms with using video conferencing despite the majority of us not being keen on the idea! But we overcame our fears and gave it a go. We cannot imagine Battle Scars without Zoom now, without reaching people in other parts of the country while staying at home. How difficult it will be to re-adjust to face-to-face meetings and services still remains to be seen.

We have been able to keep up with demand and retain our non-referral services with many people discovering us via social media or our website and many others being signposted to us by mental health and other professionals from all over the UK.

We were even able to recruit volunteers from out of Yorkshire. And at the end of the year, we recruited 2 staff, a totally new experience for us, to join the CEO in creating a dedicated paid team from April 1st.

A sense of belonging is one of the most common comments we get from the people we support. We are proud to have created the safe space so many people need.

Obviously, there were no face-to-face events taking place this year with only a handful of virtual ones. For Self-Harm Awareness Day (1st March) we were able to run two interactive virtual events talking about self-harm myths and realities attended by 120 DWP staff as well as a similar session later in that week which was attended by 55 Leeds City Council staff.

Thanks to one of our volunteer's efforts, we were finalists for the Marsh Awards in the Doing it for Ourselves category.



Marsh Awards for Mental Health Peer Support 2020

Judges notable remarks – finalists

❖ **Doing it for Ourselves**

Battle Scars

- Great activities and interventions and support, growth and expansion, training, mentoring, the fact the majority are volunteers is a credit to the group focussing on empathy and compassion, for men and women
- Complex and far reaching organisation
- Very strong application. Loved their website included self-charge and not self-harm. Great increase of peers on Facebook. Survivor led and run. Great peer model.

Impact & Value

Who we have reached and what difference our work has made

Adult services

From running 6 drop-in, no-booking-required, face-to-face peer support groups every 4 weeks in the Leeds and Wakefield areas we closed this financial year with 6 fortnightly UK virtual groups which are shorter in length to avoid Zoom-fatigue but offer more choice to our service users.

We gingerly started in May by offering a virtual group to existing service users, then opened them up to anybody based in Leeds and Wakefield. One "standard" group soon became 3: one on Tuesday morning, one on Friday afternoon and one on Monday evening.

We decided to make these groups an hour long with a topic for discussion selected by the facilitators. Soon, thanks to one of our volunteer leaders, we became inventive and started introducing various activities. Slowly we picked up methods to do the activities using virtual tools and in a lot of ways it started feeling like the sky was the limit. The volunteers started coming up with really interesting ideas making the group experience very visual and interactive.

In order to control attendance and manage the different challenges virtual groups offered, a new online booking system was set up. Volunteers on hold willing to give virtual groups a go were trained and existing face-to-face facilitators were re-trained, to create more virtual group facilitator teams of two. All virtual group facilitators attended the virtual version of our safeguarding awareness workshop specifically designed to address safeguarding in a virtual environment.

We started advertising the groups through our usual social media channels, our website and in our Facebook peer support group and started getting a lot of enquiries whether the groups were open to people outside Leeds and Wakefield. It soon became evident that there was a lot of demand so we make the groups available to any adult in the UK.

Thanks to input from our Facebook group members, it became apparent that a lot of people need support even when they manage their urges quite successfully and often wish to have that support already in place in case it's required. In order to support those whose urges are more under control or are too worried the standard groups might be triggering, in October we set up the Inbetweeners group offering support with a lighter touch. The option to join both the standard and the Inbetweeners group is available to all and it's up to them to gauge which group would suit them most at that specific time. We also wanted to ensure that there was always a smooth and easy transition between the standard and Inbetweeners group so needs could always be met without embarrassment.

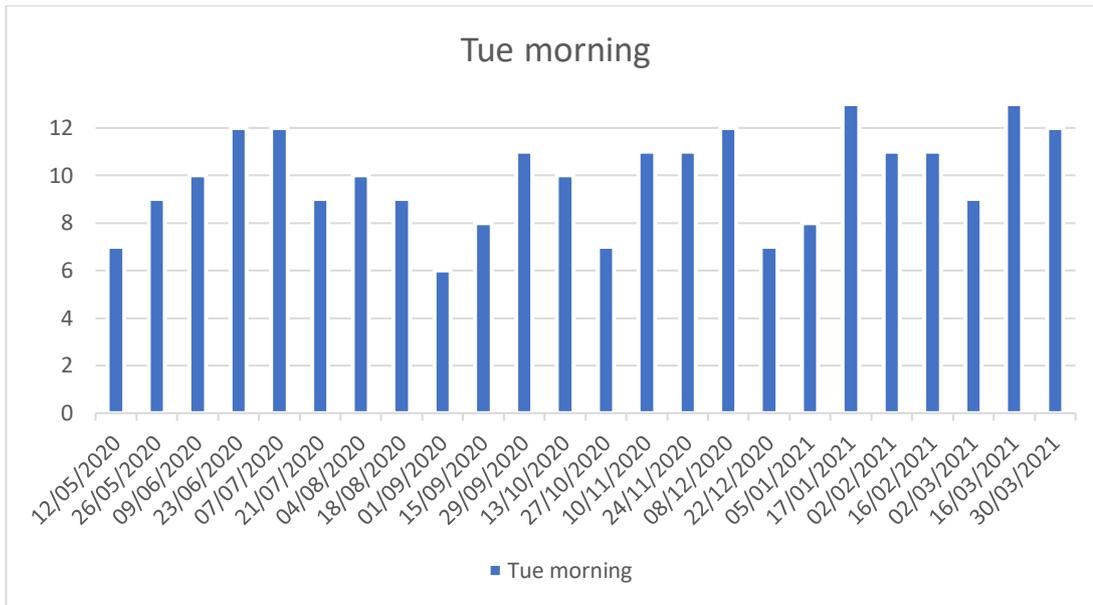
By December the standard groups were filling up within an hour of opening bookings. One group was fully booked within 21 minutes. The decision to increase the number of groups was taken a few minutes later! 2 existing and 4 new volunteers came forward to help out and went through the revised and expanded virtual group facilitator training.

