

# Network of Staff Supporters Ltd (NOSS) Annual Report September 2019 to August 2020.



This is the annual report of The Network of Staff Supporters Ltd (NOSS). The report is for the period from September 2019 to August 2020 for our contract holders, associates, service users and other stakeholders.

## **NOSS Mission Statement**

The mission statement underpins the ethos of NOSS. We provide workplace wellbeing services including counselling, mediation and training to all sectors of the community and do so in accordance to the relevant professional standards.

We are committed to the promotion of ethical, confidential, open, honest and transparent communications that not only promotes the emotional health, wellbeing and harmony of all people who in anyway access our services or seek our help but ensure that we conduct all aspects of our business in accordance with the law and with integrity and consistency.

Our aim is for an organisation's workforce to be happy to go to work, confident they are supported and working in a culture that values the wellbeing, health and motivation of the workforce with the aim that the organisation continues to be successful.

The company provides counselling, mediation, wellbeing and training services - this report relates solely to the counselling and psychotherapy service, though for context, the overview of NOSS is for the whole company.

## **1. Overview of NOSS 2019-2020.**

The NOSS Annual Report this year by necessity must divide the year in to two parts; the months preceding the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid19) and the months following the UK response and lockdown on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020.

In the months preceding Covid-19, much of the NOSS business had continued as previous years albeit with the background of the UK leaving the European Union, the annual report would and indeed does follow a similar pattern as previous years.

### **Pre Covid 19 we can report the following; -**

- Continued close working with all parts of the public sector across the UK including NHS, Councils, Schools, Public/Private Partnerships, Fire and Ambulance services to provide workplace support.

- Increased activity from smaller private companies and organisations, this follows the general increased awareness in the UK of the importance of health and wellbeing in the workplace. In addition to significant and important changes for organisations, as a result of the UK leaving European Union, in itself were increasing workplace stress and pressures, with reorganisations, restructures and redundancies being planned.
- We continue to recognise the importance of close effective working relationships with our partners such as Occupational Health team staff, HR and contract holders and the benefits that the working relationships have for staff and the ability to discuss and develop innovative support solutions.
- We continue to benefit from the support given by The Welsh Government, Busnes Cymru who provide impartial, independent support through whom we have access to specialist support, such as IT security and training courses.
- The directors of NOSS have also benefited from the monthly support of a senior business consultant specifically looking at a longer term 5 years plus strategic business plan for NOSS.

We continue to offer a range of services at NOSS

- therapeutic counselling provision – widening our range of therapies on offer in response to contract, client and therapeutic need
- increased flexibility of available session times, often outside the working day and includes early evenings and weekends
- critical incidents and emergencies with increased support following death or serious injury either in or outside the workplace
- continued increase in the way that an initial contact made from clients via email (organisation and private email address) to NOSS
- conflict resolution through mediation
- training on a range of mental health issues
- wellbeing and health awareness initiatives/promotional activity
- life and business coaching.

Support through additional language or skill - we now capture more additional skills information or specialisms such working with clients who have impaired hearing or sight.

## Service Delivery

The year for NOSS was extremely busy. We continue to consolidate our existing counselling provision and through tendering procedures and winning new business. We have also seen an increase in the number of companies approaching NOSS direct to explore what support we can provide, these companies tend to be smaller companies with 100 to 200 staff, where the professionalism, flexibility and choice offered by NOSS has proved attractive.

## Response Times for Counselling Provision

We continue to endeavour to make contact with clients on the same day a referral where possible or the next working day taking account of weekend and bank holidays especially as more clients contact or provide us with an email address which aids our response times.

We provide for all clients and contract holding organisations access to our 24-hour, 365 day, 7 days a week telephone access – where phones are answered in person by dedicated staff.

We continued to ensure our response times meets Key Performance (KPI) targets where applicable - a typical KPI - the first appointment delivered within seven working days remains a key priority for NOSS. Wherever possible we ensure that clients have an appointment sooner than seven working days, according to the contract specification.

