



Penumbra

Evaluation Report

Self-Harm Service Aberdeen

April 2008

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Service Aims and Objectives

The Penumbra Self-Harm Service for Aberdeen began in 2004 with a remit to: allow young people to talk about their problems in a non-judgemental, safe and friendly environment; offer support and understanding to enable young people to cope with a crisis and develop the skills to help them take control of their lives. The Service offers advice and information on alternative coping strategies and provides young people with an hour of 1:1 support per week, whether it be face-to-face, via e-mail, text or over the phone. The Service aims to provide a non-judgemental, young person friendly and user led support service to young people who self-harm in Aberdeen City. It also explores and caters for the needs of family, friends, carers and professionals who are in contact with young people who self-harm. The Penumbra Self-Harm Service works with young people to examine the kind of support they feel they need regarding self-harm. The main objective is to give advice and support on harm minimisation and to sign post young people to other useful agencies. The Service is committed to empowering young people and identifying that they are the experts in their own lives. It has now been running for 4 years and in April 2007 a new Development Worker, Barbara Harrower, was recruited to continue delivering the aims of the Service:

- Establish and support the development of self-harm support groups for people who self-harm, parents, carers and professionals.
- Bring together the individual support groups around common issues.
- Establish links with appropriate planning groups.
- Co-ordinate the Aberdeen Forum for Action on Self-Harm.
- Facilitate and provide training around self-harm, including supporting people who self-harm to be an integral part of the training process.
- Promote good practice across agencies.
- Make accessible and available resources for organisations and individuals.
- Liase with other interested groups locally, nationally and internationally.
- Collaborate with local press and media to reduce stigma and inform the general population on the needs of this group.

Introduction

This report has been compiled to promote the activity and outcomes during the period of April 2007 – April 2008 and will also illustrate the future plans of the Service. Service users were asked to complete a short evaluation form so that information could be gathered regarding changes in self-harming behaviour, coping strategies, overall mental health and any areas that they felt could be developed further. Evaluation forms were also gathered from each awareness raising session the Development Worker has delivered to other agencies. The information gathered indicates a very high level of satisfaction among both service users and workers from other agencies. Positive comments have been made about the dedication and helpfulness of the Development Worker and the value of the service itself.

When asked if there was any comment they would like to make about the Self-Harm Service people responded very encouragingly, saying:

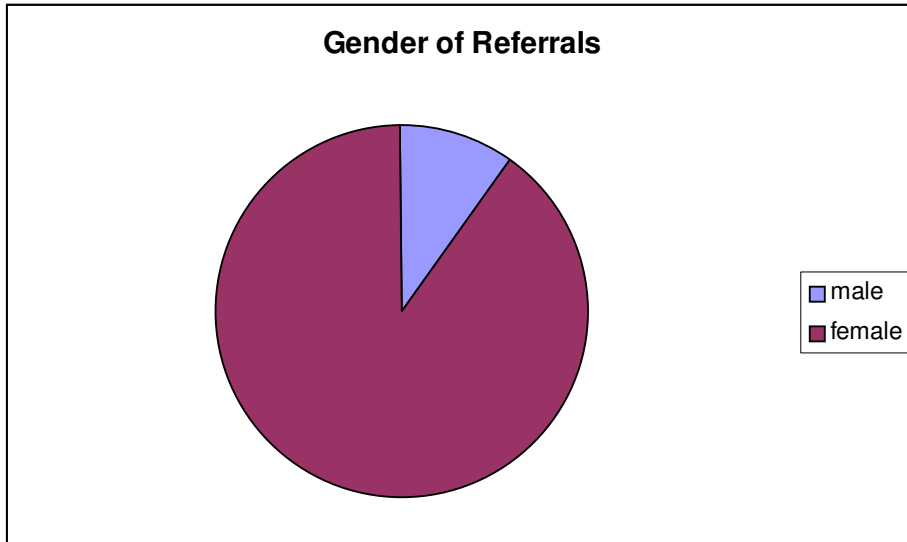
“It has been invaluable, it is melodramatic to say so but I owe my life to it.”