Two more daytime groups were launched in February with firm plans to add an extra evening group. More groups will be set up depending on volunteer availability and demand with the aim of having groups running on even more days (including weekends) and at a variety of times. Also, our facilitators decided

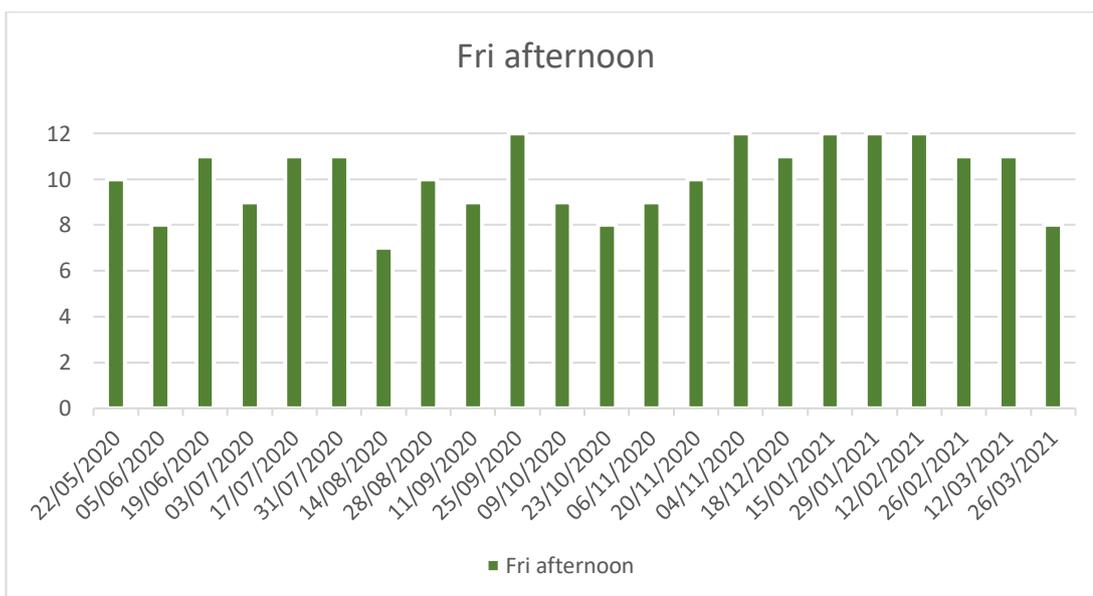
to run the groups even if they drop on holidays to avoid gaps in support.

Please check out the end of this report for pictures of various group activities.

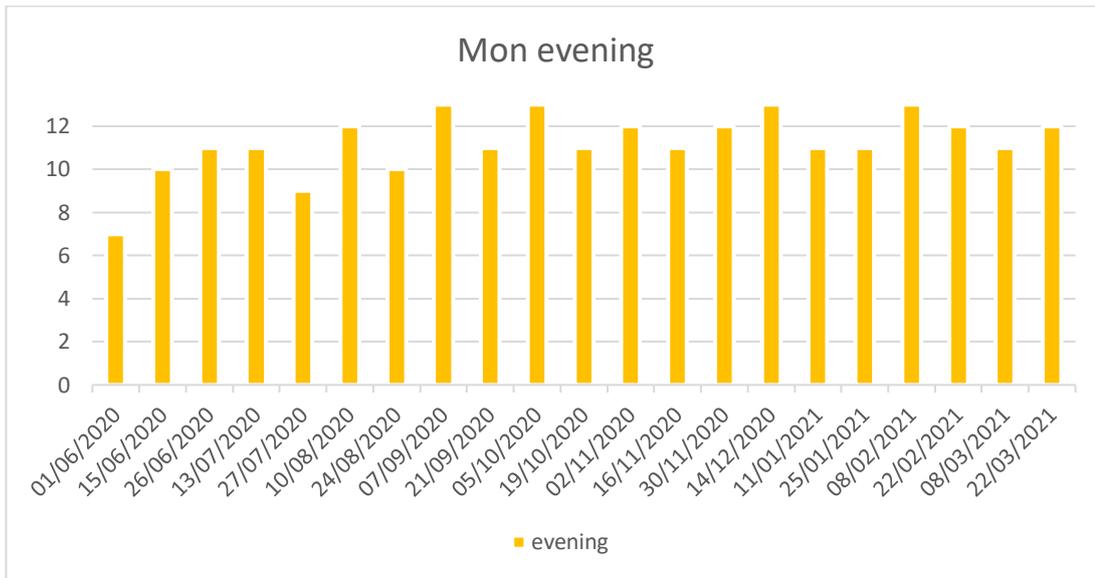
Altogether, we ran 74 standard groups with a total attendance of 770, an average of 10.4 per group:



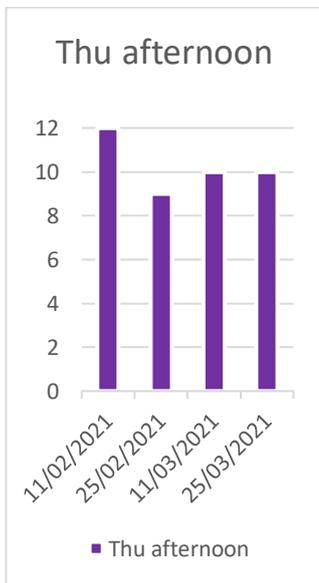
No of groups: 24
 Total attendance: 238
 Average: 9.9



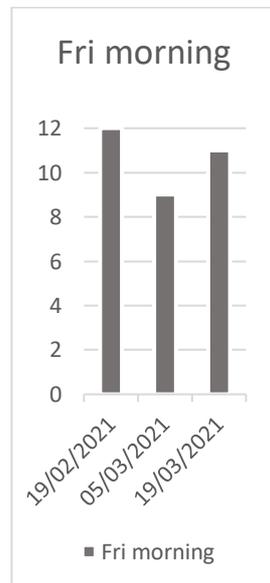
No of groups: 22
 Total attendance: 223
 Average: 10.1



