

Battle Scars

Newsletter – January 2023

Dear members

My aim was to write 2023's first newsletter early January but that obviously didn't happen. At least it's still the right month!

One of the reasons for the delay was a serious decline of my mental health in November. Things have picked up quite a bit the last couple of weeks fortunately. As you can imagine, many tasks were left undone, especially those that required a reasonable clarity of mind and good decision-making ability. Really inconvenient when you're the CEO... But as always, our brilliant team kept the Battle Scars machine running ensuring our services were not impacted upon. I'm always grateful for the amazing people who make up our organisation.

We had some disappointing news during this turbulent period too regarding two big funding bids which were both unsuccessful. Back to the drawing board and, for now, applying for any small pots we can to make sure all services keep running and to support the charity's growth. Nationally, the cost of living is having a major impact on demand on 3rd sector services while money is more scarce and many more charities are applying for the same funding. We are in the fortunate position of generating some of our own income with our training. We have ringfenced the majority of that income to cover running costs and salaries giving us more security than other similar size charities. It still feels like a juggling act most of the time though with very few funders offering multi-year grants that would allow us to plan longer term.

We suspect the societal and financial pressures this winter is also making recruiting volunteers trickier. Despite constant advertising we have only been able to recruit a small handful of people. Some of our existing volunteers are requiring extra flexibility within their existing roles, or to change roles as their circumstances change, and this is something we always want to be able to

provide. So the new volunteers are strengthening existing support instead of allowing us to expand the services that need expanding. Still, strong teams and content volunteers are essential.

Our knowledge and expertise are highly regarded and sought after. We're getting a stream of enquiries about our training and quite a few bookings of private sessions, latest being two bookings by Health Education England (NHS) for North East and Yorkshire with hopefully more sessions to come.

In early December we did the 4th Myths & Realities of Self-harm webinar and we had an attendance of 100 which is the maximum our Zoom package allows. It was also fully booked within hours of making the Evenbrite tickets available. This is proving a very useful tool, a way to not only educate but to also introduce Battle Scars, our ethos and approach, as well as advertise our services. Following the success of these webinars we'll be trying one about eating disorders during the upcoming eating disorders awareness week (late Feb/early March) alongside another self-harm session on March 1st for self-harm awareness day. We will also be running these for staff of the Ministry of Justice, the Counter-terrorism Police in the Met and Westminster City Council.

Our mailing list has grown enormously (we encourage people to join it to be notified when we open bookings for the webinars – aren't we crafty!) and so has the traffic on our website with approximately 80 visitors per day. We are contacted by people from as far as Canada for advice and support. We have also started getting much more involved in Scotland and Wales.

The bookings for short intro sessions to foster carers are multiplying (this was something that I did a lot before COVID), a specialist group of people who are somewhere in between professionals and carers. Providing them with

better information and insights can make a huge difference to the children they care for. Similarly, social services are asking for our input and advice which is helping us reach families that would probably struggle to access our services at this moment in time.

In terms of services, our virtual groups are doing very well but the adult face-to-face ones are struggling. It appears that regulars from before just got used to not accessing them and new people are still too anxious to join. We'll continue promoting them and coming up with ideas to encourage people to use them. We are confident they will pick up. The requests from other parts of the country to set up groups in their areas are constantly coming in, usually with offers of venues for them. New groups will have to wait though until the existing ones have regular attendance and we can fully test this new facilitator team model so we can predict what needs remote groups will have. Fortunately the 16/25s group is having reasonably steady attendance which we expect will increase now the students are back.

Referrals for our phone service are increasing too. FRESH has had its criteria modified and more referrers have been added: the crisis team, Intensive Support Service, Dial House, Crisis cafés and Connect helpline. 3 volunteers just completed their training and have joined the FRESH team.

Our work linking up with schools and clusters took the inevitable break over the holidays. In the meantime, the Discovery Journal, the self-harm workbook for young people (roughly 10-17) is at testing stage and should be going to the printers by the end of February. We're really happy with it and hope the young testers like it too! This will be available to young people in the UK completely free of charge.

One thing worth mentioning is our plan to recruit, retain and develop our volunteers. We're just starting work on a new, more structured and more varied development programme which will give our volunteers (and staff) more skills and knowledge. We're hoping it will help increase their confidence and even provide them with the skills they need to improve their employability, career prospects or help them secure further education places. Needless to say, we're also hoping this will attract more volunteers to join the Battle Scars family and know that our service users will also benefit. To achieve this ambitious programme we are working with Voluntary Action Leeds and the Jobcentre and we've more than doubled the volunteer manager's hours. A few more of our staff need an increase of hours to keep up with the organisation's growth, something I'm working on.

We have a few more ambitious ideas but have to pace ourselves so we don't overstretch. Like I mentioned earlier, funding is hard to find.

On lighter news though, **Battle Scars is turning 5 years old on February 6th and we're having a party!** Staff, volunteers and friends of our charity are invited to join the trustees and me on February 11th, 1-5pm, at a private venue in South Leeds, near the White Rose Shopping Centre. We'll also go hybrid at 2pm for the cutting of the cake and a short speech by me (it will be short, I promise!) If you'd like to join us, either in person or virtually, please email info@battle-scars.org.uk for full details of location (parking available) or the Zoom link. Really hope to see some of you there. It will be a relaxed afternoon with activities for those who wish to do them, like crafts and Lego.

Thank you for reading this newsletter and thank you so much for your support.

Please look after yourselves.

Jenny – CEO

