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Reflections Network Impact report

Addressing the mental health of people experiencing homelessness in Wales

February 2022

Registered Charity No: 1004103

About The Wallich Reflections Network

The Reflections Network is a counselling service which was set up by The Wallich to support people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness across Wales.

The concept originated from the realisation that staff were spending time responding to the immediate needs of clients suffering with poor mental health but were unable to fully address the underlying root causes of this.

People who experience homelessness are disproportionately more likely to have experienced adverse childhood experiences or trauma than the general population, so it is vital that they have access to professional psychological support in order to deal with these challenges and improve their mental resilience.

The Reflections Network connects service users with professional counsellors to address their specific circumstances.

Overview of independent review findings

An **independent evaluation by PDR Cymru** gives evidence that The Wallich Reflections Network is performing effectively and delivering a range of positive outcomes. The service adapted well to the challenges of COVID-19, and the model was able to quickly pivot to offer counselling support over the phone.

Demand for the service has remained high, which is evidently meeting a need that cannot be met by oversubscribed mainstream counselling provision.

The Network aims to connect people with a counsellor within 28 days of referral, dramatically sooner than waiting lists for statutory services which can run to several months and sometimes years. The model sets out that interventions should not be time-limited, rather service users are able continue sessions for as long as they and the counsellor agree is necessary.

The Wallich's support workers have also identified the strengths of the Network as part of a suite of services working in parallel with the other support they provide. When clients are receiving counselling, they are more likely to have better outcomes in other areas too, such as managing relationships, substance use, mental health or developing tenancy skills.

Outcomes

Some of the positive outcomes from counselling sessions through the network:

The review suggested that strengthening the ability to capture and interrogate data on outcomes should be a priority for the project moving forward. All stakeholders agree that the project is making a substantial difference, and there are some excellent case studies of lives which have been transformed for the better, but we should now focus on capturing quantitative as well as qualitative data in order to evidence the success of the model.

It is also vital that we secure long-term, sustainable funding for the service, as it clearly addresses a significant need that is not adequately covered by mainstream statutory provision. If Welsh Government and partners across local authorities and health boards are serious about embedding prevention as a key principle, whether for ending homelessness or tackling mental health inequalities, the network demonstrates an effective approach which will reduce pressures on crisis services.

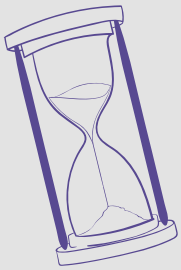
The Reflections Network forms a key part of our strategic commitments at The Wallich, to create psychologically informed environments and embed trauma-informed care into the way we work.

One of our key values is compassion, and it is this that motivates us to provide holistic, person-centred support for service users no matter their circumstances. Poor mental health or past experience of trauma must not be allowed to become a barrier to ending an experience of homelessness.

The Reflections Network at a glance March 2019 – November 2021

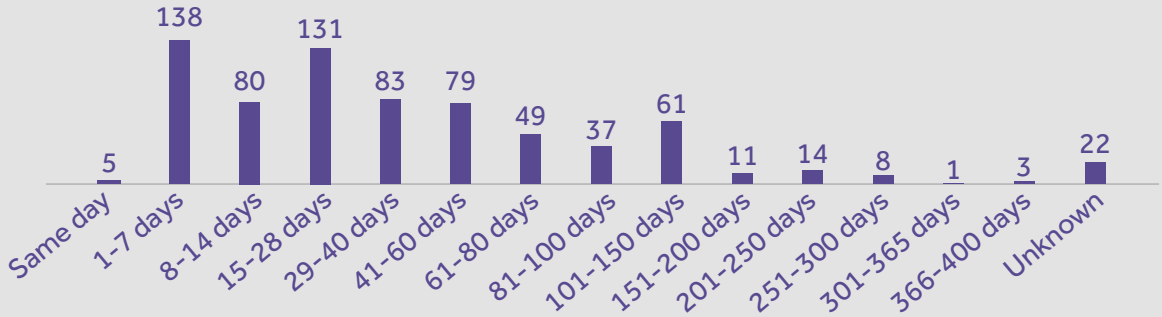
722 first appointments issued

6,553 counselling sessions offered to service users



More than **7,000** hours of counselling issued

Number of days referral to scheduled first appointment



Where 28 day target was missed, demand was very high.

Outcomes: Who has the Reflections Network helped?