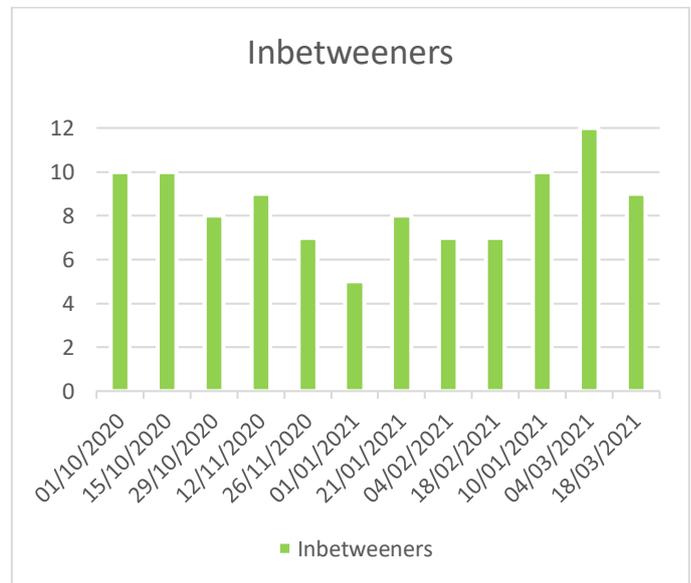
No of groups: 21
 Total attendance: 236
 Average: 11.2



No of groups: 4
 Total attendance: 41
 Average: 10.2



No of groups: 3
 Total attendance: 32
 Average: 10.6



No of groups: 12
 Total attendance: 100
 Average: 8.3

Plans for the future

The virtual groups have not only made our services available to those not based in Leeds or Wakefield but we have been able to reach local people who were unable to get to the face-to-face groups due to disabilities or

difficulties using public transport etc. Due to these groups' success, we made the decision that all virtual services will continue even after all restrictions are lifted, something that was extremely reassuring to those living too far away to access physical groups.

Being a disabled single parent and someone who self-harms there was always a level of isolation and loneliness. I had connections with others but not on a level I could open up and feel understood. Battle Scars is like a family, so welcoming, friendly and inviting with no judgement and I love going to the groups. They've changed my life for the better and I always look forward to attending the sessions. I would be truly lost without them.

I've recently started attending the Battle Scars support groups on zoom and have found them to be friendly and supportive – just being able to spend time with other people who self-harm, who really get it, is a real source of stability and reassurance. I feel less isolated and more able to get through the week, knowing that they're there.

I began to self-harm again a few months ago, after a 15-year hiatus, following a build-up of anxiety due to work, divorce, lockdown and single parenting. I managed to confide what I was doing to a counsellor, but really struggled to open up to anyone else. Finding the Battle Scars group on Facebook was an absolute lifeline – a community of people talking openly about self-harm and supporting each other. Being able to ask questions, feel supported and valued, and supporting others has helped remove some of the shame from my self-harm, and has enabled me to open up to a few friends, and to build my "off-line" support network. It's helped me understand a bit about why I do it, offered suggestions for alternative release mechanisms when needed, and helped me keep myself safe.

Work with young people & supporting families

We had to unfortunately suspend all services working directly with young people in schools and colleges.

Even though some school staff attended our virtual training for professionals all other contact with schools ceased but we have maintained contact with other organisations supporting young people both in Leeds and nationally with the help of the Young Lives Leeds project amongst other networking initiatives.

Once again, the virtual world allowed us to create a service we had been wanting to set up

for quite some time: a regular parents/family support group, a group that is open to any adult family members of someone who self-harms. The person who self-harms can be under or over 18. This is the most demanding out of all our groups as we're dealing with family members who are desperate for peer support, guidance, advice and understanding, who are feeling extremely isolated and unable to broach this subject with their friends and families due to the stigma surrounding self-harm. Numbers for this group are usually low which works quite well as it allows us to give each member the time and support they need.

We have a growing number of regulars who are now able to extend their support to newer members.

Plans for the future

We are expecting the parents/family group to go from strength to strength with possibly a second such group added. We are also hoping to set up face-to-face groups in Leeds and Wakefield.

We have received funding to look into developing services for young people, a 12-month project starting in June. There is a lot of need and a lot of difficulties in developing effective and appropriate support for young people. In the meantime, thanks to the Addressing Self-Harming in Leeds funding we have now received, we will be launching a weekly face-to-face group for 16-25's.

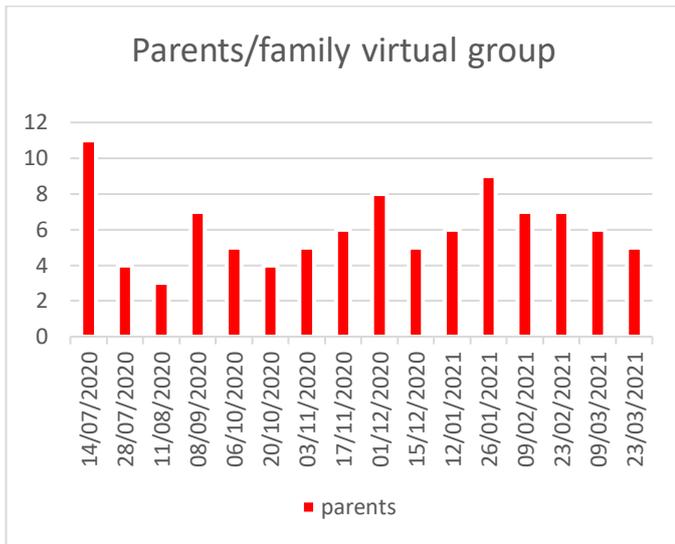
I am a mum of a 15-year-old who tried to take her own life at 13 and started self-harming at 13. Now 15 she's been sectioned for 3 1/2 months. Found this group and love it. Can't thank this group enough of how much I have reached out and found the help I needed. I've also attended one virtual group which was lovely but life has just got in the way to join any more. But I plan to.

I was very nervous the first time I attended. I wasn't sure what to expect and I was afraid of being judged. Also, I was worried it was going to be really depressing and upsetting. I find the group really supportive and a safe space to talk about anything. I felt it was good to hear from others going through the same thing.

My daughter is self-harming and I find the group a really good way to process this because being new to all this I'm still struggling to get my head together. It's good to get support so that you can support the person you are supporting. Without looking after yourself you can't do this. That's another thing the group helped with not feeling guilty to take time out when it gets too much.

Me and my husband joined Battle Scars support group this year. From just a few meetings, we have gained a lot of knowledge and also ideas of how to help our son. It was very daunting at first, as we didn't know what to expect from the group, but we were put at ease from the start. We so look forward to the meetings now, as everyone is in the same position. We really can say what we are having to deal with. There is no judgment or having to make excuses of why our son self-harms. Even though Covid has stopped the group face to face, doing it on zoom is just as productive. We never end the session feeling down or upset, we actually leave smiling.

