



APR23/MAR24

Operational Report

**ALTERNATIVES COUNSELLING AND LISTENING ROOMS ARE A DUNDEE
BASED CHARITY. WE ARE PART OF THE DUNDEE THIRD SECTOR
COMMUNITY, PROVIDING CARE AND COMPASSION IN TIMES OF LOSS
AND DISTRESS.**

SC023483



ABOUT US

Every day in Tayside there are individuals who are experiencing distress and loss. It is often held in secret, or simply not acknowledged, due to the rituals and relationships in our society.

Alternatives have developed the experience and skills to respond. We offer a free, compassionate and tailored service at the point of need. We achieve this by ensuring that our team is well supported, with the skills, training and environment needed to offer excellent care and counselling, to allow clients to experience the best service possible.

This year we have been challenged to think with aspiration. Not to accept things the way they are, but to re-imagine partnerships and projects that could transform the support people in Tayside receive. This has led to new projects and collaborations which are now starting to become a reality. We look forward to reporting on these and giving you a glimpse into a year of growth and dynamic change.



PROJECTS

This year we have secured funding from **The Scottish Government**, **CORRA** and **Whole Family Wellbeing Funds** to begin new partnerships across the city.

We have established a partnership with the **NHS Tayside Perinatal Mental Health Team (PMHT)** and **Parent to Parent**, to offer tailored perinatal counselling and groups, which will be embedded in the pathways of both services.

We have also enabled a new partnership with the **BIRCH team (Tayside Council on Alcohol)**, establishing birth parent counselling and group therapy as part of the holistic service BIRCH offer to parents with looked after children.

These projects aim to reduce crisis and distress and build hope and healing for parents facing overwhelming loss.



Our Projects

Reflect

- Pregnancy loss counselling
- Pregnancy decisions counselling
- Pregnancy support
- Post abortion care
- Infertility Support
- Agency Training
- Student Placement Program
- Professional debriefs and supervision

Outreach Counselling

- Pregnancy loss and distress
- Specialist counselling for birth parents who have children in care
- Birth parent groups
- Partnership with the BIRCH Project
- Agency training

Perinatal Counselling

- Perinatal distress counselling
- Therapeutic perinatal groups
- Partnership with Parent to Parent and NHS Tayside PMHT

Infant Loss Counselling

- Baby loss counselling
- Counselling for individuals affected by the death of a child (under 2 years old)

Download Youth Counselling

- Counselling in schools
- Counselling for under 25's with distress or anxiety
- Young people groups and workshops
- Within Rockwell Learning Centre and other Dundee schools
- Preventing Crisis
- Creative Approaches
- Therapy dog