Where possible clients are given appointments much quicker including same day or next day where this is convenient for them. We can report initial contact to first counselling session as part of our contract management reporting mechanism, which are confidential, anonymous and are exception based e.g. we would only report the number of appointments that fall outside the KPI for no other reason other than the non-availability of a NOSS counsellor, given the choice and flexibility of NOSS counsellors

The reasons for first appointments falling outside the KPI but would not breach a KPI where specified, remain -

- Client/service user not accepting the first offer of appointment
- Availability of client limited due to work, home commitments or other such as childcare issues, holidays
- Wanting a specific counsellor, time or location other than or exceeding the contract specification requirements.

- Failing to attend appointments or short notice cancellations even though appointments are only offered at mutually agreed times/locations. Clients are asked to give us as much notice as possible when cancelling appointments, and at least 24 hours, allowing us to offer the session to another person, are given appointments cards and can be sent confirmation of appointment by email or text.
- Changes to the service requirements beyond our control / not within the agreed specification and we have worked positively with the commissioner to ensure suitable alternatives are offered and made available

Demand for support either higher or lower rates of referral is managed successfully through effective recruitment and our business contingency/flexible operating model. We value our counsellors highly and support them in business and clinical issues as they require.

We continue to offer our counsellors support, choice and opportunity, often talking to and secure emailing our counsellors daily. Where we are reviewing changes to the operational way of working – we will consult, ask for feedback and seek opinion before making changes.

Our continued thanks, as always, go to:

All our valued counsellors and associate advisers – both new and longstanding - who are extremely caring, professional and consistently deliver a service that we are extremely proud of, they are discrete, ethical and confidential and bound by the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions or equivalent of their own professional body and not least our hard-working, yet often unseen, staff at our head office who are professional, experienced and patient with all our service users (contract managers and clients) and often go above and beyond their own business support remits to ensure a client/service user is supported.

Often as the first point of contact for a referral, they are able to effectively reassure the service user and explain the counselling process, answering any questions and allaying any fears or concerns about counselling even before an appointment is made.

We know this personal contact makes a very positive difference to our service users from the feedback we receive during those conversations or from indirect feedback at the first counselling session. We continue to review how we operate this service and offer best value to organisations and clients alike.

## 2. Clinical Responsibility

NOSS Clinicians and Associates are required to work within the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions and the Professional Conduct Procedure; our NOSS associate recruits are expected to work closely with us to ensure they fulfil the requirements of BACP standards. This ensures that we are able to evidence and demonstrate confidentiality, professional and ethical best practice throughout our network.

It is a mandatory requirement of our recruitment process that all our counsellors, associates or specialists are accredited, eligible or working towards accreditation to their relevant professional standard (such as BACP, BABCP, BPS, UKCP), that they maintain full professional indemnity and public liability insurance and ensure that they commit to and evidence the CPD requirements of their professional body including professional clinical supervision of their practice. This requirement is self-certified each month by all who have provided support that month.

## 3. Service Evaluation

We conduct monthly, quarterly and annual contract management reviews and seek regular associate / counsellor feedback. We also promote the use of our online feedback forms for all service users to support our continuous improvement cycle – *review, evaluate, action, implement*. We continue to promote the value to us of receiving suggestions and comments or compliments; though due to the appropriately anonymous nature of client feedback this element is more difficult to capture and continues to be our focus to ensure a broad reach of evaluation tools are deployed and that we are able to evaluate and improve all our service areas. One of the main methods of receiving client feedback is verbally when Head Office staff are talking to them on the telephone, these comments which are often most complementary, are captured appropriately and forwarded to the counsellor and directors.

Any negative feedback is subject to the NOSS formal Complaints Procedure, which is either and as appropriate, followed formally or used as the process to follow albeit informally.