Please note: Names have been changed to protect the identity of our service users.

Jerry

Jerry was really pleased when The Wallich staff offered to refer him to the Reflections Network. Following these sessions, he feels that he has a better understanding of how to cope and problem solve, and of how his behaviour affects others. He now knows that he needs to take responsibility for his own behaviour. Jerry also has a better understanding of his mental health and the support he needs to move on to supported living accommodation.

Rich

After working with a Reflections Network counsellor, Rich started to find it easier to express himself, and began to understand how his alcohol consumption led to him being asked to leave the family home. Rich is now working with drug and alcohol teams and working to become abstinent from alcohol. He has gained independence and now has the skills to manage a tenancy of his own.

Dafydd

Counselling has eased Dafydd, stopped him from worrying and constantly thinking the worst. He said, "The counsellor has helped me understand that I have a tendency to get ahead of myself and worry about all sorts of things that may not be true, or never happen." He now looks forward to his sessions with the counsellor and feels better able to keep on top of things. "I now know that if I'm having a bad day, that's all it is; a bad day." He is better able to manage his emotions and better understands his past behaviour. He feels good after each session, regardless of how heavy the discussions.

What our service users say

> "I don't turn to alcohol to cope now, as I've got the confidence to deal with things differently."

> "I'm now on a Peer Mentoring course and want to become a volunteer."

> "Things are looking good, and I have been making steady steps in the right direction."

> "I'm far more optimistic now. My friends can't believe I'm the same person."

Critical success factors

- ✔ Accessible service with modest waiting times
- ✔ Universal provision
- ✔ Strong understanding of client group
- ✔ Opt-in service
- ✔ Support process built around relationship of trust between client and counsellor
- ✔ Blend of face-to-face and telephone offer
- ✔ Trauma informed approach
- ✔ Clients set their own goals
- ✔ Interaction with wider The Wallich services
- ✔ Flexible and pragmatic approach
- ✔ Commitment to providing safe closure of support
- ✔ Clients see service as effective and working in their interests

Recommendations to improve the Reflections Network

An independent evaluation by PDR Cymru has outlined a series of recommendations to bolster the service's delivery and measurement of success.

Recommendation	What The Wallich will do
Make every effort to secure additional resources to continue Reflections Network provision. Securing a larger sum of grant funding over a long period would give the team greater certainty and allow innovation in the model.	The Reflections Network Manager is working closely with The Wallich Income Generation team to secure more long-term future funding.
By the end of the project period, collate and analyse all available monitoring data to help evidence the true impact of the Reflections Network intervention.	We have analysed all available data and will improve our data collection strategy going forward with a new design.
Strengthen level of interaction and dialogue between support workers and counsellors to improve understanding of the counselling process and fine-tune the referral process.	The Reflections Network Manager will design and roll-out training for all support staff to improve dialogue and working relationships with counsellors and how best to promote the service.
Explore opportunities for Reflections Network counsellors to come together as a group to share experiences and discuss best practice.	The Reflections Network Manager will consult with counsellors to consider the best ways to facilitate regular meetings as a team.
Look at how service users can best shape and evaluate provision. The Service User Group could be reinstated and options for involving Peer Mentors could be explored.	The Reflections Network will explore this with The Wallich Service User Shadow Board and plan a strategy going forward.
Assess the viability of building some administrative capacity into the project model.	Administrative capacity is reliant upon level of funding. Future bids will keep this recommendation in mind where appropriate.
Continue to provide a blended offer, whereby service users have the choice to access counselling face-to-face or over the phone.	This blended offer has continued and will remain a standard feature of our offer into the future.
Strengthen monitoring and evaluation processes to allow effective capture of data on the progress and value of the support.	The Reflections Network Manager has actioned work with The Wallich Business Systems team to explore and build capacity within our case management systems, to ensure more effective capture of data for the Network going forward.
Revisit KPIs / outcomes to ensure they reflect what the support is trying to achieve.	A review of all KPIs and outcomes is underway for the next financial period.
Make every effort to retain and develop the network of counsellors who have successfully delivered the support to date.	Funding bids have been submitted with financial uplifts to ensure retention of our current network of counsellors.
Consider some of the detailed points outlined in this report on how systems and processes might be tweaked to deliver marginal gains.	All aspects of the Network are currently under review to see where further improvements can be made.

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