I feel like I have come home in that I have found a safe place to talk about issues myself and both my daughters face in relation to self-harm with other people who understand.



No of groups: 16

Total attendance: 98

Average: 6.1

Demographics about our virtual groups

Approximately 47% of attendees were from Leeds postcodes with an overall 61% of attendance from Yorkshire. The Do Something

Different group (*see Work with Partners*) was only available to Leeds residents.

Private Facebook group

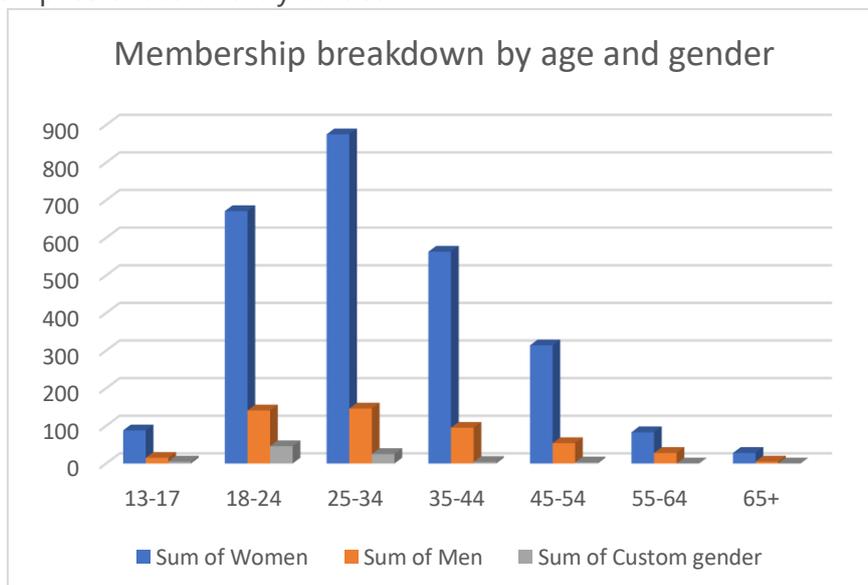
This group is a vital service providing around the clock support to 3,102 members which represents a nearly 40% increase from last year. The best thing about the group is the ethos of acceptance and compassion along with the obvious desire by members to offer help.

with any rule breaking with the utmost sensitivity.

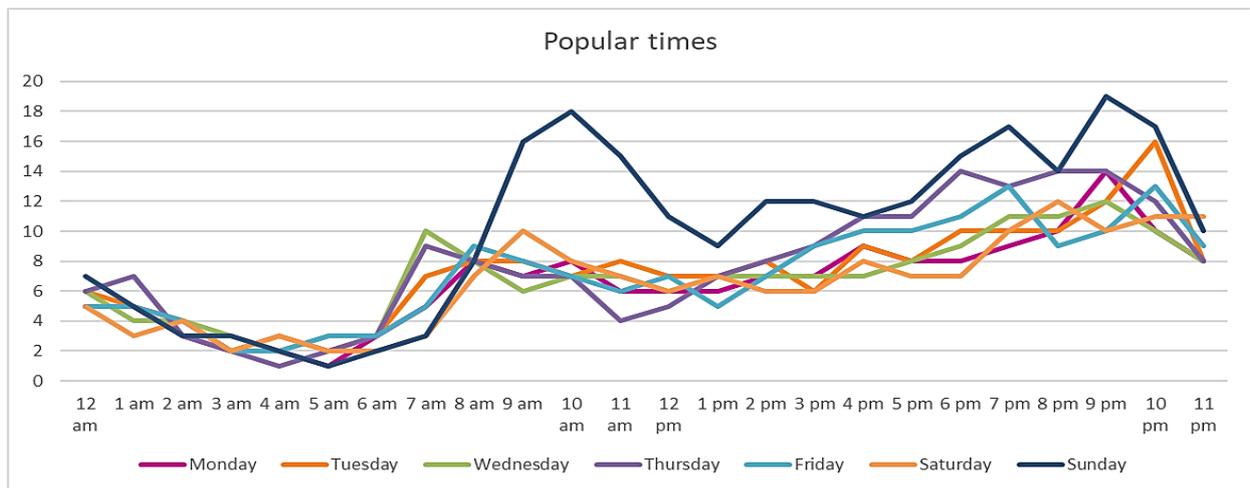
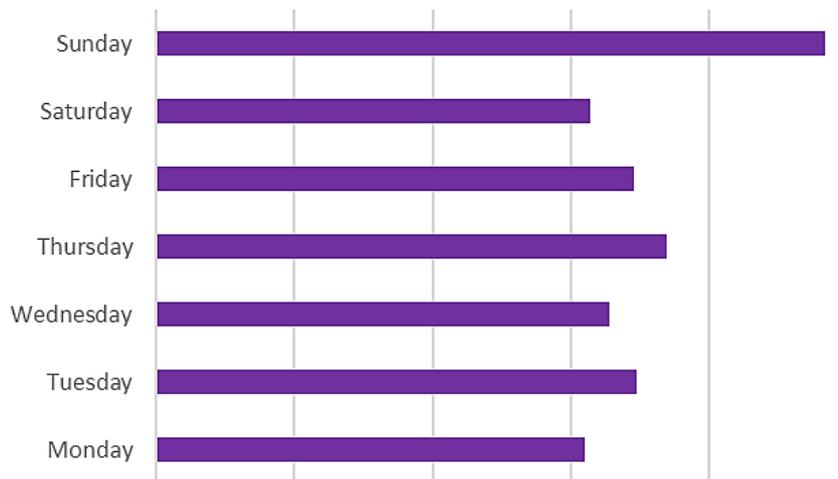
Plans for the future

The admin/moderator team are always vigilant but also always compassionate and try to deal

To increase the admin team to allow existing members to temporarily step down as and when required to protect their wellbeing.



Posts, comments and reactions



This group is a safe place for me to open up about how I am feeling, full of supportive people who actually understand, care and can challenge my negative thoughts.