“...The support worker has been absolutely fantastic, easy to relate to, supportive, positive and I have a lot of respect for the work that is being done...it is brilliant to have found somewhere where I am not seen as a time waster or an attention-seeker and I am actually seen for who I am.”

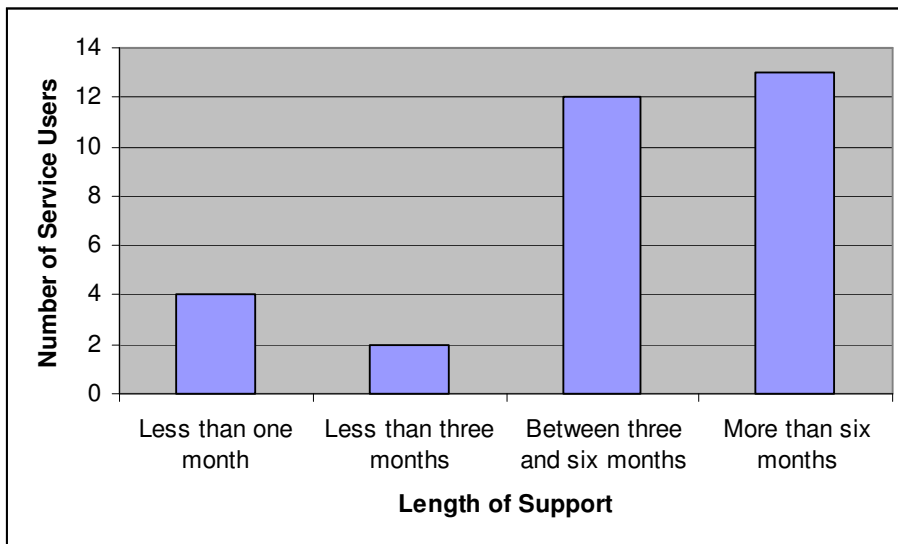
“I have never felt judged and have always had the opportunity to talk about how I am feeling.”

Summary of Service Users

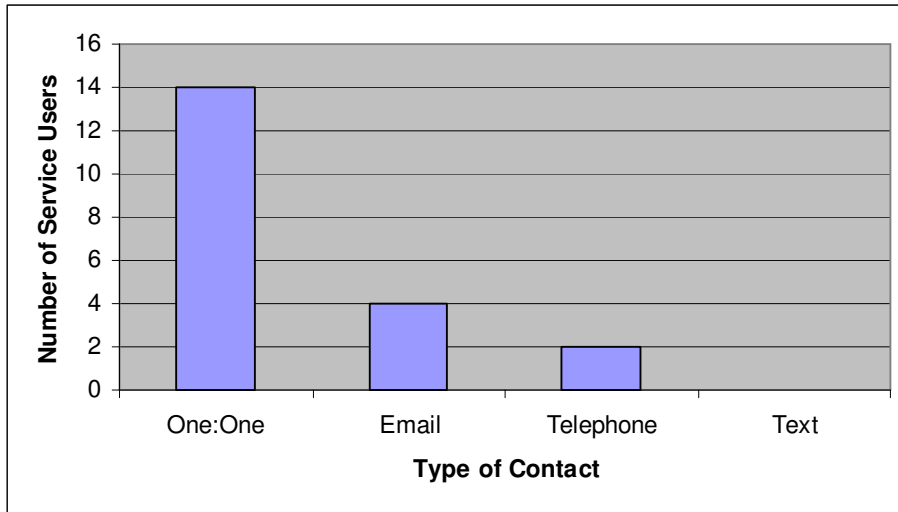
The Self-Harm Service currently supports 14 individuals on a regular 1:1 basis and a further 6 individuals are in occasional contact via text or email. The vast majority of the service users are female, as represented in the chart overleaf:



Since April 2007 there have been 21 new referrals. Including service users remaining from the case load of the previous Development Worker and the new referrals since April 2007, 32 service users in total, the chart below indicates the period over which service users have accessed support:

