

WHAT WE DO

- We provide free psychodynamic counselling and group therapy for women on low incomes for up to a year
- We run projects to provide counselling for: refugees and asylum-seekers, Irish women, older women and women affected by domestic violence
- We provide counselling in 7 languages: English, Arabic, Somali, Farsi, Turkish, Spanish and Portuguese
- We undertake outreach and educational work on issues relating to women’s mental health

Chair & Directors report

New beginnings

Unusually for the Maya Centre our year began with a party when we opened the doors in June 2007 of our new Centre in Finsbury Park to our friends and supporters. More than 70 people attended the event which had special guests Jeremy Corbyn, MP for Islington North, Stefan Kasprzyk, Mayor of Islington, and Sandi Toksvig, comedian, presenter and Vice-President of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, who formally opened the building by releasing balloons into the Islington sky. This event also marked the launch of the new Maya Refugee Project, funded by Comic Relief, which provides counselling and group therapy to women refugees and asylum-seekers from anywhere in London in seven different languages.

Much of the year has been about building this new project – recruiting new bi-lingual counsellors in order to offer counselling in more languages, undertaking outreach and publicity and welcoming a new set of clients into the Centre. We are so pleased that through funding the project, Comic Relief, have given us the opportunity to work with women who have often been very traumatised in their home country and suffered all the loss and uncertainty of living through the asylum process in the UK. For the refugee women coming to the Maya Centre, experiences not only of political violence such as torture, but also domestic violence and sexual abuse are extremely common (as they are for all our clients).

The Maya Centre was founded on the principle of providing psychological support to the most marginalised women who would find it difficult to get help elsewhere. As our asylum system has become increasingly designed to provide an unwelcoming and even hostile response, refugees have become ever more marginalised financially, socially and psychologically. The double blow of persecution and exclusion in her home country and hostility and financial deprivation on arrival in the UK can leave an asylum-seeking or refugee woman with deep psychological scars. We aim to listen to the story of what happened to someone and help them to think about how to rebuild their lives in the UK.

Projects

This Refugee Project team now consists of Nilay Nagle, Turkish-Speaking Senior Counsellor and Fadumo Mohamed, Somali-Speaking Counsellor and three sessional bi-lingual counsellors: Orit Beck (Spanish/Portuguese), Ilkay Cetin (Turkish) and Atoosa Khosravi - Noori (Farsi). Overleaf Geri Dogmetchi, Clinical Director at the Maya Centre, gives a more detailed account of the Refugee Project and the clinical issues that are involved with the work. The other major project development for the year was the re-launch of our Older Women’s Project which has been awarded increased three-year funding from City Bridge Trust and The Henry Smith Charity. The experiences of older women who have lived in long-term poverty and often in violent relationships may have left them with high levels of depression and anxiety, as well as facing the issues common to us all as we get older – loss, bereavement and illness/disability. The specialist counselling that we provide for women in their 50s, 60s and 70s aims to give our clients a unique space for reflection about their experiences and to provide them with the resources to live life in old age as fully as possible. In October we welcomed a new Senior Counsellor, Carole Jackson, who will manage the project.

Our domestic violence project (funded by the Safer Islington Project) continued to support a wide range of women who have been subject to sexual and physical violence. Jennifer Crease joined the team in June as the new Senior Counsellor for the project and has done much throughout the year to consolidate and develop the project, working alongside Veronica Wade, Domestic Violence Counsellor. A new therapeutic group for women affected by domestic violence has been running during the year, facilitated by Helen Finch, and has helped to provide support for a greater number of women.

Our oldest project, Counselling for Irish Women, has been ably managed by Helen O’Hora Swords for some years and we worked during the year to expand this project by seeking funding for another counsellor to work with Helen. This funding was agreed by the Dion Committee and the Irish Youth Foundation and we intend to recruit someone to the post early in the new financial year.

Centre staff

Over the year we said goodbye to two invaluable members of staff, Penny Wise, Senior Counsellor for the Older Women’s Project, and Jessica Everitt, Office Manager. Both of them contributed an enormous amount to the Maya Centre and will be much missed. In September, Jasmine Tonge, took up the post of Office Manager and has already made her mark in developing and improving the efficiency and organisation of the Centre.

This year of development could not have happened without the solid support of some of our funders. The completion of our move to new premises was supported by a number of trusts, in particular the Peter Stebbings Memorial Fund, The Parthenon Trust and the City Parochial Fund, all three of whom have supported the Maya Centre in different ways over a number of years. We are particularly grateful for their added support in these recent years as our costs have risen not just because of the one-off costs of moving but also because of the much increased rent we are paying. Three other trusts: The Volant Trust, The Cripplegate Foundation and Lloyds TSB Foundation have been providing us with longer-term core funding which has been invaluable in supporting our work.