WE CONTINUE TO WORK CLOSELY WITH

ANGUS GLENS PROJECTS

TCA BIRCH PROJECT

NHS TAYSIDE WOMEN'S HEALTH TEAM

LOCAL GP AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

DUNDEE AND ANGUS SCHOOLS

DUNDEE VOLUNTEER AND VOLUNTARY ACTION

ITTY BITTY BABY THINGS FOR ANGEL WINGS TAYSIDE

ARC-ANTENATAL RESULTS AND CHOICES

NHS MATERNITY AND NEONATAL BEREAVEMENT TEAM

PERINATAL AND INFANT MENTAL HEALTH TEAM

TAYSIDE BEREAVEMENT NETWORK

PARENT TO PARENT

ACTION FOR CHILDREN

CAMHS TAYSIDE LEVEL UP GROUP

ACTION FOR CHILDREN

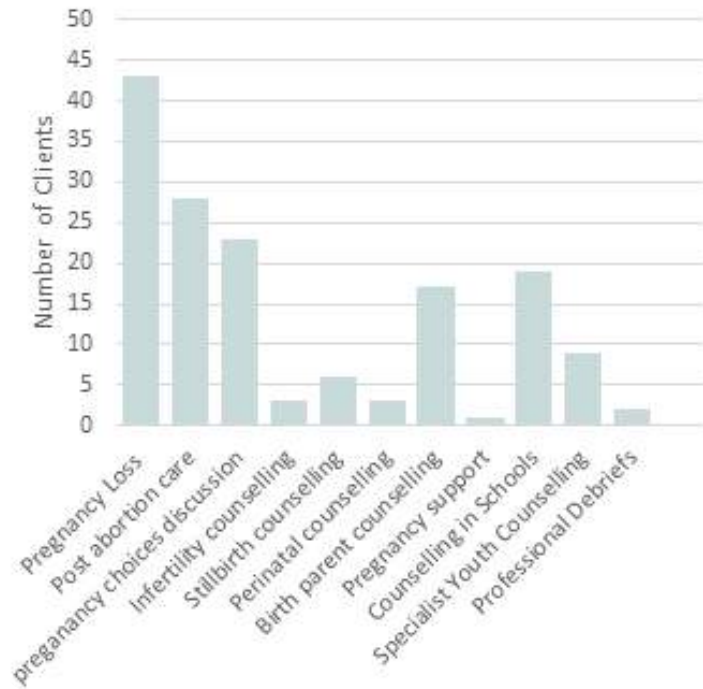
DUNDEE COUNSELLORS NETWORK

Client Feedback

What difference did we make this year with our projects?

1,587

This year we have delivered 1,587 support sessions, an increase of 23%, to 154 individual clients.



“

“I feel I received an exceptional service with adequate and well considered advice.

Before calling, my head space was literal chaos. After calling, I can now make a decision”

Pregnancy choices client,
Feb 24

”

Our clients are asked to complete a wellbeing assessment at the start and end of therapy. Clients who had completed therapy showed an average reduction of scores, indicating distress was reduced from from moderately high (18) to a normal level of wellbeing (8).

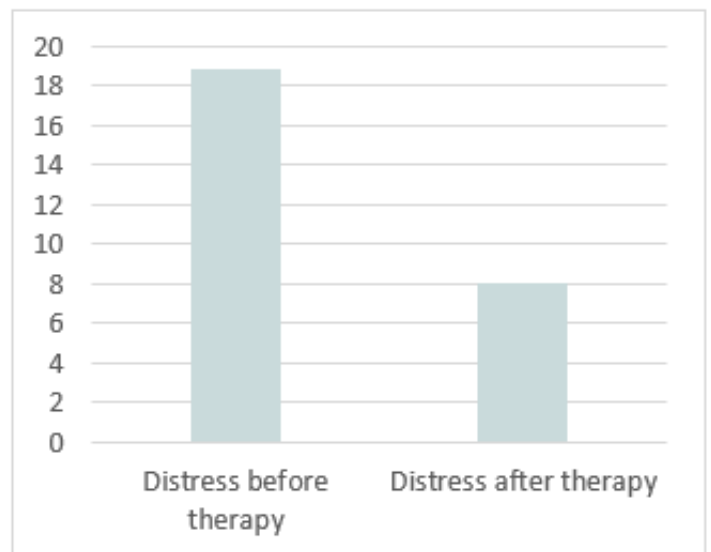
“

“My counsellor really saved me from going down a bad spiral and I was very appreciative of the extended support.

There were highs and lows during our sessions, but I left with a more manageable outlook on life”

Pregnancy loss client,
Jan 24

”



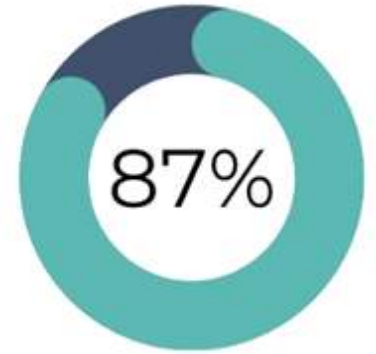
Client Feedback

We asked our clients how they felt about their counselling with Alternatives

“I feel the counselling I received was greatly beneficial in offering clarity and validation, which helped me process my trauma and find myself again. I feel like I have more tools and confidence to manage things going forward”

Client feedback, March 24

They told us that following therapy..



87% agree or strongly agree that counselling has changed how they feel about life

“The counselling I received was tailored specifically to me and I was able to choose what we focussed on in each session.

For me, it was really important to have a space where I could just discuss any thoughts and feelings without judgement and try better to understand how I can cope with those thoughts and feelings and that’s exactly what I got”

Client feedback, Feb 24

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I feel more positive about the future	92% Agreed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I feel better about myself	91% Agreed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I feel more connected to people that matter	81% Agreed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I understand myself better	89% Agreed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I feel more able to cope with life	88% Agreed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I am more able to make positive decisions	90% Agreed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I feel less anxious	82% Agreed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I feel less down	86% Agreed



“I couldn’t have asked for anything more, the support and advice I received helped me navigate through a situation where I couldn’t see a way out. I now have a better understanding of my emotions, a positive mindset and an ability to put myself first.