I don't comment much as I don't feel qualified to do so. I do find myself wanting to wrap my arms around you all most days. As a mum this group has helped me gain a real understanding for anyone dealing with day-to-day self-harm. Thank you for letting me be part of that.

In the Battle Scars group I feel like I can express myself without being judged and I like that it's a private group so no one I know knows what I'm writing etc. I feel safe with this group.

	Countries	Members
1	United Kingdom	1,560
2	United States	988
3	Australia	106
4	Canada	70
5	South Africa	51
6	Philippines	43
7	India	37
8	Ireland	26
9	Pakistan	25
10	Nigeria	17
11	New Zealand	16
12	Netherlands	13
13	Bangladesh	12
14	Malaysia	11
15	Poland	11
16	Egypt	10
17	Morocco	10
18	Indonesia	10
19	Germany	9
20	France	9
21	Vietnam	8
22	Mexico	7
23	Czech Republic	7
24	Israel	7
25	Italy	6
26	Brazil	6
27	Uganda	5
28	Ghana	5
29	Spain	5
30	Greece	4
31	Denmark	4
32	Belgium	4
33	Ethiopia	4
34	Bulgaria	4
35	Malta	3
36	Papua New Guinea	3
37	Algeria	3
38	Hungary	3
39	Romania	3
40	Trinidad and Tobago	3
41	Kenya	3
42	Nepal	3
43	Tunisia	3
44	Sweden	3
45	Norway	3
46	Hong Kong	2
47	Finland	2
48	Austria	2
49	Estonia	2
50	Jamaica	2

	Countries	Members
51	Iraq	2
52	Portugal	2
53	Sierra Leone	2
54	Puerto Rico	2
55	Cyprus	2
56	China	2
57	Syria	2
58	Singapore	2
59	Slovakia	2
60	Russia	2
61	Belarus	1
62	Jordan	1
63	Sudan	1
64	Fiji	1
65	Botswana	1
66	Jersey	1
67	Faroe Islands	1
68	Serbia	1
69	Zimbabwe	1
70	Japan	1
71	Grenada	1
72	Zambia	1
73	Switzerland	1
74	Saudi Arabia	1
75	Iran	1
76	Slovenia	1
77	Argentina	1
78	The Gambia	1
79	Lesotho	1
80	Qatar	1
81	Mongolia	1
82	Swaziland	1
83	Peru	1
84	Thailand	1
85	Mauritius	1
86	Panama	1
87	Colombia	1
88	Guyana	1
89	Bermuda	1
90	Sri Lanka	1

	Top towns and cities	Members
1	Leeds	227
2	London	47
3	Bradford	37
4	Birmingham	26
5	Wakefield	19
6	Manchester	19
7	New York, NY, US	16
8	Glasgow	16
9	Melbourne, VIC, Australia	16
10	Kingston upon Hull	15
11	Nottingham	15
12	York	15
13	Sheffield	14
14	Sydney, NSW, Australia	14
15	Brisbane, QLD, Australia	13
16	Stoke-on-Trent	13
17	Leicester	12
18	Harrogate	11
19	Liverpool	11
20	Dublin, Ireland	10
21	Warrington	10
22	Edinburgh	10
23	Castleford	10
24	Morley	9
25	Bristol	9
26	Baltimore, MD, US	9
27	Bolton	9
28	Basildon	9
29	Preston	8
30	Blackpool	8
31	Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan	8
32	Barnsley	8
33	Southampton	8
34	Chicago, IL, US	8
35	Lincoln	8
36	Nuneaton	8
37	Dhaka, Dhaka Division, Bangladesh	8
38	Pretoria, South Africa	7
39	Halifax	7
40	Dewsbury	7
41	Chelmsford	7
42	Plymouth	7
43	Ottawa, ON, Canada	7
44	Louisville, KY, US	7
45	Newcastle upon Tyne	7
46	Oldham	7
47	Belfast	7
48	Durban, South Africa	6
49	Stockport	6
50	Houston, TX, US	6

	Top towns and cities	Members
51	Wrexham	6
52	Bournemouth	6
53	Mansfield	6
54	Cape Town, South Africa	6
55	Bedford	6
56	Pontefract	6
57	Gateshead	6
58	Derry	6
59	Philadelphia, PA, US	6
60	Springfield, MO, US	5
61	Toronto, ON, Canada	5
62	Boston	5
63	Basingstoke	5
64	South Shields	5
65	Swindon	5
66	Doncaster	5
67	Ipswich	5
68	Delhi, India	5
69	Swansea	5
70	Johannesburg, South Africa	5
71	Perth, WA, Australia	5
72	Newark	5
73	Southend-on-Sea	5
74	Scunthorpe	5
75	Adelaide, SA, Australia	5
76	Brighton and Hove	5
77	Robin Hood	5
78	Walsall	4
79	Reading	4
80	Abingdon	4
81	Tacoma, WA, US	4
82	Gloucester	4
83	Altofts	4
84	Wigan	4
85	Coventry	4
86	Lancaster	4
87	Swadlincote	4
88	Tulsa, OK, US	4
89	Windham, ME, US	4
90	Savannah, GA, US	4
91	Paisley	4
92	Aylesbury	4
93	Watford	4
94	Middlesbrough	4
95	Saint Helens	4
96	Portsmouth	4
97	Cardiff	4
98	Scarborough	4
99	Cairo, Cairo Governorate, Egypt	4

Battle scars is a place where I can find help and support when I feel like isolating myself, it is a place where I won't be judged and can say how I really feel.

My daughter started self-harming age 14 a few months ago, she spent 3 weeks in a clinic getting the help she needed. I am constantly reading up on self-harm, what it is, what it isn't, how everyone feels when they do, how they celebrate when they don't. As a mom, I have learnt so much from everyone who is just openly expressing their joy, their hurt, their pain, their sadness, their elation, whatever it is, it's always real. A fantastic platform to share, to vent, to celebrate, and always comes with supportive comments. I have learnt so much from everyone on this group, it's helped me be more understanding and supportive of what my daughter is going through. I thank you all xx

Training for professionals

Like most organisations we decided to turn our training virtual. We tested the Q&A sessions on self-harm and eating disorders first and then, due to demand, we turned our full 1-day workshop on self-harm into a virtual session too.

There were a multitude of tech issues we all had to deal with but with some flexibility and ingenuity, the sessions were delivered successfully.