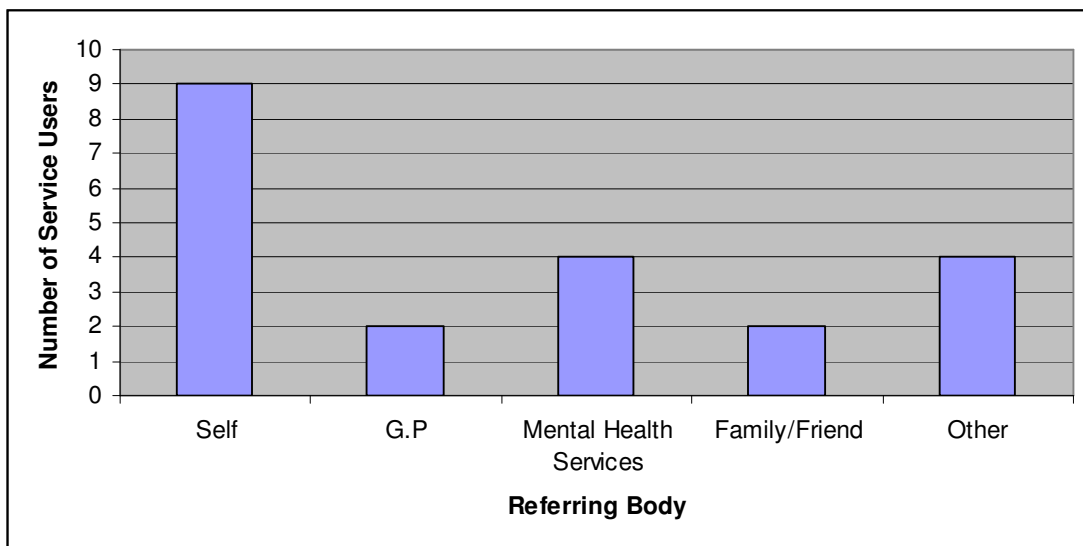


Current service users access support in a variety of ways including 1:1 support, email, text and telephone calls. Overleaf is a representation of this:



Although the chart demonstrates that the majority of service users receive 1:1 support many of the young people also email and/or text in between support sessions.

The chart below indicates where referrals come from. It reveals that most of the service users self refer although approximately 50% of self-referrals were directed to the service by mental health services or by their G.P.



Since April 2007 **16 service users have moved on.** This figure is based on new and existing service users.

Summary of Support Sessions

Since Barbara took over the post in April 2007 there have been a few changes in terms of support, guidelines have been created to ensure that the service users and the Development Worker know what to expect from a support session as well as practical things like explaining the procedure that will be followed in an emergency or crisis situation. Support sessions are limited to 1 hour but, due to the nature of the work, the time limit can be flexible. Sessions have become more structured over the last 12 months and now take place at the Penumbra premises on Summer Street, this change came about when service users voiced that they preferred the privacy of the office, although there is still the option to meet outside the office should people feel more comfortable.

In the initial stages of contact, support sessions are typically centred on developing a trusting and open relationship between service user and Development Worker and discussing the guidelines. On average this takes 1-2 sessions but this depends entirely on the individual. Once trust and open-ness have been established the sessions focus on ascertaining what the service user hopes to achieve through receiving support from the service. Areas such as self-harm triggers, nature of self-harm and duration of self-harm behaviour are discussed in order to assess how to proceed with future support sessions. Service users are asked to keep a diary of their self-harm to help them with identifying any triggers or patterns in their behaviour. Generally speaking, service users contact the service with a view to developing more positive methods of coping and stopping self-harm so sessions concentrate on looking at distractions and alternatives to self-harm such as using the 15 minute rule or doing something to occupy the mind and hands like origami. The catalogue of self-harm alternatives is extensive but they do not suit everyone, therefore part of the session is used to explore alternatives tailored to the individual. If an area is identified which is out with the capabilities of the Development Worker then the service user is signposted to a more appropriate agency while still receiving support for self-harm related issues. There are a variety of recovery-based tools employed during support sessions to help people to learn new ways of coping with the stresses of life, such as the recovery path and the WRAP plan.