“I’ll carry the knowledge and tools a gained throughout my life and I will forever be grateful for the help I received.”

Client feedback, Feb 24

STUDENT PLACEMENTS

This year Alternatives Counselling have five trainee counsellors on our student placement program delivering counselling to over 25 clients. As an organisation we benefit from the compassionate and skilled care that our placement students provide.

Placements give us the opportunity to extend our support to more clients, but our team times also gain from the learning environment they are immersed in.

We wish every student all the very best and are delighted that some have chosen to continue working with us.



JAMIE-LEE

Trainee
Counsellor



JENNY

Trainee
Counsellor

We asked our students how they felt about their placement

Well supported from team, very high-quality premises, counselling resources, and easy, intuitive IT system all helped make it an enjoyable placement.

I am thoroughly enjoying my Alternatives experience. The team have all been so lovely and welcoming. I feel like this is a great service and I'm happy to be part of it. Due to this, I can see myself staying in this placement until I finish university.

"I cannot speak highly enough of the counselling I received. I feel like the old me again but even better and I have come from a place I couldn't see out of. I know I still have work to do and I feel completely confident I can do it with plenty tools to process, accept and move on from it."
Client of a trainee counsellor, March 24

THIRD SECTOR SUPPORT

Alternatives are embedded in the local community. It is important for us to reach out and be part of the third sector supporting other agencies with our time, skills and resources.

Reaching out through training

GP Training

In August 2023 we presented again at the annual GP Women's Health training course. This gave us the opportunity to share about the third sector in Dundee as well as the work we do at Alternatives, collaborating with Women's Health Services in providing the very best care for individuals in Tayside.

Nurses Training

Alternatives Counselling were asked to collaborate with the maternity psychology team to deliver training on trauma informed bereavement care to the amazing nurses from the early pregnancy unit in Feb 2024, we loved the collaboration and spending time with the team who make most of our referrals.

Training for Medics

Alternatives were asked to again be part of a 3rd year medics training on Women's Health delivering a presentation to the student cohort in 2023. One young volunteer has started working with us following this presentation.

Baby Loss Awareness Week October 2023

This year to mark baby loss awareness week we spent time at the 'Itty Bitty Baby Things for Angel Wings Tayside' coffee morning. A collaboration with Tayside SANDS and the NHS Maternity bereavement group. We were able to distribute individualised packs for parents as a comfort at this time and build awareness of the support available to them.

Child Memorial Service December 2023

Alternatives were again part of the child loss memorial service, a collaboration with NHS Spiritual care team. Alternatives provided over 50 comfort bags to parents to support this event.



YOUTH TEAM

ROCKWELL SCHOOL COUNSELLING SERVICE

SINCE AUGUST 2023, DOWNLOAD HAS ENTERED A NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH ROCKWELL LEARNING CENTRE AS THEIR COUNSELLING IN SCHOOLS PROVIDER. SO FAR, WE HAVE SUPPORTED 20 YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH 132 COUNSELLING SESSIONS.

“Alternatives are extremely skilled in working with our group of young people. The service provided meets the needs of the school and this is very much down to the nature of their counsellor.

The counsellor is always professional and along with Sheriff (therapy dog) and brings a sense of calm to the building.

The counsellor clearly has a depth of knowledge in this field, and this is evident from her interactions with the young people and staff. She is very attuned and responsive to the young people's needs and behaviours, always remaining calm and professional in potentially difficult situations.”

