



# NewLife

counselling

“we’re listening”

Manifesto 2010

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The 2005 Northern Ireland Health and Well-being survey indicated that 19% of the population aged over 16 in Northern Ireland considered themselves to have a mental health problem, including depression. This equates to about 400,000 people. In addition 45,000 children aged 5-15 have a moderate to severe mental health disorder requiring often costly mental health interventions.

In this context New Life Counselling is proud to play a significant part in meeting this challenge of improving the emotional health of the population head on, providing cutting edge counselling services which demonstrably help people and their communities.



### Cost effective services

New Life Counselling provides value for money services to communities which desperately need them. Our work saves the Executive significant funds through provision of counselling services at an early stage which prevent the need for more costly care and medication at the later stages of mental illness. At a time when more and more people are having to cope with the impact of job losses and economic uncertainty, the services which New Life Counselling provides are more important than ever – helping people to cope with the financial impact of this as well as the emotional impact on their self esteem and confidence.

*We want to work in partnership with government to help tackle deeply rooted societal problems, which manifest themselves in individual and family suffering.*

With one in four people in Northern Ireland suffering a mental health condition at some stage in their lives, this has a profound impact on the individual but also impacts our society socially and economically – limiting individuals capacity to work, learn and contribute to their community. This has further attendant cost implications for the Assembly in terms of increased unemployment benefits and primary care costs. We believe that concerted effort can be made to tackle these issues, through the provision of cost effective counselling services, with clear benefits for individuals, families, communities and the finances of Northern Ireland PLC.

*A study by the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health and the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health shows that the total costs of mental illness in Northern Ireland amounted to £2.8 billion (£1,680 per head population) in 2002/03. In comparison it is estimated that a comprehensive programme of psychological therapies would cost just £250 per head population producing a saving of 84%!*

### Life changing & life saving services

The DHSSPS priorities for action have identified that a focus on mental health services should include the promotion of mental wellbeing and prevention of mental health conditions where possible, and this should include including improving access to psychological therapies.

New Life Counselling has been changing peoples lives as a result of the services provided. In 2009/10 New Life Counselling alone received 3,805 referrals for counselling to support individuals. This change in peoples lives was achieved by providing professional counselling and therapeutic services to enable individuals to improve their emotional health. The benefit of our services for our clients has been:

- Improved educational attainment
- Securing of voluntary or paid employment
- Building family relationships
- Contributing to the local community.

These outcomes are significant for the population of Northern Ireland and its Executive.

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*Consider the impact of a high percentage of the population being economically inactive due to poor emotional health?*

*How much money from the Department of Education budget is wasted as a result of young people failing academically because their emotional health is compromised due to relationship difficulties, alcohol misuse or the effects of a family separation?*

*How would our communities thrive without the personal investment made by so many to voluntary organisations and how much would this be reduced if people cannot contribute to local communities due to emotional and mental health difficulties?*

The most obvious impact of poor mental health and lack of access to psychological services has been the rise in suicides, attempted suicides and suicidal ideation. There have been large increases in rates of suicide amongst young people in Northern Ireland. Approximately 150 suicides per year are recorded but in 2009, 260 were registered. This is a worrying and tragic loss of lives in Northern Ireland.

It is noted that a key target from DHSSPS is to reduce suicide by 15% in 2011 and we assert that this target is simply unreachable in the absence of psychological therapies and early intervention approaches to address the emotional and mental health difficulties that these victims are experiencing.

It is challenging in a constrained economic climate to consider the long term impacts of poor mental health. Our attention is drawn to

the most pressing and immediate problems. However, it needs to be recognised that not investing in the emotional health and wellbeing of our population is costing us money now, and storing up problems for the future.

Emotional problems left unresolved often lead to increased dependence on drugs and alcohol, reduced educational attainment, inability to secure and retain employment, clinical depression, mental health diagnoses and increasing suicide rates. This undeniably has a knock on effect and creates budgetary pressures for the Health Service through demands for inpatient mental health care. It also has a huge impact on unemployment, claims for benefit support and a reduced skilled labour market.



