Kent Association for the Blind

Impact Report April 2024

Counselling



Supporting sight impaired people to live independent lives

kab.org.uk

01622 691357

Counselling

Counselling gives someone an opportunity to talk through what's going on for them with somebody from outside their usual circle of family and friends.

A counsellor listens, without judging or telling someone what to do, and can help people find ways of coping with the challenges they are facing. Counselling can support someone to express their feelings, manage anxiety or low mood, and adjust to changes in their life.

> **"The service has been absolutely brilliant. I had tried other (counselling) services but they didn't really help, but this was different. I feel more equipped to deal with things...small steps, but I'm in a much better place. Thank you for all the support. The counsellor gets a gold star from me."**



KAB's Counselling Service

In 2019 KAB introduced a counselling service for clients across Kent, Medway, Bromley and South East London.

The service is holistic, allowing clients to bring all issues that are important for them. For most, recent sight loss or the impact of visual impairment is the presenting issue. Our therapists' experience and training in this area benefits our clients, many of whom come to us specifically because of our additional awareness and familiarity with sight loss.

KAB's counselling service model takes a flexible approach to supporting clients, as we understand that people sometimes need to attend health appointments, have childcare difficulties, have to visit a family member who is unwell, or for any number of reasons need to reschedule a counselling session. Our clients feel reassured that they won't be discharged for not attending an appointment now and again.

Our counselling is flexible and therapy is not time limited but instead, we offer tailored short and long term options for support, from stand-alone counselling sessions to psychotherapy over several months. We provide therapy face to face at our three sight centres, as well as by phone and video call. Our aim is to maximise access for clients who have needs in addition to their sight impairment e.g. difficulty hearing on the phone, neurodiversity or reduced mobility. Our multi-skilled team allows us to be very responsive to clients' therapeutic needs.

> **"I understand my feelings now in relation to past events. Gemma (KAB's Lead Counsellor) has allowed me to do this...I have been in a dark place, but am less frightened now."**

Case Study

Pat is a woman in her late 40s. She is widowed with two daughters and three grandchildren, all living quite nearby. Until becoming sight impaired she had always worked full time, and enjoyed her job because of the interaction with people all day.

Pat was referred to the counselling service by her KAB rehabilitation worker following unsuccessful eye surgery, and pending registration as sight impaired.

Pat was struggling to cope with sudden sight loss and had been recently diagnosed with depression and anxiety by her GP. She was taking a break from her full time job, and unsure if she would be able to return to work with her reduced vision and lack of own transport. She had to give up driving due to her vision loss. She was very anxious about going out alone, and distressed to be unable to help with her grandchildren's school run as she had done previously.

We worked with Pat for twenty appointments over nearly nine months. During this time her mood lifted, she became more able to manage her anxiety and started to adjust to life with sight loss.

Meanwhile, Pat's rehabilitation worker supported her in learning cane skills and gaining confidence to get out walking on her own. After a while, she resumed doing the school run with her three grandchildren.

Feeling more confident, Pat returned to work following discussions with her employer about the support she now needed. Her employer was keen to make adjustments to enable her to continue in her job. Gradually she returned to full time working. Being able to return to work has made a huge improvement to her emotional wellbeing.

Pat's rehabilitation worker and counsellor worked concurrently to help and support her with the practical and emotional aspects of sight loss, and as Pat slowly regained her independence she reported feeling reassured and well supported by KAB.

> **"The sight loss is manageable now. It isn't brilliant, of course it isn't, but it's ok, I can do this, you know."**

Please note that some details have been altered for anonymity.



Developing relationships with GP surgeries

We understand how access needs related to sensory loss and restricted mobility can make it harder to arrange GP appointments and contact mental health services.

We regularly liaise with GP surgeries and are able to successfully assist clients to obtain GP services, medication reviews and onward referral to mental health teams where appropriate.