Deputy head Teacher,
Rockwell learning centre

YOUTH THERAPY DOG

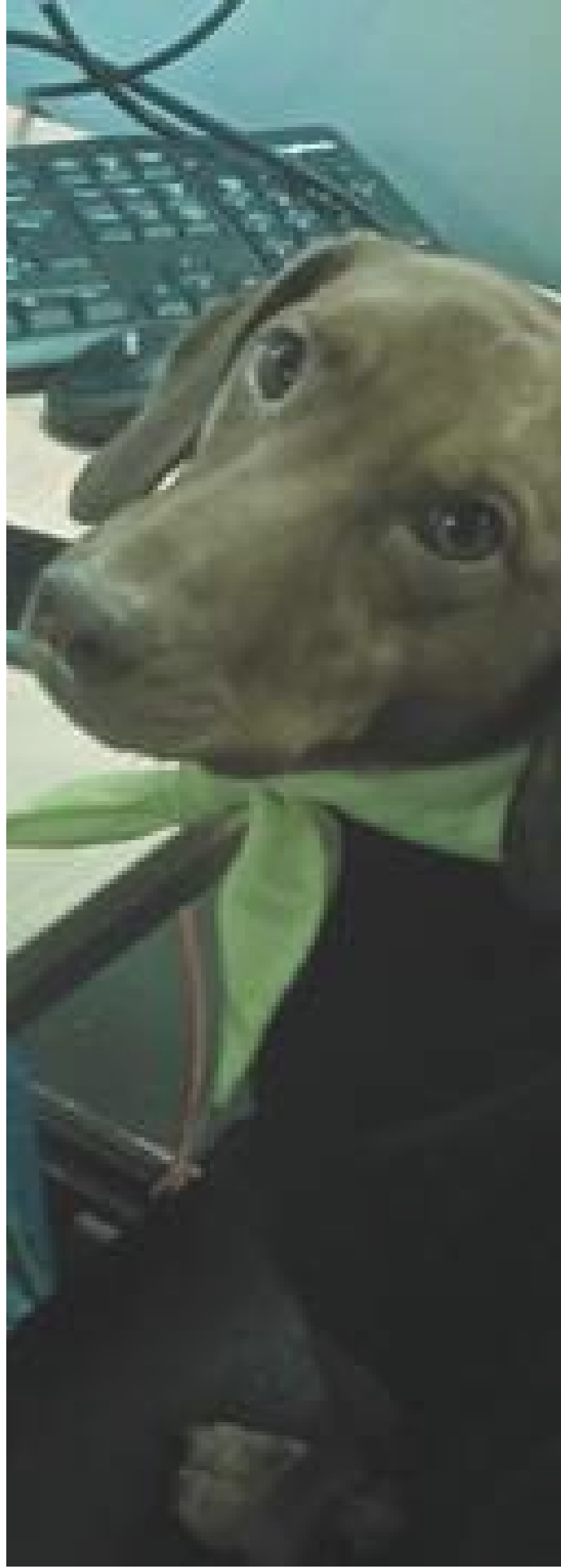
MEET SHERIFF!

This year we have had the support of our therapy dog Sheriff. Sheriff is an amazing asset to the service and helps young people engage with counselling who might struggle in more traditional counselling set ups.

We also delivered bespoke animal therapy workshops with a small group of S1-3's working with Sheriff and his friend Quince – the young people thoroughly enjoyed working with the staff and both dogs and lots of fun and connection was had!

The flexibility and responsiveness of Alternative's approach to Counselling in Schools, has undoubtedly contributed to the highest level of uptake of a Counselling in Schools service at Rockwell to date.

The young people really benefit from engaging with Sheriff and the counsellor as it provides a calm, safe space and helps them regulate enough to be able to talk about their thoughts and feelings.



YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

I volunteered at Alternatives as part of the work placement module during my Psychology and Counselling degree at Abertay University. From the moment I started volunteering I felt welcomed by the staff and felt it was a place I could be comfortable to be myself.

I enjoyed my time volunteering at Alternatives and getting to help and be part of a valuable service to many people. Although I volunteered at Alternatives as part of a placement, I feel the experience provided so much more for me. As part of my experience, I was given the chance to explore my own goals for the future and I was treated as a valuable team member, even though I only volunteered for a short while. I got the chance to learn about the services Alternatives provide and understand the experiences of the counsellors and the many creative ways they support their clients.

This experience helped confirm my love for counselling and realising my potential for the future. The staff have been incredibly supportive of my goals even after my time spent volunteering and I look forward to hopefully working with them again in the future.

Nathalie, young volunteer



COMMUNITY DOWNLOAD YOUTH COUNSELLING

We are thrilled to be welcoming our new Youth Counsellor, Laura, to the team as of March 2023. Laura has a wealth of experience of working with children and young people and has recently graduated from her MSc Counselling from Abertay University. Alongside her role at Alternatives, Laura will bring knowledge from her role of CAMHS Education Support Officer as well as year of experience as a youth worker and artist.

Welcome Laura - we are so excited to have you!