## What do we need to do to address this?

As an organisation delivering professional counselling services, New Life Counselling sees counselling as a key tool in addressing these issues and this has been evidenced by the significant benefit for the many thousands of clients we have supported since 1993. We consider delivery on the following 4 issues to be key to securing a better future for Northern Ireland society.

### 1. Access to Psychological Therapy Services

We believe that it makes sound economic and social sense for people in Northern Ireland to have access to counselling services when they are needed.

New Life Counselling has been providing services in North Belfast since 1993. Our counsellors have worked with some of the most disadvantaged in our society, many of whom have suffered emotional health difficulties due to the impact of trauma resulting from the Troubles. Without the access to free counselling services offered by New Life Counselling these individuals would not have been able to move on with their lives.

These clients are evidence of the benefits of counselling. They have effectively contributed to their communities, improved relationships, secured employment or re-entered education.

New Life Counselling is aware that many communities across Northern Ireland still do not have access to such services. According to current NICE guidelines, these evidence-based therapies ought to be made available to all who need them. Effective treatments exist but only a quarter of all the individuals affected by mental health issues are able to access any form of treatment or therapy – compared with over 90% of people suffering from physical illness.

The lack of help offered to older adults with depression and anxiety is particularly concerning, as well as being medically and economically counter-productive. Psychological therapies are very effective for a wide range of mental health problems. For many, talking therapies provide a lifeline during periods of mental distress and are more effective in many situations than medication.

We have identified such areas where services are limited and have developed a plan to resource these areas for which we are currently engaging in fundraising activities to financially support these.

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New Life Counselling is delighted that the Department of Education has invested heavily into the emotional health and wellbeing of pupils in post primary schools through both the PEHAW initiative and the Independent Counselling Service for Schools. New Life Counselling now delivers these services to almost 180 post primary schools across Northern Ireland. This provides an invaluable resource to schools, teachers, pupils and parents.

New Life Counselling would like to see this provision extended into both Special Educational Needs and Primary schools. We believe that early intervention is the most effective intervention on emotional health as well as being the most cost effective.

**Action:**

- All children and young people and adults should have access to professional counselling/psychological services in their local area.
- These services should be to a high professional standard and staffed by qualified and experienced counsellors.
- Referral to services should be open and clients should be able to request services for themselves as well as others requesting the services on their behalf.
- Services need to be designed to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of the populations that they serve and consequently there should be a range of services available within community settings.

It is heartening to note that all three main British political parties have stated their commitment to provide better access to psychological therapies in the next Parliament and we challenge the Assembly to ensure that full access to psychological therapies when they are needed is available across Northern Ireland.



## 2. Bamford Review

New Life Counselling was encouraged by the DHSSPS investment into the research leading to the Bamford Review on Mental Health Services. In particular New Life Counselling would support the key findings in relation to the benefit of early intervention services, enhancement of community-based services and a shift away from hospital-based care along with the recommendation that there should be better access to a range of evidence-based psychological (“talking”) therapies.

The vision set out by the Bamford Review aimed to promote the mental health and wellbeing of the whole community and in parallel decrease the prevalence of mental ill-health through preventative action. This is a significant step forward in addressing mental health related illnesses in Northern Ireland. The assertion that the NI Executive would adopt the Bamford vision and make this vision a reality in seeking to provide person centred, seamless community-based services, informed by the views of service users and their carers, making early intervention a key priority and protecting and promoting people’s mental health is, we believe key to addressing the potential long term impact of poor mental health within our society.

New Life Counselling would like to see progress made within the Assembly on the implementation of the Bamford recommendations, building on the efficient and value for money contributions made to service delivery by the voluntary and community sector.

Whilst New Life Counselling operates a diverse funding strategy which involves support from a range of corporate, private and philanthropic sources, and whilst the current economic climate is recognised, we believe more needs to be done to invest in the implementation of the Bamford Review and the community services needed to realise this.