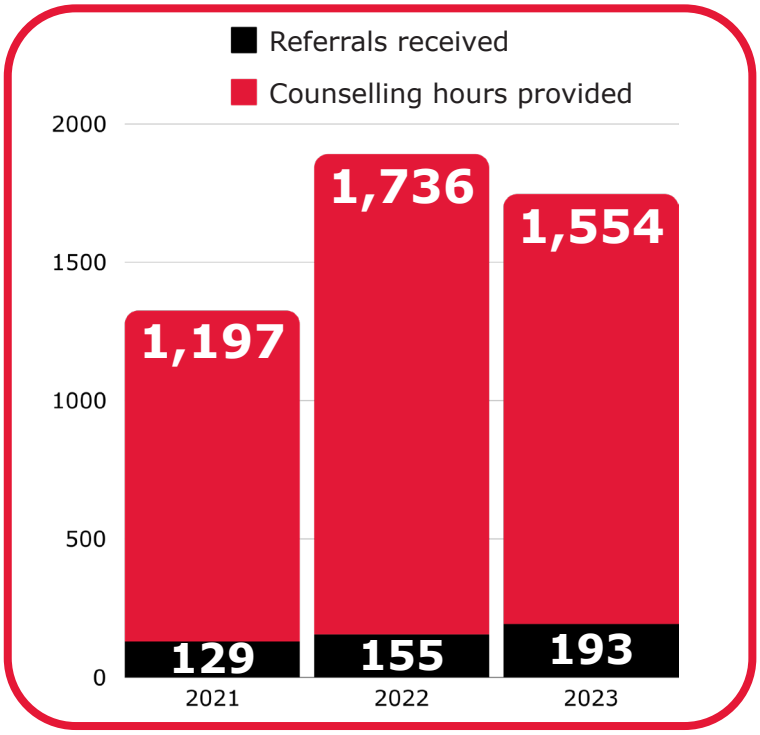
We know that many clients will be best served by a combination of counselling and GP support. Where our own service is not suitable for client needs, we endeavour to ensure they are referred to other, more appropriate, agencies. Clients report that they appreciate the advocacy we can offer in this area, and feedback suggests that GPs respond swiftly, once made aware of specific needs.

> **“The service was perfect for me and just what I needed. The counsellor was great - she didn’t tell me what to do but helped me build a toolbox that I can go to when I need it.”**

Referral and Outcomes

The consistent annual rise in referrals, averaging a 22% increase, demonstrates improved awareness of the service and the growing need for counselling.

The service uses a personal wellbeing measure created by the Office for National Statistics called ONS4, which offers clients the opportunity to evaluate how satisfied they are with their life overall and also their current level of anxiety.



Questions 1 to 3 are scored on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely". The questions are:

Q1 Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

Q2 Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

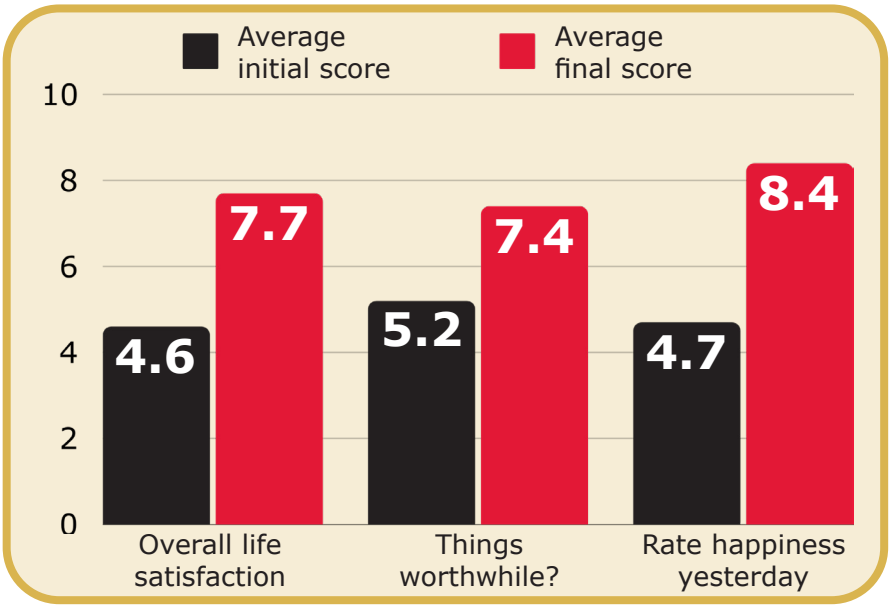
Q3 Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