Over the past year we trained 180 professionals, about half the number we normally train in a year, but as our reputation grows and information about us is reaching organisations out of the Yorkshire area, we are getting more interest from much further afield. This year we had the pleasure of training a number of staff and volunteers from Forward Leeds, Leeds Children's Services (residential care), Leeds Recovery College and DPJ Foundation (Wales) amongst many others.

Plans for the future

Virtual training is not the same as face-to-face but it can be engaging and interactive. It's

easier for people to fit in and can be attended irrelevant of where one is based. One more virtual service here to stay but we will be reintroducing all our face-to-face training that will be delivered in all areas within reasonable driving distance. We will continue providing our survivor-led training on self-harm and eating disorders to any professional in the UK.

I found the training very insightful and very useful for my role here in the [children's residential] home. It gave me a better understanding. Thank you for your honesty and sharing your experiences, it will help many others understand this too.

Thank you again. Be proud of yourself because the world needs more people like you.

Brilliantly helpful and approachable trainer.

Understanding self-harm 1-day workshop



IF THERE IS NO WAY, CREATE ONE



Roots of self-harming behaviour

- Abuse: physical, sexual, emotional
- Difficulty understanding/processing emotions (may be linked to autism)
- Bullying
- Disconnection/isolation
- Frustration when having to maintain high standards (self-imposed or no) - common with high achievers/perfectionists
- Pressures at work or school or because of family expectations
- Financial worries
- Bereavement/loss (of persons, health, job, relationship)



Understanding self-harm 1-day workshop

- Issues around own sexuality/gender and "coming out" difficulties
- Chronic pain/physical illness
- Mental health illness
- Frustration due to physical and/or mental disabilities
- Poor self-image, low self-esteem and confidence
- Self-hatred
- Hormonal disturbances (puberty, anti/postnatal, menopause)
- Medication side effects - temporary or permanent
- Peer pressure (combined with above)
- Because they're dissociating (due of trauma)

www.battle-scars-self-harm.org.uk

Found the training very informative and gave me a broader knowledge of self harm, triggers and how to support those who have currently self harmed. Safe - box I am going to incorporate into my practice. As those I am supporting have self - harmed once with the intention of not doing this again. I work more with managing on calming stress/ pressures to prevent from self-harm.

Thank you!

Thankyou so much. Such informative training. Thankyou :)

Amazing Training! I found myself able to relate so much of what you were saying to Autistic children I've worked with, to anxiety/depression in children and even family members who struggle with addiction, even though I'm yet to work with a child or young person who is self harming. You are both very brave to relate your experiences whilst being knowledgeable and professional at the same time, is a real skill :) Thankyou

Thank you, it was quite eye-opening to hear views from another perspective, often children do not always have the means to explain their thoughts and feelings as to why they self-harm so it was very useful.

FEEDBACK

This has been really informative and i appreciate the sharing of your personal life's it gives a whole different perspective than that of a therapist/psychologist . I've got a lot to take away from this session. Thank you

Thank you, really informative

Thank you for your openness discussing your personal experiences of self harm its been really enlightening. Thank you also for the resources and being able to share these with colleagues. They will be extremely useful and help our young people.

Website and social media

As always, we keep our website updated and relevant. It is our “one-stop-shop” when it comes to information about Battle Scars and our services. Last year we had nearly 9,000 unique visitors.

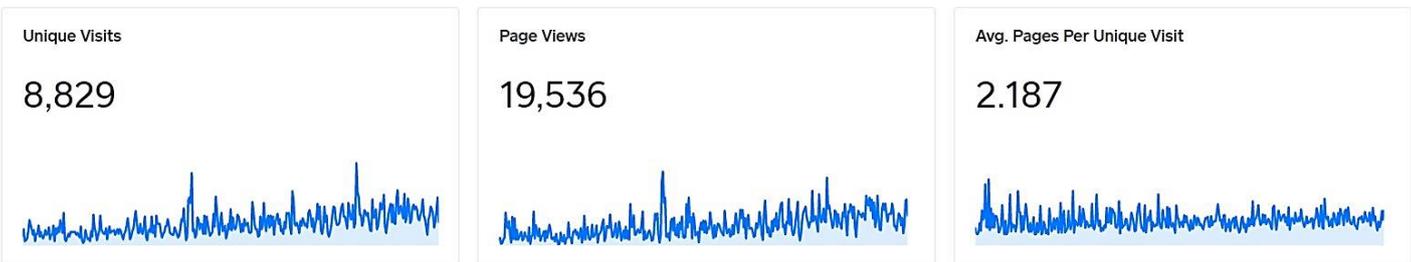
An amazing team of volunteers is managing our social media on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn spreading the word.

Plans for the future

We already need a dedicated member of staff to coordinate our marketing and social media presence so we will try to secure funding for this role. Social media is the best way to reach people anywhere in the world, break down the stigma surrounding self-harm and reassure those who self-harm that we do understand.

Overview

Daily ▼ April 1, 2020 - March 31, 2021 📅



Other projects/activities

After longer than a year in the making and the involvement of over 50 Battle Scars service users and volunteers, the 12-step Self-harm Addiction Programme workbook became available in December. Thanks to the Tudor Trust, the workbook is free to order but there is a small admin charge of £1 as well as postage when requesting the hard copy (*please see back of report for workbook content*).

Many of our service users’ families do not know that they self-harm, something we take into consideration when posting the workbook making sure there is no indication it’s coming from a self-harm support organisation.

84 copies have so far been ordered by people as far as the USA, Canada and Australia.



Before long it became apparent that professionals wanted to check this workbook out or needed a copy themselves in order to work with the people they were supporting. By January we had made a special PDF version available to them and 10 copies have been ordered by various mental health professionals, professionals working in charities as well as primary care.

Early feedback has been very positive with people recognising but overcoming the challenges and making good, steady progress. A system is being set up to obtain feedback from everybody who has got a copy at the 6 and 12-month points to see how they are progressing and what improvements will need to be made when we carry out a full review of the workbook at the end of 2022.

We also turned our 2-hour self-harm workshop virtual for delivery via the Leeds and Wakefield

Recover Colleges. We managed to keep it fully interactive and engaging.

