



SERVICE ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY

1.0 Strategic Context

- 1.1 AMH New Life Counselling is the counselling service of Action Mental Health. Committed to supporting the emotional health and wellbeing needs of its clients through the provision of counselling. We provide friendly, professional counselling services for children, young people, adults and families. We aim to promote the health and wellbeing of people who are suffering emotional distress, including stress, anxiety, depression, relationship difficulties, self-esteem issues, self-harming behaviour, suicidal ideation. The service is provided without distinction of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnic identity, political or religious opinion.
- 1.2 The counselling team consists of client based teams of professionally accredited counsellors or equivalent (eg. registered Art / Play Therapists), namely the under 18's (OKAY), over 18's (ACP), and Family Team. Each team is managed by a Team Leader and assisted by at least one Assistant Team Leader.
- 1.3 AMH New Life Counselling aims to provide a counselling service that is affordable to everyone. Our target population includes individuals (*5 yrs of age upwards*), families and carers. We recognise the challenge in reaching our target population, particularly in local geographic areas of ongoing intimidation, violence and mistrust.
- 1.4 AMH New Life Counselling works in partnership with various community and statutory organisations in highlighting service availability and referral pathways. We also communicate interactively with our clients throughout the therapeutic process and seek feedback for ongoing service improvement. The quality, professional and friendly service provided builds trust with the communities we serve.

What might deter people from accessing our service?

- Lack of awareness about the service
- Finance/affordability – the service needs to be both affordable to clients and delivered in accessible locations
- Whether the service provides therapy that is 'fit for purpose' in terms of regional variation of referrals and timely response
- Physical access

2.0 Service Awareness

- 2.1 Only those who are aware of our service can access it and only those external referrers who know about our service can make referrals. Our publicity strategy and networking activities are therefore of vital importance. We have recently updated our website and information leaflets and undertaken relationship building exercises and networking with GP's, community mental health teams, and community groups.
- 2.2 Increasingly, clients are likely to access our website as a first point of information. Our website has recently been updated with additional service information, including service times and referral pathways. Service information and updates are also communicated regularly via AMH Facebook and Twitter pages, allowing further accessibility of service information and planned initiatives.
- 2.3 We are also increasing service awareness and accessibility via strategic partnerships with several community / voluntary organisations (e.g. Parenting NI, MS Society, Lifeline / Nexus / Cruse Bereavement), allowing for signposting options to facilitate informed service choices for clients and access to the most appropriate service at that time. These partnerships extend to the use of an interpreting service with the Belfast Trust for clients from a Non English Speaking Background. This is an area where we are seeking to improve our accessibility, via a service partnership with the Counselling All Nations organisation <https://counsellingallnations.org/> who have delivered training for our staff.
- 2.4 We distribute information leaflets to local GP Practices and other local service providers on an annual basis including Cruse Bereavement Care, Women's Aid, Family Trauma Centre and Barnado's.
- 2.5 AMH New Life Counselling is a member of several mental health related forums, including the Community of Interest Mental Health Forum. As part of this Forum, we contributed to the recent development of a Belfast Trust website. This website provides self-help resources and service accessibility information for practitioners and potential clients.
- 2.6 AMH New Life Counselling is also included on Health & Wellbeing Resource directories in Belfast and South Eastern Health & Social Care Trusts, and has contributed to the Protect Life Suicide Prevention Strategy.

3.0 Affordability and Accessibility

- 3.1 AMH New Life Counselling recognises the financial constraints for many of our clients. For example, our Ardoyne office is located in an area currently ranked '4' of 890 Super Output Areas for multi-deprivation in NI (NIMDM 2017), with '1' being the most deprived.
- 3.2 In order to enhance accessibility, AMH New Life Counselling services are

available free of charge to clients. Quality services are delivered by professionally registered counsellors and psychotherapists in accordance with the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions.

- 3.3 AMH New Life Counselling services are delivered in three accessible office locations in Greater Belfast, along with regional satellite locations (eg. Lisburn). AMH New Life Counselling operates Monday to Thursday (10am – 5pm) and Friday (10am – 3pm). There are also evening appointments available (Mon – Thurs / 5pm – 8.00pm), further enhancing accessibility, particularly for clients working during daytime hours.

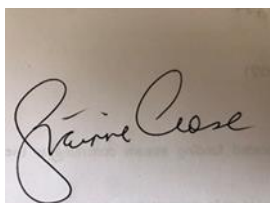
4.0 Flexible to Meet Needs

- 4.1 The demand for services is increasing, particularly in Belfast and this leads to potential accessibility limitations in relation to timely access. AMH New Life Counselling is continually monitoring and managing waiting lists in order to facilitate access. In order to meet local client need, AMH New Life Counselling is contracted by various agencies including the Public Health Agency, Belfast, South Eastern & Northern Trust Mental Health Hub Consortiums, and the Victims & Survivors Service (VSS). The VSS contract in particular is tailored to provide service access to people impacted by the NI conflict.
- 4.2 AMH New Life Counselling promotes regular client feedback on facilities and support. This feedback is designed to promote ongoing service improvement and is sought from individual and family clients at the commencement, during and following therapy.

5.0 Physical Access

- 5.1 AMH New Life Counselling premises promote disabled access, including our building entrances. There is an internal lift in our East Belfast (Bloomfield House) office and our North and West Belfast offices provides an accessible waiting area and counselling room on ground level.
- 5.2 In addition to this AMH New Life Counselling offers a counselling service to Deaf and Hearing impaired clients. AMH New Life Counselling recognises that accessing counselling when you use sign language as your main means of communication can be difficult. Therefore, we work in partnership with relevant community and statutory organisations to provide service information and encourage referrals. Options for initial client communication include online referral <https://www.amh.org.uk/new-life-counselling/> or phone contact via a family member / friend. Following referral, clients are contacted via email or text message and an initial appointment is arranged with our experienced, Level 3 BSL trained counsellor.
- 5.3 AMH NLC Counselling also provides online and telephone counselling services to promote service accessibility and to engage with people from different geographic regions. We now offer a blended service of face to face / online / telephone counselling to maximise client choice. We also continue to

refer to professional guidance and resources including BACP GPiA 056
'Equality, diversity and inclusion in the counselling professions.'



Grainne Close
Interim Head of New Life Counselling

16/03/21_____

Date

Review Date: March 2024

For Distribution to:

All AMH NLC Staff, Supervisors
and Volunteers