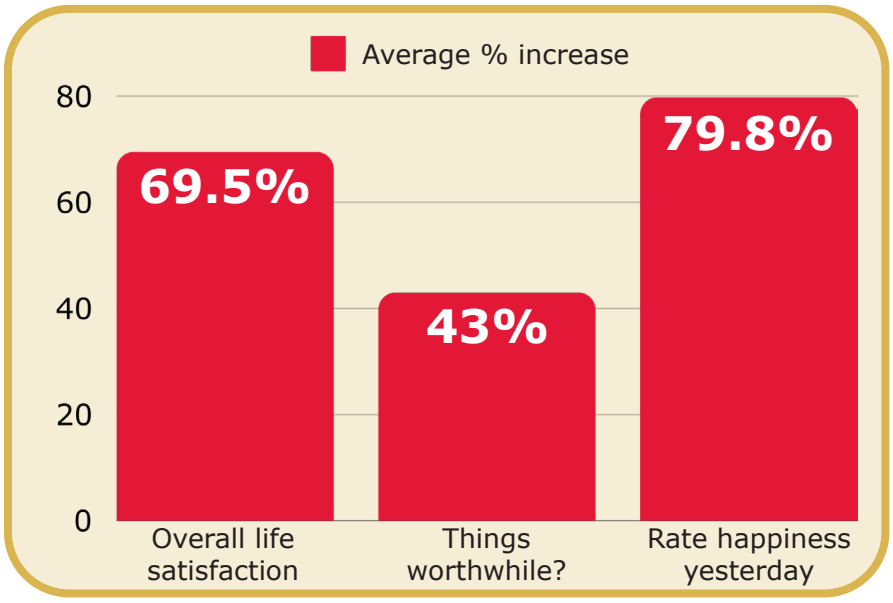
Q4 On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Clients complete an ONS4 questionnaire with their counsellor at the start and end of their counselling as a way of measuring progress. For longer term clients, the ONS4 measurement may be used at intervals to monitor the impact the counselling is having.

Data taken from completed questionnaires from KAB clients is shown below.

Evaluating self-worth (questions 1 to 3).

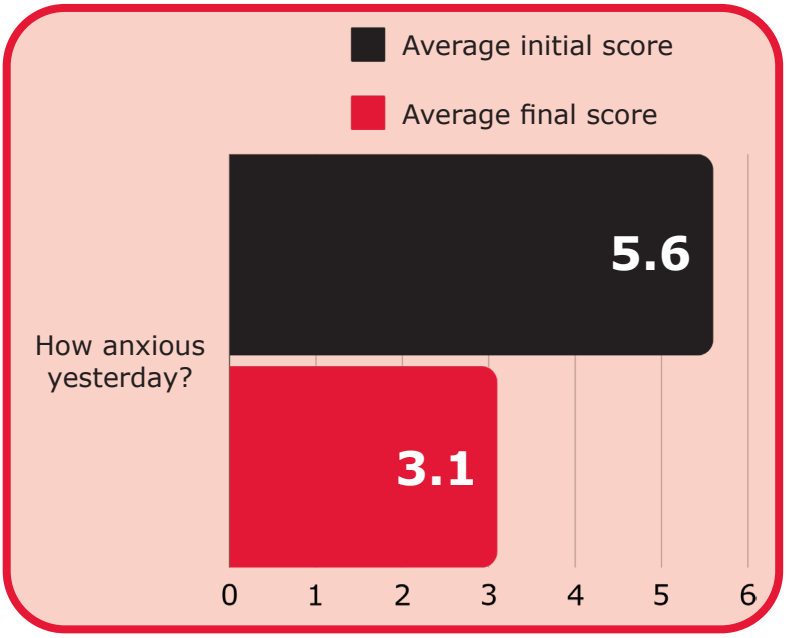




The results show, on average, a **63% increase** in levels of feeling of worth, following counselling.

Level of anxiety (question 4).

Overall, clients reported a **45% reduction** in levels of anxiety following counselling, a significant decrease clearly demonstrating the value and impact of counselling for them.



Case Study

Collin is in his late 50s and lives in West Kent with his wife Pam. He reported being fit and active with no sight problems, until 18 months ago. He ran his own plumbing business and spent his weekends cycling, restoring vintage cars, and entertaining his five grandchildren. One Monday morning, he woke up to total vision loss. Over the coming weeks, he underwent a high number of tests and eye surgeries. Some sight returned, but 6 months later he had been registered as sight impaired and referred to KAB for support.

Collin's life was thrown into chaos by his sight loss. He had the traumatic experience of sudden blindness along with the stress of treatment, and the fear of total sight loss recurring. During the next few months Collin suffered with severe anxiety, including panic attacks on a daily basis. The combination of sight impairment and anxiety prevented him from carrying out his normal activities. He was unable to work, cycle, or tinker with cars and he didn't feel up to playing with the grandchildren. He found hospital appointments particularly challenging. Despite a visit from a KAB rehabilitation worker, he felt unable to put into practice the suggestions she had made around getting out independently, or resuming sporting activities, as too much of his energy was taken up with combatting his anxiety. He became very dependent on Pam, and his discomfort about this increased his distress.