Penumbra is committed to working within a harm minimisation framework and is dedicated to providing good quality information on how to self-harm safely, including giving advice on wound care, when to seek medical attention and where is safer to cut should people feel they still need to. Penumbra does not condone or encourage self-harm but appreciates that it is a valid coping mechanism which is difficult to stop using in the absence of alternatives, therefore promotes harm minimisation in order to help reduce the risk of permanent or life threatening injury.

Activity

The Development Worker has also created links with other agencies such as Choices, a pregnancy counselling service and Westhill Carers Support Group in order to; raise further awareness of the self-harm service, refer people to other appropriate services and to enhance the effectiveness of the self-harm service in terms of being up to date with services in and around Aberdeen. The self-harm service continues to provide awareness raising sessions and in the past year has delivered presentations to nursing staff at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary Accident and Emergency Department; Tutor Support Staff at Aberdeen College; Support Workers at Aberdeen Foyer; the Guidance Teacher Network and various staff within Penumbra. During the last year around 91 people have attended the awareness raising sessions.

The awareness raising has proven to be successful and useful with most people commenting that they had no idea about the diverse nature of self-harm and were amazed by what they had learned. The most positive comments came from the A&E staff who said that they sometimes did not think about the thoughts and feelings that people experienced leading up to self-harming and only saw it as an injury to treat. Many of them said that they had learned a lot about how to engage with people who self-harm and said that they would take what they had learned and apply it to their practice. One member of staff also commented that:

“ Having someone who self-harms taking part in the discussion was a good idea and gives us insight into their experiences rather than just a professional capacity.”

Taking this comment into account a couple of service users have been recruited to assist with awareness raising sessions in the future in order to give an account from the point of view of someone who self-harms, and they can share their own personal experiences if they feel comfortable in doing so.

In addition to awareness raising sessions, support sessions and meetings with Choose Life and ACT2Care, the Development Worker also attends relevant training, seminars and conferences to liaise with other organisations and to gather any information that may be of use to the service and its users. Since April 2008 she has attended the SIREN conference, Children and Young Peoples Mental Health conference, ASIST training and the Harm Minimisation: Limiting the Damage of Self-Injury conference. The Development Worker is part of the ACT2Care Strategy Group, held at Craiginches, and as a result of this connection there is potential to do further work with the prison staff and prisoners in a bid to reduce self-harm and suicide within the prison system. Over the coming year it is hoped that the self-harm service will be supporting prisoners within the prison in order to establish a link prior to their liberation.

Future Plans

The priorities for the coming year, in terms of raising awareness, are to continue to work with A&E staff until they all have a better awareness of self-harm and of the self-harm service itself. There are also plans to develop an information booklet for the staff to pass on to patients presenting with self-harm related injuries or self-poisoning. The booklet will hopefully be developed with help from the service users already being supported by the self-harm service and will include information on how to contact the service and some practical advice about wound care, provided by A&E. Further awareness raising is planned for Momentum, V.S.A, staff in Craiginches Prison and staff at the Rape and Abuse Crisis Service.

The self-harm service continues to receive a number of enquiries from people out with the 16-25 year old age range and out with Aberdeen City. In the last 12 months there have been 47 enquiries from agencies wishing to refer service users for support from the self-harm service. Information, advice and support were provided

to the agencies concerned but this was limited beyond the initial enquiry due to the constraints of the remit. This means that at least 47 people were unable to use the service directly. Most of the potential referrals were under 16 or over 25. It is clear that there is a gap in the provision of services for people who self-harm and that future expansion of the Aberdeen Self-Harm Service would benefit a great many more people than it currently does.

