



Service Accessibility Strategy (WAVE Counselling)

Policy and Procedure	
Department: Clinical Services	WAVE Disability Strategy
Author: Clinical Services Director	December 2014
Reviewed	March 2020
Next review	March 2022

Context

WAVE aims to provide a counselling service that is affordable to everyone affected by the Northern Ireland conflict. Our target population includes individuals (*6 yrs of age upwards*) and families who have experienced bereavement, injury or trauma through the civil unrest in Northern Ireland, irrespective of religious, cultural or political belief.

We recognise the challenge in reaching our target population, particularly in local geographic areas of ongoing intimidation, violence and mistrust. Responses from our annual Equal Opportunities questionnaires were reviewed as part of this strategic development.

Client characteristics

WAVE's equal opportunities and accessibility monitoring has highlighted an approximately even distribution of clients of different genders and community backgrounds, with some regional variation. The majority of clients are married/in a civil partnership 43.44%. The proportions of clients who were employed, unemployed and economically inactive each accounted for roughly one-quarter of clients. Self-referral to WAVE is the most commonly cited referral source 57.25%, followed by referrals from the Victims and Survivors Service 6.11%.

The most common primary reason for referral to WAVE is currently traumatisation 30.08% followed by bereavement 26.50%. There were variations in referral reason by centre. Bereavement was the most common reason in Armagh, while psychological injury was the most common referral issue in Derry/Londonderry. The proportion of clients indicating intimidation as their referral reason was greater at the Ballymoney centre than any other centre. Almost three times the number of clients indicated physical injury as their main referral reason to the Belfast centre as to other centres.

The largest proportion of our clients are resident in Belfast with Omagh receiving the second largest number of referrals.

What might deter clients accessing our service?

- 1) Knowledge of the service and our philosophy of inclusiveness. Some clients may associate the service with one particular community orientation over another, as opposed to providing cross community services.
- 2) Finance/affordability – the service needs to be both affordable to clients and delivered in accessible locations.
- 3) Whether the service provides therapy that is 'fit for purpose' in terms of regional variation of referrals and timely response.
- 4) Physical Access

1) Knowledge of the service

- 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 upgraded our website and have undertaken relationship building exercises and networking with GP's, community mental health teams, and community groups (e.g. NEXUS, QUB, Relate).

- Increasingly clients are likely to access our website as a first point of information. Our website redevelopment has allowed clients to make email enquiries regarding the counselling service. These enquiries are answered by WAVE's Head of Clinical Services within 24 hrs.
- WAVE has also developed social media initiatives via Facebook and Twitter, allowing further accessibility of service information and planned initiatives.
- WAVE has developed strong inter-agency partnerships with various regional statutory services (e.g. Victims & Survivors Service, GP's, CMHT's, CAMHS, Youth Justice & Probation, Public Health Agency, Community Addiction Teams, Queen's University Belfast).
- We are also increasing service awareness and accessibility via strategic partnerships with several community / voluntary organisations (e.g. Lifeline / Relate / Nexus / RFJ / Cruse / Dunlewey Substance Advice).
- We distribute cover letters and information leaflets to local GP Practices and other local service providers on an annual basis including Cruse Bereavement Care, New Life Counselling, Women's Aid, Family Trauma Centre and CAUSE. We also distribute leaflets at our satellite centres in Magherafelt, Newry, Ballymena, Cookstown and various areas of Greater Belfast.
- WAVE is a member of several mental health and trauma related forums, including the Traumatic Stress, Alcohol and Drugs N.Ireland Best Practice Forum. As part of this forum, WAVE contributed to the recent development of a Belfast Trust website. This providing self-help resources and service accessibility information for practitioners and potential clients.
- WAVE is also included on Health & Wellbeing Resource directories throughout Belfast and Northern Ireland.

2) Affordability

- WAVE recognises the financial constraints for many of our clients, with recent monitoring data from 2019/20 indicating 29.23% of clients were economically inactive and 22.18% unemployed. Whilst Northern Ireland has the highest recorded rate of PTSD in the world, many clients are restricted from accessing the help they require due to financial limitations. In order to enhance accessibility, all WAVE counselling services are delivered free of charge to clients. Quality services are delivered by professionally registered counsellors and psychotherapists in accordance with The Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions, BACP.

WAVE Counselling services are delivered in accessible project centre and satellite locations In Armagh, Ballymoney, Belfast, Derry–Londonderry and Omagh. WAVE Counselling operates Monday to Friday from 9am – 5pm in all 5 project centres. There are also evening appointments available in our Belfast project centre (Mon – Thurs / 6pm – 9pm), further enhancing accessibility, particularly for clients working during 9am to 5pm.

3) Flexible to Meet Needs

- Equal opportunities monitoring has reflected varying referral reasons and patterns across our regional centres. For instance, bereavement as a primary referral reason in the Armagh region is significantly higher than other areas. We therefore tailor our services to meet this varying demand with more keyworking resources focused upon addressing the higher levels of intimidation in Ballymoney and an Injured Group in Belfast linking effectively with counselling services in Belfast.
- The demand for services is increasing, particularly in Belfast and this leads to potential accessibility limitations in relation to timely access. WAVE is continually monitoring and managing waiting lists in order to facilitate access. For clients waiting for an initial assessment, there is one to one keyworking support provided by WAVE's outreach workers and this support is maintained throughout counselling, with assistance provided for any signposting during or following service delivery.

4) Physical Access

- The primary referral reason for over 13.55% of our clients is 'physically Injured.' These injuries are often severe based on incident experienced during the civil unrest in Northern Ireland.
 - We have previously undertaken a formal review of our disability access – and have made 'reasonable adjustments' to all premises. ALL WAVE facilities facilitate disabled access including building entrances, toilets, car parking facilities, internal lifts.
 - WAVE also promotes regular client feedback on facilities and support. This feedback is designed to promote ongoing service improvement and is sought from individual clients and also via several forums (e.g. WAVE Injured Group).
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