A year after being registered as sight impaired, Collin contacted the counselling service. At assessment, he explained the impact his anxiety was having on daily life. During that appointment, Collin was taught a breathing technique that he could start using immediately. He also agreed to see his GP to discuss his anxiety medication. The following week, Collin reported a positive appointment with his GP who had increased his medication, and he said he was sleeping better. He was feeling the benefit of the breathing exercises. He also said he managed to get through a hospital appointment without a panic attack for the first time in months.

Collin was offered face to face counselling sessions with a member of the team specialising in Transactional Analysis and Neuro-Linguistic Programming. These approaches focus on self-regulation and calming techniques to help cope with anxiety. After five sessions, Collin felt that he had regained control. He still had a lot to deal with, but reported that he had developed strategies to help him. He and Pam were able to enjoy a holiday in Portugal, a trip he couldn't have imagined taking just a few weeks before. Collin knows that he is welcome to contact KAB's counselling service again in the future, should he need to.

Please note that some details have been altered for anonymity.

Our counsellors

KAB's counselling team is made up of therapists from a wide range of backgrounds, including several with lived experience of sight impairment.

We have counsellors and psychotherapists working with a variety of modalities and approaches including Person Centred, Transactional Analysis, Trauma Focused, Creative Therapy, Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.



Gemma, Lead Counsellor

Trainees are all enrolled on accredited counselling or psychotherapy diploma or post-graduate courses and, like their qualified colleagues, they bring a wealth of personal and professional experience. Continuous learning and development are key to our holistic service delivery.

All our trainees undertake in-house training on sight impairment, and regular group supervision meetings mean that there are always opportunities to enhance knowledge and understanding. The mix of practice styles and experiences in the team mean that all colleagues can benefit from peer support and sharing ideas.

The training we provide, alongside their experience supporting our client group, enhances our trainees' overall development as therapists. As they move on to work in other agencies and/or private practice, their increased understanding of sight impairment and disability issues will have a beneficial impact on the wider therapeutic community, as well as the clients they may work with in future.

"As a volunteer counsellor for Kent Association for the Blind, I feel valued and very much part of a warm and friendly team, who welcome input and new ideas. From the moment I first communicated with the Service Manager until now, I have felt incredibly comfortable and supported, enabling me to grow as a practitioner and ensure that service users are at the heart of the work I do. The comprehensive induction that I had, the excellent training I have received and the ongoing support from my counselling mentor and wider team have been second to none. Above all I feel I can be me; accepted, valued and good enough just as I am."
Sarah – Counsellor on Placement.

Thanks to our supporters

The consistent annual rise in referrals, averaging a 22% increase, demonstrates improved awareness of the service and the growing need for counselling.

We'd like to thank the following organisations for supporting our counselling service:

- City Bridge Trust
- Bromley Mental Health Hub
- Ian Askew Charitable Trust
- Souter Charitable Trust.

We'd also like to thank these organisations whose donations have been put towards the counselling service:

- Joan Ainslie Charitable Trust
- John Swire Charitable Trust
- Tula Trust
- The 29th May 1961 Charity
- WH&A Hawkins Trust
- The Lois Cumbers Charitable Foundation.

> **I thought the service provided by KAB as a whole, and particularly the counsellor, was excellent.**
>
> **I wasn't sure what counselling could do for me (…) but it was a really positive part of my adjusting to sight loss and a rewarding and helpful experience.**
>
> **It's also worth noting that the communications and organisation side of the programme was very switched on and efficient (…) the counselling provided was by far one of the most beneficial things offered to me…I really appreciate everything done on my behalf, and congratulate you on a great service.**

Summary

The case studies in this report show the benefit of both long term and short term counselling and KAB believes that its clients should be able to discuss any aspect of life that is affecting them with a counsellor.

It is for this reason that our counselling service is not restricted to people discussing only sight loss. We believe in supporting the whole person for as long as necessary which is why our service is not limited to an amount of time or number of sessions.

The team of dedicated counsellors deliver our award winning service from our three Sight Centres in Bromley, Canterbury and Maidstone, as well as by telephone or video depending on the client's preference.

The remarkable growth of our counselling service, from one qualified volunteer counsellor and a student on placement in 2019 to a multi-disciplined team of between 8 and 10 qualified and student counsellors today, highlights the need that exists for it, and this important work will continue in order to support the emotional wellbeing of KAB's clients.





linkedin/company/kent-association-for-the-blind



instagram.com/kentblind



facebook.com/kentassociationfortheblind

Kent Association for the Blind
72 College Road
Maidstone
Kent ME15 6SJ
Charity registration number 1062354

Kent Association for the Blind