All the responses received including any negative comments, are reviewed by the senior team and, unless the response is marked as anonymous, we also share the feedback with the counsellor concerned – we know this is appreciated by our associate colleagues and reinforces our commitment to them in sharing compliments/feedback and good practice.

In this way, we use feedback to inform and improve our existing practices and service delivery. In the main the feedback is positive and complimentary; we are happy to report only rare occurrences of negative / neutral feedback. We have used this feedback to make further improvements to our service offering or ensure we are able to explain why it is not possible to change process.

We communicate news and views with each of our Associates by email each month. We continue to communicate on face-to-face basis with our associates to personally relate news, comment or support. Every Associate has access to the directors of NOSS by phone or email at all times

### **Service Reporting to our organisations**

Apart from the date to day contact, regarding operational activity, we have scheduled contract meetings with all the organisations we work either monthly or quarterly, to ensure that all activity meets the needs of the staff and the organisation.

Through our reporting mechanisms confidentiality and anonymity is maintained, reports (generally monthly) are used for example; to demonstrate the numbers accessing service, number of sessions delivered, status of in/ out of work, primary and secondary referring issues, trends and emerging issues, which are used to support an organisation's ability to effectively manage and support the wellbeing and emotional needs of its workforce.

This year there has been an added benefit for contract holders, as result on the introduction of iNOSS (our bespoke integrated management system) we can, on request, create specific reports on organisational and contract activity produced in a format that has the ability to be interrogated in MS Excel for example allowing in-depth analysis of issues and trends for example.

In the last NOSS Annual Report under future focus and next steps we indicated several initiatives we planned the following have been put on hold as a result of Covid 19

- Secure portal technology for both client/organisation and associates - HOLD
- Review business process for counsellors in administrative tasks we request of them to ensure that they continue to focus on counselling and where possible make working for NOSS as easy as possible – HOLD
- Cyber Essential PLUS accreditation

## **Post UK response and lockdown on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020.**

It is noted that NOSS primarily delivers workplace support. All of the above has continued to be delivered by NOSS the difference are as follows -

Working within the public sector often that support is delivered on an organisations own premises, we worked very closely as organisations such as Councils and the NHS to help develop their response the COVID 19 in relation to providing counselling to staff.

Acutely aware of the pressure key workers became under before and since the UK lockdown was declared and are still under, at the time of writing, we designed support solutions that met the requirements of an organisation, staff and counsellors. The changes we made are reported to the BACP in the NOSS BACP Temporary changes report (see attachment) and were in summary –

**1. On Site** If working on site e.g. at a hospital, that location was changed, but still on site as building were allocated for different purposes this was in early February 2020 when face to face support was allowed.

Following lockdown and no face to face support was permitted and no on-site support has been delivered since.

We work across the UK and restrictions have been different in parts of the UK at different times with different dates for the lifting of restrictions and indeed localised lockdown areas as a result of COVID 19 spikes which we have had to take account of.

**2. Organisations** working closely we jointly agreed how support would be delivered for staff.

Support can be delivered by several options, telephone or online via applications such as ZOOM, WebEX, Teams, What's APP, Skype for example. The default option for the delivery of support was always telephone, this because no matter about a clients IT skills, reception or internet connection especially in rural locations, clients can access and use a telephone. There has been consideration given to hard of hearing clients and solutions deigned on a case by case basis.

In addition to agreeing the methodology for support delivered, we ensured that all contract holders had access, on a priority basis to the directors of NOSS on a 24/7/365 basis and although many of our contracts are for Monday to Friday during working hours provision and open extension was invited for all staff from all organisations to use the 24/7/365 access provision either on a 'pay as you go' or a contract basis.

The 24/7/365 confidential service provision provides different accesses - messaging delivered through encrypted email for non-urgent issues, messaging for urgent issues and immediate access to a NOSS on call counsellor either within office or out of office hours. All organisational contract holders receive both verbal and written updates in any change in service provision – contact is often daily, weekly or monthly.