**Action:**

Implementation of Bamford should mean:

- Enhanced access to community based psychological therapies for those who need them
- More DHSSPS finance for mental health promotion and prevention going into community based interventions
- Recognition of the value and impact of the work of organisations such as New Life Counselling
- More effective, cohesive and focused delivery of appropriate services
- Radical review and update on the strategy for mental and emotional health in Northern Ireland

### 3. Regulation

New Life Counselling recognises that whilst counselling services can provide significant benefits for clients, the use of psychological therapies in the hands of poorly trained, inexperienced or unregulated staff can be damaging. New Life Counselling places a high value on employing high calibre, experienced, well qualified staff to assist our clients in working through the, often complex, issues which they present with.

New Life Counselling provides a professional and ethical service and abides by the BACP Codes of Ethics and Practice. We have a strong commitment to continual professional development and support our therapeutic staff through ongoing support via clinical supervision and line management. We also have robust risk management and recruitment procedures to ensure the safety of our vulnerable client groups which include children, young people and vulnerable adults.

New Life Counselling believes that regulation of counselling services, as is already in place in other health fields, is important to validate the high standards of organisations, such as our own, who operate ethically and in line with professional regulations. The ability for counsellors to practice in an unregulated manner causes us concern and potentially brings into disrepute the reputation of all counselling services. The implementation of regulatory standards would provide:

- Clients with the confidence that their practitioner has a recognised skill and knowledge base
- Clients with a reassurance that the intervention they receive is 'appropriate' to their presenting issue, and when it is not they will have recourse
- An undertaking that the skills base from which the counsellor works is appropriate to the client group (e.g. adult and child practitioners)

#### Action:

- We would like to see the Assembly move forward the statutory registration of counselling practitioners, putting in place an appropriate, recognised standard to be achieved by practitioners in order to be allowed to practice. This not only safeguards reputable counselling organisations but more importantly protects the, often vulnerable, clients who seek the help of counsellors.



### 4. Training & Skills Deficit

New Life Counselling has been pleased to see an increasing openness within the Northern Ireland population to seek counselling support. Whilst we are aware that a 'stigma' still exists for some in seeking counselling support increasingly this is being overcome and counselling is being seen as a 'normal' support to assist in addressing some of life's problems.

A significant development which has aided this has been the implementation of the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS). This programme, delivered within all post primary schools across Northern Ireland, funded by the Department of Education, makes counselling services available to young people within their school environment. Young people seek support for a range of issues including exam stress, bullying and family breakdowns. Whilst this openness to making use of counselling services bodes well for our ability to improve the emotional health and wellbeing of our society it also presents challenges for us.

In 2008 New Life Counselling employed just 20 counsellors (mostly on a part time and sessional basis). By September 2009 we needed to employ 117 staff with the majority of these being employed on full time 3 year contracts. This was a fantastic opportunity for the organisation but we did become aware of the potential for a serious skills deficit in the future.

This is due to 2 key factors:

- 1.) Increasing openness of individuals to make use of counselling services thereby increasing demand for such services and staff with counselling skills

- 2.) A lack of availability in education and training programmes for counsellors in Northern Ireland.

Having conducted some internal research we became aware that many of our more highly qualified staff had relocated for a time to England to secure their qualifications and local universities face challenges in continuing to run the necessary courses in counselling. Therefore action is needed to address this so that we are equipped to meet the emotional health needs of our population or we risk regressing. We are aware that this issue is also noted within the DHSSPS Strategy for the Development of Psychological Therapy Services.

#### Action:

- New Life Counselling would like to see the universities in Northern Ireland recognising the difficulties in relation to workforce and training issues and being supported by the Assembly to provide the needed courses. At this stage New Life Counselling has itself chosen to deliver a post graduate level programme to upskill existing counsellors to better provide services for children and adolescents. We have begun and will continue to lobby the universities to this effect but need the Assembly to recognise the risks associated with a lack of action in this area.





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