We would like to extend our thanks to all our funders, trustees, staff and supporters for helping us to achieve another successful year through their support and hard work. At the time of writing this report a new Director, Emma Craig, is about to take up the reins at the Centre and we would also like to wish her well in her new post and in taking the Maya Centre forward in its plans over the next few years.

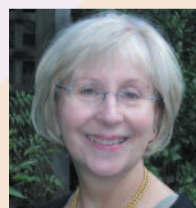
Margaret Bluman,
Chair



Deborah Lyttelton,
Director



Gerri Dogmetchi, Clinical Lead



My first year as Clinical Lead at the Maya Centre has been challenging and busy. I am pleased to have arrived at a time when I could support the counsellors and supervisors in maintaining their high standard of work during the transition into new premises, and to be involved in recruiting new staff. One of the projects for me in the coming year is to work towards the Maya Centre’s BACP organisational accreditation.

Veronica Wade, Counsellor, Domestic Violence Project



“I finally feel that I am worth something, and I am proud of myself” a recent client told me. It is a privilege to be part of a process that empowers women, helping them to explore and make sense of their lives. Their presenting problem is often the tip of the iceberg and as the work progresses our clients may reveal domestic violence and various

forms of abuse. It takes time to build and establish a therapeutic alliance but when this takes place, real change can happen. As part of their journey of self-discovery, many of our clients have had to deal with shame, racism and cultural and historical baggage. Women can, perhaps for the first time, put their feelings into words.

Nilay Nagle, Turkish-speaking Senior Counsellor, Maya Refugee Project



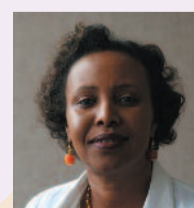
The Turkish project has survived and expanded despite the major changes at the Centre. When my clients came to our new Centre they seemed very positive, saying that it was bright and modern and near to shops and transport. However, it’s been difficult for many of my client because we have lost our creche in the move to the new Centre. I am excited about the new Maya Refugee Project and look forward to working with refugees with the other bilingual counsellors at the centre.

Helen O’Hora Swords, Senior Counsellor, Irish Project



This year we have been delighted to have received increased support from the Irish Government’s Dion Fund to support our work with Irish women. With this funding we can continue to strive hard to support vulnerable Irish women when they need it most.

Fadumo Mohamed, Somali & Arabic-speaking Counsellor, Maya Refugee Project



I am so pleased to see that we are growing. The experience of employing new counsellors to work in different languages was exciting for me. I felt so pleased when I received an email from a counsellor in Greenwich letting us know that she saw about our new Refugee Project on the internet. She told me that they have many Somali and other minority ethnic clients and how hard it is to meet these clients’ psychological needs because of the language barrier. I am hoping to run a Somali domestic violence group in the near future.

Counselling Refugee Women at the Maya Centre

The Maya Centre offers counselling to women in a confidential, safe environment. The Centre itself provides concrete safety in its building, a containing space, free from interruption, regular and consistent. Words like 'regular' 'consistent' 'confidential' 'private', take on a particularly poignant meaning in the light of the experiences of the women we see at the Maya Centre...

Most of the women who come to the Maya Centre have suffered from domestic violence and/or child sexual abuse. The statistics are overwhelmingly high. Safety, privacy, confidentiality have complex meanings for women who have been abused.

One of the projects set up last year, is to provide 'mother tongue' counselling for refugee women. A large number of these women will have been abused and subjected to violence, not only from within their families. Refugee women will have experienced violence in their country of origin, they may have experienced rape, violence, imprisonment and torture. They may have watched these things happen to members of their family, or seen members of their family killed.

To come to this country and find some kind of refuge is a first step on a long journey towards recovering a sense of themselves as well as finding concrete safety. The Maya Centre building takes on a special significance for our Refugee Women. The reception area offers something therapeutic. It is quite common for women to come a little early, perhaps deliberately so that they can sit in the peace and quiet, knowing that nobody will come and bother them with questions, knowing that they have a right to be sitting exactly where they are.