**3. Counsellors** most particular communication has been with our counsellors, acutely aware of the duty of care to existing clients, the counsellors own position as a result of COVID 19, new clients, IT skills and phone or on-line counselling skills. Our communication was often daily, weekly and we continued to brief at least monthly.

We extended the invite for all counsellors to support the out of office hours support team. We gave choice to all counsellors to pause or continue to provide support. We asked counsellors who did not currently deliver support other than by face to face (a lot do) if they were trained and confident to deliver support via other media, if we didn't already have documentation showing additional training / qualification this has been provided.

We gave choice to counsellors to deliver support initially by phone but if jointly agreeable with the client support could be delivered via an online platform.

We promoted online training and access to  
<https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/telephone-and-online-counselling/>

We reminded counsellors of the access by direct phone and email to the clinical director and NOSS directors. During lockdown we surveyed all counsellors and asked them to share their thoughts, an example is detailed below

*Since lockdown or even just before lockdown, we have seen many changes, many of us have had our own personal journeys to manage together with changes, in the way services are delivered that you provide*

*Though not yet at the end of the Covid -19 journey, we are focusing on the future and we are inviting you to share with us your thoughts and feeling about, how to date, you have changed your services and how those changes might shape, how you deliver your services the future.*

*Please, if you can and wish reply by email - if you don't want to reply by email and would rather talk about changes, please email us and we can arrange a time for a phone call. We would like to know what changes you have made, what impact those changes have made for you and your clients. What changes you might keep and those that you will stop once the restrictions in the UK are lifted.*

**Below are some ideas on how you may have changed your service, its not comprehensive and is just an outline.**

- *Have you delivered or did you already provide online or phone sessions?*
- *Will you continue or stop delivering sessions online or by phone sessions?*
- *How do you feel the alternative sessions are they very therapeutic / sometimes therapeutic / not very therapeutic?*
- *Are you confident you could recognise if a client was NOT suitable for alternative sessions?*
- *Did you or had you completed training for delivering sessions online or by phone sessions?*
- *Would you like more guidance about delivering online or phone sessions if so, do you expect or has your professional body provided support?*
- *What online platforms have you been using and have there been any advantages or disadvantages, did you complete any training including online tutorials?*
- *Have you made any changes to your requirements for either delivering or receiving supervision?*
- *What other thoughts you have around the delivery of counselling post COVID19 – what can make counselling more successful for clients.*

We were very grateful to receive many thoughtful and considered replies all of which has contributed to the overall information gathering, so far during the COVID19 pandemic.

The journey with our counsellors through COVID 19 is not yet complete and we will continue to communicate carefully with our counsellors to ensure that they are supported

**3. Staff** are located across the UK and in many different job roles, working for many different organisations, often key workers. We have tried to maintain existing client counsellor relationships and where previously face to face sessions would be delivered on site, we have tried to maintain the opportunity of initiating or resuming a face to face relationship once restrictions are lifted. For example, if a member of staff works in location, we will refer the member of staff to a counsellor who normally works in that location.



Apart from the delivery method, staff have seen no change in service delivery in that sessions last the time as a face to face session and they receive up to the same contract approved sessions. Some organisations have initiated self-referral as well as a manager or occupational health referral.

**NOSS Head Office Staff** aware of the changes likely to be introduced by February 2020 we implemented the NOSS business contingency plan this include landline phone transfer to be answered 24/7/365, remote access to various systems from a home location via laptops of PC's, weekend cover for emails. We continue to support all head office staff and have found that service has been unaffected by remote working. Head Office has not been used since lockdown.

In summary we have tried very hard to support our head office staff, counsellors and organisations by continuing to deliver much needed support with the minimum of change or difference.

**We are truly grateful for all the support we have received from our head office staff, consultants, accountants, organisations, counsellor and not least our clients.**