LAURA
Youth Counsellor

THIS YEAR THE ALTERNATIVES TEAM HAVE SUPPORTED 83 YOUNG PEOPLE WITH 320 SESSIONS OF 1:1 COUNSELLING IN OUR DOWNLOAD YOUTH SERVICE.

2 GROUP WORKSHOPS WERE DELIVERED TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN TAYSIDE THIS YEAR.

“The counselling I received was very good. It was helpful in helping me understand issues better, recommending things to try and having someone to listen to me”

“I found the service amazing; it was good to chat and my counsellor was lovely”

“The counselling was very helpful in helping me navigate my emotions and understand myself better”

What's next for Download?

- Download will be re-introducing our Youth Steering Group. This group will be allow young people to be involved in the design of our service and have a voice within our service.
- Laura will focus on redesigning our group work, including the voices of young people and redeveloping the activities to make them in tune with the most current experiences of young people.
- Alternatives hope to expand our specialist counselling in schools work to make our services available to more schools across Tayside as part of the Counselling in Schools Partnership.

OUTREACH & PERINATAL PROJECT

A Collaboration

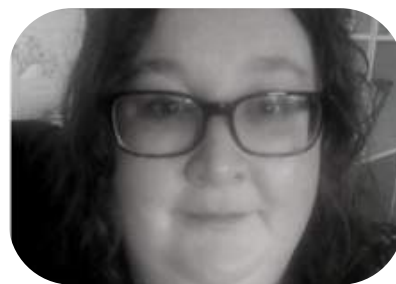
Our outreach team continue to deliver our gentle counselling model, working in partnership with other agencies to reduce the barriers for those who find it more challenging to access counselling. This project offers a high level of support, with a greater focus on relationship building and community-based counselling.

This year we secured funding from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund to build a partnership with the BIRCH project, which supports birth parents who have children in care. Allowing the outreach team to provide group support and one to one counselling, to participants of the BIRCH program. We have continued to receive funding from the Scottish government through CORRA fund, to reach out to birth parents across Tayside.



LESLEY

Outreach
Counsellor



LOUISE

Outreach
Counsellor

“

“I have nothing but positive things to say. I felt in a horrible place when I first attended counselling and I really didn't know how it was going to help me move forward. Now on the other side of things I can say it has really helped me process things and put things into perspective”

October 24

Challenges

It is a challenge to provide counselling in the context of ongoing crises. For many birth parents, interactions with social work and other services are ongoing. We recognise that the stabilisation and emotional support of 'here and now' circumstances often takes over the exploration and processes of the past. For this reason, the work remains long term.

What Works?

Outreach counselling works well when we have good supervision and support for team members. This year we have been able to fund 4 team members to complete the advanced certificate in a trauma approach, which supports clients to understand their responses to trauma and to find ways to meaningfully support these. Regular review days are now embedded in our practice creating space for the team to reflect on the best ways to support this client group. We also know that the relationship has to be at the centre of this work.

Feedback

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I feel more positive about the future	All Agreed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I feel more connected to people that matter	All Agreed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I understand myself better	All Agreed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I feel more able to cope with life	Agreed/not sure
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I am more able to make positive decisions	All Agreed

We are delighted to have secured funding from the Scottish Government Whole Family Wellbeing Fund for a partnership project with Parent to Parent and Tayside Perinatal & Infant Mental Health Team, to provide targeted support for parents of young children who are experiencing anxiety or low mood.

These projects aim to support parents of young children who are feeling anxious to make sense of their experiences, understand themselves better and feel more able to cope with life.

The project will be piloted over the next two years and is already receiving excellent feedback with one client describing the work she is doing with Michelle as transformational.

26 CLIENTS ARE CURRENTLY ACCESSING OUR OUTREACH SERVICE RECEIVING AN AVERAGE OF 21 SESSIONS.



In February 2024 we recruited Michelle McDonald, who did her trainee placement with Alternatives. She has been building a referral pathway with the perinatal team and has begun a perinatal group with Jamie-Lee, a trainee counsellor and support worker from parent to parent.



MICHELLE

Perinatal Counsellor

Client story

Sarah came to Alternatives in 2023 after a pregnancy loss. She felt like she had lost her identity and felt constantly sad. Sarah described that she hated herself and no longer felt any connection to her own body except for a feeling of hate. The experience had left Sarah isolated and she struggled to find the confidence to leave the house.