If yes, how many times in the last year?	2 or 3 times	I have made 5 attempts in the past year	3 or 4 times	None	Twice in the last year	Once	Once
Has your suicidal behaviour changed since contacting the service?	I am able to not act on suicidal thoughts by using alternative coping techniques. I am certain that I would have attempted more often without the support.	My attempts are less compulsive and happen when my mood is significantly lower than previous breaking point.	I think about what I have to live for now and how I can change my future.		Yes, I am more in control of my impulses now.	More open about talking about how I feel.	Yes, because I know now that there is someone to talk to rather than bottling everything up. No one is judging.
How did you hope that the project could help you?	I wanted to understand why I self-harm. I wanted someone to see me for me and not just my self-harm. I wanted to stop self-harming. I hoped somebody would listen to what I have to say. I wanted to find other ways of coping with these feelings.	I wanted to understand why I self-harm. I wanted to stop self-harming.	I wanted to understand why I self-harm. I wanted to talk about the issues behind my self-harm. I wanted someone to see me for me and not just my self-harm. I wanted to find other ways of coping with these feelings	I wanted to find other ways of coping with these feelings.	I wanted to understand why I self-harm. I wanted to talk about the issues behind my self-harm. I wanted to stop self-harming. I hoped somebody would listen to what I have to say. I wanted to find other ways of coping with these feelings.	I wanted to talk about the issues behind my self-harm. I wanted someone to see me for me and not just my self-harm. I wanted to stop self-harming. I hoped somebody would listen to what I have to say. I wanted to find other ways of coping with these feelings.	I wanted to understand why I self-harm. I wanted to stop self-harming.
How has the development worker helped you to reduce or stop self-harming?	By providing advice on alternative coping techniques, by not giving me the negative reaction that I have had in the past. I have realised I don't need to be ashamed of self-harming and I don't feel as bad as I used to if I slip-up and self-harm again.	The project worker has provided practical advice when I was very self involved. She has been sensitive but hasn't stood for my crap and has cut through it to the crux of the matter and then supported me on that issue.	Just having someone laid back to talk to. Help with issues at that time. A different point of view that can relate to your issues.		By posing a challenge to me not to harm myself. By accepting my good reasons for self-harming but not accepting that self-harm was helping me. By listening.	Has provided a safe, comfortable environment where I feel able to talk about self-harm without being judged.	The project worker has helped me by listening and identifying why I might be self-harming. Just giving advice, listening and generally helping me to understand why I am doing this. No one is judging and it feels like a safe environment to speak freely.

<p>What has helped you to control your self-harm?</p>	<p>Starting to find alternative coping methods, developing techniques and an understanding as to why I feel the way I do, which in turn will hopefully help me to find ways of not self-harming.</p>	<p>Having someone who wants to help me without rushing my recovery.</p>	<p>Being able to be more open about them. With help, reading more about issues, friends, family a myself.</p>		<p>*PENUMBRA* a non-institutional setting, staff that are not controlling and a real understanding of what it is like.</p>	<p>Discussing and putting into practice a variety of other coping strategies.</p>	<p>Talking about how I feel, 15-minute rule, many DVDs and games. Generally keeping myself occupied.</p>
<p>Is there anything else you would like to say about the self-harm service?</p>	<p>For me, the self-harm project has been very helpful; this questionnaire does not really show how much use the project has been mostly due to me being not very well during the process so far. I have learned a lot though, and hope I do manage to quit self-harming. The support worker has been absolutely fantastic, easy to relate to, supportive, positive and I have a lot of respect for the work that is being done. I think it is good that the project is providing support that is not really available elsewhere. It is brilliant to have found somewhere where I am not seen as a time waster or an attention-seeker and am actually seen for who I am.</p>	<p>It has been invaluable, it is melodramatic to say so but I owe my life to it.</p>	<p>Thank You!</p>		<p>It has saved my life and I cannot praise it (specifically Barbara) enough. <u>Thank you.</u></p>	<p>Overall very beneficial, support worker easy to talk to. I have never felt judged.</p>	<p>It is a fantastic project that has really helped me. Just knowing that someone is easy to speak to, there to give advice and not to turn around and tell you that you should stop or how you should feel. It can be as relaxed or intense as you want the session to be which is good as sometimes speaking can be hard. Thanks Barbara.</p>