Plans for the future

Apart from the new funding which will cover the costs of the 16-25's peer support group, we have been awarded funding to set up and run a phone follow-up service for those who have presented to hospital or Minor Injury Units for treatment of self-harm injuries. This is still at the very early stages of development.

So far we have not had been able to secure funding for a project looking into men getting support for self-harm and ways to encourage them to acknowledge their behaviour and attend our services.

A longer-term project will be looking into approaching minor ethnic communities and developing ways to support them.

Work with partners

Following the Crisis Summit in January 2020, the Mental Health Collaborative project ground to a halt. Towards spring this year, it started picking up momentum again. We have been working closely with Leeds Involving People to present case studies which will become the basis for the work the Collaborative will focus on during the next few months as we're trying to develop robust, compassionate support throughout someone's crisis journey (not just focusing on the crisis point).

The researchers for the project FReSHSTART run by the University of Leeds set up a more regular Covid-19 support group for the organisations involved in the project. It has been an incredibly useful initiative that has helped us forge links with other self-harm organisations in the country such as Self Injury

Support UK and Harmless as well as other mental health organisations supporting adults, young people or people from ethnic minority communities.

We linked up with Mentally Healthy Leeds, a Touchstone project, to run the Do Something Different virtual group every 4 weeks. This is an activity and discussion mix group where we've done craft, magic tricks, music that has significant meaning for us, massage and even a "don't-show-and-tell" session linking up to what we find grounding, using "masking" to avoid showing how we're feeling, items that give us comfort etc. Considering this group was meant for face-to-face delivery, we've had to be very imaginative but it has been quite successful.

As always, we work closely with our service users and volunteers to develop and improve services and we are now more confident to partner with other organisations with funding bids.

Plans for the future

We are looking forward to more partnerships and collaboration with other organisations both voluntary sector and statutory, both local and national.

Volunteers

Even though the number of volunteers stayed about the same as last year at 35 there have been some departures due to lack of appropriate opportunities with us in the foreseeable future or some volunteers have now moved on but we also had some new arrivals. A number of our volunteers have been on hold since the first lockdown, mostly because they do not wish to get involved with virtual work. We are grateful they have decided to remain on our books and we are hoping to mobilise them again soon.

Many existing local volunteers took the plunge to get involved in the virtual work and have made incredible progress as well as a huge difference to our work. What we started experiencing more though, was recruiting volunteers from other parts of the UK as more distant service users showed interest in volunteering. We turned all volunteering training virtual and this is a part of the volunteer programme we are going to maintain to continue expanding the Battle Scars community.

I began volunteering as a moderator on the Facebook page. I was welcomed by the team and have always felt that I can ask about anything I'm not sure about in the Admin channel and get support. There's a real rapport amongst the team.

I did my formal volunteer induction last year. It was very thorough and I felt that it informed me about Battle Scars and equipped me to broaden my volunteering. The safeguarding training was especially in depth, which was reassuring as we often interact with people who are vulnerable.

I'm really impressed by the support and opportunities it's given me. I've had my first 1-2-1 (these are both more frequent and more useful than the ones I get at my place of employment!) and I've attended the one-day virtual self-harm awareness training. I've recently started facilitating a virtual peer support group and have been provided with the training and equipment I needed. A year ago I couldn't have imagined myself feeling confident enough to do this. I'm really grateful for the opportunity. Battle scars and I met at one of the lowest points in my life but it's very much been my silver lining.

Volunteers

Apart from virtual group facilitators (the role the majority of our volunteers have) we have volunteers doing marketing, social media and IT work (an area we had to heavily invest in over the past year) and we set up the new role of Battle Scars Ambassador. This is still a very new

role which we are hoping to develop more in the coming year.

Our volunteers have shown resilience and adaptability that is a credit to them. We are extremely grateful to them for their continued efforts and support.

Plans for the future

Developing existing volunteers is always a priority. We will need volunteers to facilitate the 16-25's group as well as a large number to take part in the phone follow-up service. These will have to be local volunteers who can easily

facilitate at the Lovell Park Hub or who have a good knowledge of local services.

We expect demand for the virtual groups to continue increasing and we will be able to give more opportunities to existing volunteers to have more involvement or recruit and train as required.

Trustees and AGM

Last year's AGM took place virtually in September – delayed hoping we could do it face-to-face. A 6th trustee was voted in and joined the board bringing different skills to the organisation. Two longer-serving trustees stepped down and were voted back in.

This year's AGM will again take place virtually. No trustees are due to step down and we do not require any new trustees.

Plans for the future

We will be looking into running a hybrid AGM next year so we that our members, volunteers and service users out of Leeds can join us.

Staff

Despite our plans last year, our CEO remained our only member of staff for the last financial year. But thanks to funding from Awards For All (The National Lottery Community Fund) we were able to recruit 2 new home-based part-time staff helping out with the virtual groups

and their administration who started work on April 1st.

Plans for the future

Same as our volunteers, we will be focusing quite a lot on developing existing staff. As per our policy, we will always aim to recruit from volunteers and then from service users; continue supporting and encouraging growth and stability, as well as gaining from their loyalty and existing experience and skills.

Thank you so much for all your hard work - you are so appreciated!

We wish to build an organisation where staff do not have to hide their struggles with self-harm and mental health, where we can provide appropriate support and flexibility, where they feel safe. Battle Scars has and will retain peer

support as the main focus, an organisation where the staff support each other across all levels, where we build working relationships based on honesty.

Funding and strategic plan

Shortly before the pandemic we had put together a 5-year strategic plan. We had to extensively modify this plan and, with advice from Voluntary Action Leeds and NCVO, we went for a more realistic and, hopefully, predictable, 2-year plan.

Our main funders, the Tudor Trust, have once again, supported us throughout the pandemic with both money and signposting to very useful resources. We have felt valued and appreciated and we have been very grateful for their ongoing support.

We had the pleasure of meeting the Brelms Trust trustees and, as a result, received the instalment for year 2 of their grant.

We were awarded £10,000 from Awards For All (The National Lottery Community Fund) covering the above two new posts and relevant expenses.

We were also awarded £2,500 from the Charles & Elsie Sykes Trust to look more closely into support provision for young people, a project that is starting on June 1st.

A number of unexpected and very generous donations were also very gratefully received.