Over 17 weeks she worked with her counsellor to explore these thoughts and feelings. She talked about the relationships in her life and the ways they were supportive or caused her hurt. She created a timeline of events so that she could see what had happened in her life from a new perspective. She identified ways of asserting herself and her needs, enabling her to feel more confident moving forward, in relationships and friendships.

As the sessions came to an end she explored her hopes for the future, and began thinking about her strengths and qualities. Sarah agreed that she is thinking much less negatively about herself and has a more positive view of the future. Sarah said that her relationships felt more connected as she was able to re-enter the world around her with a strong sense of herself

"I feel that counselling has helped me find the calm within my life and has given me lots of tools to help keep this peace, I am grateful for this service!"



AMBREEN
Centre Administrator

It has been a dream at Alternatives Counselling for a long time to have a dedicated administrator. This year we have seen our team double, and the time came to have a person whose dedicated role is to support the administration and operational procedures of the organisation. We are delighted to have Ambreen in post who is both an excellent administrator and organiser, but is also training to be a counsellor and understands the depth of work that happens within the organisation.

What's Next?

2024/2025



Celebrating 30 Years

2024 will mark 30 years since Alternatives became a charity. Over these years hundreds of individuals have given their time, energy and money to support over 1000 people to access support the point of need.

We plan to celebrate all of you in our supporters party taking place in October 2024. We will be in touch when we have final dates and plans.



Counselling in Schools

This year Alternatives Counselling Youth Team will be the providers for counselling in Braeview Academy, Craigie High School and Rockwell Learning Centre. We look forward to expanding our team and developing an excellent provision based on our experience of providing attuned and personalised counselling to young people.



Team Retreat and Learning Days

This year our team is expanding from 6 to 11 staff members with a further 5 trainee counsellors and 3 volunteer counsellors. As we navigate the changes and adapt to new projects and ways of working, we also plan to take care of one another.

We have planned retreat days in August and in the autumn and may be seen walking through the woods in Dundee, having lunch together or we might even take to the water.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FUNDERS

Alternatives Counselling have been blessed to have a strong range of funders and individuals who support the work of the services. This ranges from local and national trusts, to clients and those who just want to see the service sustained in Dundee.

Your commitment has brought hope in the midst of distress, through the hours where our counsellors have been alongside those who are facing devastating loss, through investing in the future counsellors in Dundee, through supporting individuals with a gift of a comfort bag when they arrive for a procedure at Ninewells. We are grateful.

We thank you for your continued support

- CORRA Foundation
- Henry Smith Charitable Trust
- Northwood Charitable Trust
- Robertson Trust
- Souter Charitable Trust
- Spirit of Waracle
- VOLANT Charitable Trust
- WM Sword Charitable Trust
- Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund
- Alexander Moncur Trust
- Young Start
- Awards for All – community lottery fund
- Whole Family Wellbeing Fund

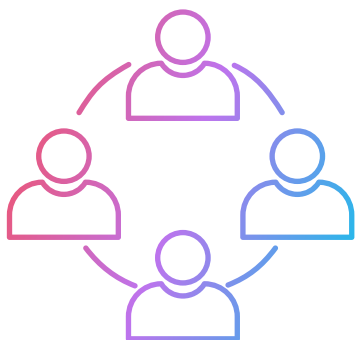
- And many more generous individual and anonymous donors

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

GOVERNANCE

Alternatives are governed by a board of trustees who are responsible for the strategic direction, policy making and financial decision making of the charity. We are grateful for commitment of our board who have worked alongside team members to support the work and planning of each project.

Members who served on our board for the year ending March 2024



Shona Mason

Chair of the board

David Baker

Treasurer

Nicola Reed

Safeguarding lead

Sam Muirberry

Good governance

Jennifer Inglis

Operational matters

Elizabeth Waine

Mentor

MEMBERSHIPS

Alternatives are committed to the accountability and support of membership with external agencies. We abide by COSCA ethics and code of practice. We respect the dignity, worth and uniqueness of all individuals and affirm their autonomy.

- COSCA - Counselling and Psychotherapy Scotland (Organisational members 3579)
- Youth Scotland (membership number 35009971)
- OSCR- Scottish Charities Regulator (SC023483)
- ICO- Information Commissioner's Office (ZA808571)
- Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action