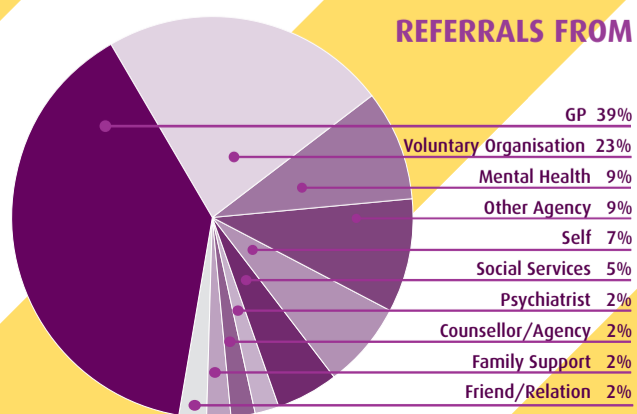
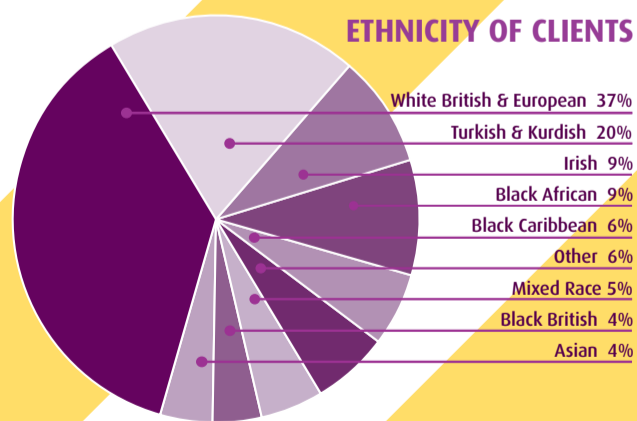
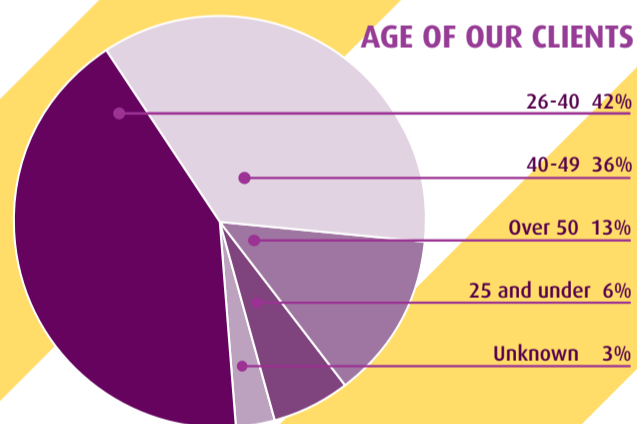
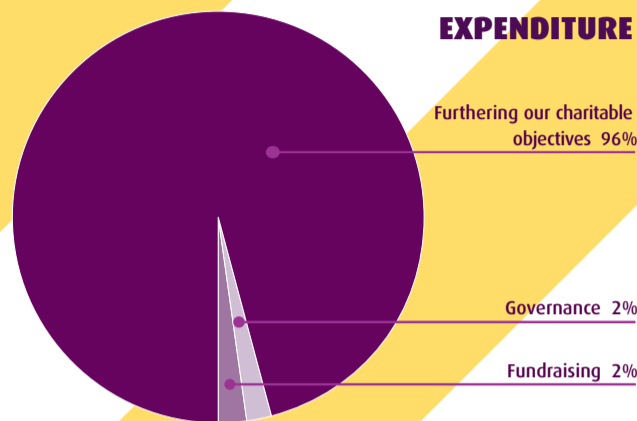
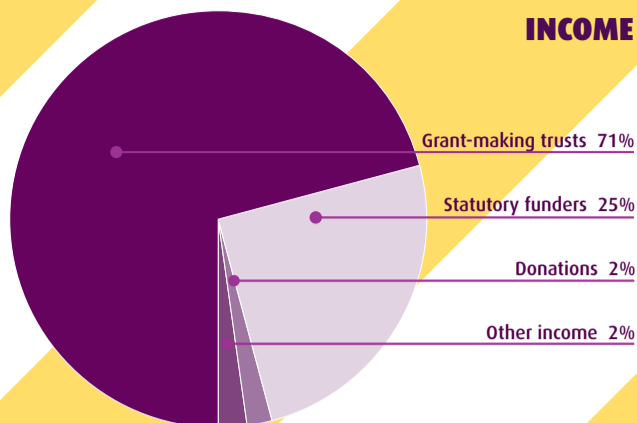
The counselling will start on time. The counselling room door will be closed but never locked. There is privacy and confidentiality but not confinement. The chairs are comfortable, the lighting is not harsh and interrogative. The women are able to speak, to be silent, to weep, laugh, contemplate and be angry as they choose. The counsellor will sit alongside this journey in the counselling, helping to reflect, to acknowledge, to make connections and to start to build a new sense of self.

Counselling refugee women means acknowledging the struggle to find a place in the host country. Counselling helps women come to terms with the losses of the old world and to mourn. Many of the women who come to us are suffering from post traumatic stress which has become entrenched; disabling them. It prevents them from learning the language, from letting their children go out into the world and from finding a place in our society. The counselling space and the time we allow for these issues to evolve, enables the women we see to overcome the traumas experienced, enabling them to become more settled, fulfilled and integrated.

"I stopped blaming myself for something that wasn't my fault."

"I was supported through a horrifying time in my life."

"I felt at a breakdown point before coming."



The Maya Centre
counselling for women

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