Plans for the future

There is still a lot of uncertainty about things returning to "normal". There will be some more

adjustments to make and some services will have to be modified. But we are hoping to not only continue with some pre-covid plans but also to hopefully set up face-to-face services in other parts of the UK.

A selection of short educational, information and training videos are also in the pipeline.

the
Tudortrust



LOTTERY FUNDED

The
Charles & Elsie Sykes Trust

Finances

Summary of financial accounts

	Breakdown	Total
Brought forward		£ 43,277
<i>Restricted funds</i>	£ 35,599	
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>	£ 7,678	
INCOME		
Restricted funds		£ 19,250
<i>Awards For All</i>	£ 10,000	
<i>The Brelms Trust</i>	£ 3,250	
<i>The Charles & Elsie Sykes Trust</i>	£ 2,500	
<i>The Tudor Trust</i>	£ 3,500	
Unrestricted funds		£ 4,530
<i>General donations</i>	£ 1,442	
<i>Fees & charges</i>	£ 2,593	
<i>Membership</i>	£ 170	
<i>Other incomd</i>	£ 325	
TOTAL INCOME		£ 23,780
EXPENDITURE		
Salaries		£ 29,839
Payroll charges		£ 168
Travel		£ 35
Training & information		£ 371
Crisis cards		£ 420
Website & email		£ 742
Consumables		£ 490
Equipment		£ 2,630
Insurance		£ 323
Advertising		£ 252
Phone		£ 63
Printing & postage		£ 1,753
Other payments		£ 40
Accountancy & independent examination		£ 260
12-step Addiction Programme		£ 191
TOTAL EXPENDITURE		£ 37,577
Carried forward		
<i>Restricted funds</i>	£ 19,220	
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>	£ 260	
<i>Reserves</i>	£ 10,000	
TOTAL CARRIED FORWARD TO 2021-2022		£ 29,480

Virtual group activities

Starting off as Zoom novices, props were used to help with group activities. Here, Zephyr the Zebra is helping with turning negatives into positives



Compliment Discussion

Q) What can we offer in a compliment??



Calming Safe Haven



Support Web



Has Your Support Network Changed During Lockdown?

For others, phone contact is better than having to walk into a room full of people for the first time.

Got worse - got a lot smaller.

Most important to everyone

Video calls make you more accountable, but it makes the professional have to relate to you more than over the phone.



Battle Scars going virtual and being opened up to the whole of the UK has meant that more people have been able to benefit from it.

Had to rely a lot more on technology for us to maintain contact with people in our support networks.

People have had to go onto long waiting lists to get mental health support.

Some of us miss the face-to-face contact, having to use the phone isn't the same.

POSITIVE DISTRACTIONS

control over chores such as tidying up and organisation

the power of trees and the safety of being in your own home



turning a negative into a positive (a positive destruction)

walking eg. walking the dogs

indoors or outside activities on your own



Music all genres

cross stitch and crafts

weighted blanket

pets and animals

parks

stimming such as playing with putty or fidget toys

Addiction workbook extracts

The Battle Scars 12-step self-harm addiction programme

Introduction

Many people would never put the words “self-harm” and “addiction” – or “dependency” – together. But within the Battle Scars community “self-harm addiction” is a frequently used term. For some, hearing us acknowledging such a concept is a relief – a shock, even – confirming that what they believe they’re struggling with, actually exists.

Is it an addiction or not?

Even though self-harm is not “officially” recognised as an addiction, it is nevertheless very real. It creeps up and builds up very quietly; it can be kept hidden or secret for a very long time; numbers are greatly underestimated by the general public (many of whom don’t even know that self-harm is a “thing”); there are no black-box warnings like on cigarette packets, no “say-no-to” type advice like children in schools get about drugs and it does not have an impact on crime statistics. It can cause dependency though, it can take over one’s life, it can destroy lives, relationships and careers, it can lead to severe harm or accidental death, it can increase despair to suicidal levels and certainly has an impact on Emergency Department statistics. In an identical way to substance addiction, it can be needed in order to function, while tolerance levels rise and more is required just to get the same result, the same “hit”.

Step 2 checklist:

I can see that the benefits of changing outweigh the benefits of remaining as I am.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am using words that truly describe how I feel.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am ready to consider making changes.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand the difference between managing self-harm and breaking the self-harm addiction.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am starting to think about who I could ask to be my Trusted Person.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Step 4 – Task 3: Where would I like to get help from?

Having a diverse support network made up of people of various relationships would provide me with different types of support, at different times and with different approaches. It also avoids putting too much pressure on any one person. Sometimes asking for someone’s help is all it takes for them to join my support network. Who else could I approach for support?

Friends	Family
Professionals	Groups

Necessary acknowledgements:

- The stigma and shame surrounding self-harm has made it really hard for me to reach out and be truthful and honest.
- Trusting is difficult.
- Trusting someone with my shameful/embarrassing/secret/extreme thoughts about self-harm is extremely difficult.

Necessary decisions:

- I can learn to trust.
- I can learn to open up.

Questions to ask myself:

Do I know what my triggers are?		
Yes	Some	No
When the trigger was not obvious do I try to find out what it was, work out what made me feel like that or look at the events leading to it?		
Yes	Sometimes	No

It's vital to know what triggers us. Also, to be able to recognise when there truly was no trigger and we self-harmed because of the effects of pure addiction.

Knowing our triggers can help us equip ourselves with ways to avoid them, control them, manage them or, if none of these options are possible, manage the aftermath. Having to go back in our minds to review the situation and understand the trigger is never pleasant. Nevertheless, it's essential in this process.

We might think there are hundreds of triggers that set us off and we would therefore need hundreds of strategies to manage them. With better knowledge of our triggers, we discover that they fall in only a few categories and that one strategy can cover an entire category.

You may need to fill in quite a few Trigger Logs (Task 4). Extra copies are at the end of this workbook and they can be downloaded from our website with the option to use the interactive function on screen. If, after careful examination of the situation, there is no apparent trigger, that would confirm the severity of the dependency on self-harm.

Some things to think about

- I am becoming aware of the importance of connectedness. Addictions often stem from a lack of connections with fellow human beings. Being part of a group or volunteering and being part of an organisation could help provide a feeling of belonging and being connected with people who understand.
- I can help myself through helping others – engage in peer support.



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