



The Maya Centre
counselling for women

The Maya Centre Strategic Plan
2020 - 2025

***Playing our Part in Developing
a Safer, Healthier Community***

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What is The Maya Centre?

Run by women, for women, we create a safe and inclusive space for counselling vulnerable women from diverse backgrounds who have been harmed by gender-based violence or abuse. We support women to gain understanding and resilience, regain control and engage with a wider community.

Our values and priorities

For 36 years the Maya Centre has provided access to *quality* therapy based on well-established psychodynamic principles and practice, delivered by well trained, supervised counsellors with extensive cultural and gender awareness, delivered free of charge to women who need, but cannot afford, therapy. We provide same-language counselling where possible, usually having ten or more languages available, and take pride in our diverse team and inclusive approach.

Through the individual and group therapy, we hear what our clients tell us about the challenging social context of their lives and recognise their need for a holistic, complementary approach, arranging tailored '*wrap around*' supports where possible, including legal, benefits and housing advice, and supportive activities through our community development work.

This updated *Strategic Plan* reflects the ambition and commitment of the Maya Centre to thrive and develop, it sets out our vision and our plans for delivering on our clients' priorities.

Our priorities for 2020-2025 are

- To *grow our services*, thoughtfully, to meet the increasing emerging issues of gender-based violence which seriously affect the diverse women who come to us.
- To broaden our income so we can offer our expertise to more women, from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and to do so effectively and cost efficiently;
- To increase the *visibility* of the challenges our clients face and the benefits they can gain from our expertise, supporting their voices to be heard more widely;

- To amplify the *impact of our work* to support our whole team, therapists, staff, students, volunteers and academic partners as a learning organisation, to evaluate the impact of our wholistic approach and create resources to share the approach more widely.

Growing our Services

Our specialist expertise is valuable and hard to come by, and increasingly in demand. More women approach us every year and if we are to respond to their needs, including those who are unable to access our centre, we need to grow the capacity of our services. Our new video counselling project offers opportunities to reach women further afield or who cannot easily leave their homes. We will need to invest in business development resources to build on the pilot, ourselves or in partnership, and aim to begin this process early in 2020.

We aim to gain maximum front-line benefit for all our income, particularly as it has become increasingly difficult to achieve funding for 1-1 counselling. With help from our volunteers, our social media presence has grown, with more ad hoc individual and event fundraising bringing in much needed unrestricted funds. We aim to raise £35,000 unrestricted funding per year for 1-1 counselling through new sources.

We have used independent, pro bono consultancy to review our organisation in the past five years, and have increased the efficiency of financial systems and procedures, improved waiting times and greatly reduced DNA rates. Longer grant and contract periods would help reduce the burden of constant fundraising, and additional resources would allow us to focus on wider business development, for example to support the video counselling project and develop a business case for creating training materials and delivering training.

We have developed collaborations with local counselling organisations, and have jointly won a contract in Haringey for short term work with women using their refuge, and our contract with the NHS has increased. We will seek further developments in other boroughs, and other partnerships with related organisations.

Action: To increase our business development resource to help with building the video counselling project, training, enhancing visibility and seeking other business opportunities.

Action: To build on pilot work on live video and telephone counselling, directly or in partnerships, to make it possible for our specialist expertise to serve clients unable to leave their homes or living in other areas of London and beyond.

Action: To continue to diversify funding applications and contract bids to local, London and national bodies, and to actively seek commercial sources of income during 2020-21 and beyond.

Action: To increase our social media presence and encourage service users, friends and supporters to fundraise for the centre, and make voluntary donations where possible.

Action: Fundraising committee to initiate and deliver broader range of income opportunities, with aim of overall increase to £35,000 in unrestricted funds.

To increase the *visibility* of the challenges our clients face and the benefits they can gain from our expertise

Our clients' lives are improved through their work with The Maya Centre; their stories should be heard more widely so more women hear about the opportunity to benefit. We want to go further in learning from our clients' experience both in the design of services, and in feedback on services used.

Some told their stories through the 'My Voice' project; the recordings they made and edited were heard widely, including at an event at the House of Lords, making a strong emotional impact.

Last year our clients developed a successful series of workshops which brought in women from other communities, who found a wide range of support to their recovery.

We have a regular programme of Open Evenings, where service users have shared their experiences, and along with staff, trustees, and patrons have learnt from each other. The feedback from clients has been very positive about how well we interact with them as well as the range of services provided.

We will build on these events, working with clients to put their skills to good use and make their stories heard more widely, to funders and the general public, potentially through a series of podcasts, and through continuing links with academic studies.

Action: Investigate the creation of podcasts to make our clients' experiences heard by funders and the public, to encourage others to seek help if needed and let the wider community gain greater understanding and respect for the difficulties some women live with.

Action: Continue our programme of two or three Open Evenings each year, and expand opportunities for clients to be involved.

Action: To seek resources to repeat the successful series of workshops

Amplify the impact of our work

As a result of the Maya Centre's work, vulnerable women with multiple disadvantages who have experienced gender-based harm will:

- be better able to meet their own needs;
- have increased self-esteem;
- be better able to set limits and boundaries;
- have a better understanding of the impact of past trauma on present behaviour;
- reduce self-injuring behaviours;
- have improved ability to function and solve problems;
- have improved relationships with others

We want to understand in more detail what difference we make - how well are we are doing and can we do better? We aim to build breadth and depth into our measurement of the impact of our client work, gaining greater understanding of our clients' experience over time.

We want to share what works with our partners and more widely.

Actions: to continue to gather the insights of our clients,

Action: to refine our data collection and analysis to gain better understanding of the positive impacts on our clients' lives;

Action: to make our findings about the impact of our approach to therapy better known, employing our planned business development resource to assess how we might create training materials from our expertise in gender-based work and work with identity and cultural issues.

Action: Investigate further academic partnerships to expand our learning and evaluate the outcomes of our approach.

Background Information - The Maya Centre

A registered charity based near Archway, run by women, for women, we have provided therapeutic services and raised awareness about women's mental health and gender based abuse for 36 years. Our 1-1 counselling is free to all our clients who are on benefits level income.

We have a team of skilled and experienced counsellors, many of whom can counsel in other languages, enabling us to provide high quality counselling to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women and Refugees. Additionally we provide some complementary therapies, and can help women to access advice on benefits, housing, law and employment matters, and community activities.

Our specialist expertise

Having achieved many of the priorities from previous strategic plans, we go into 2020 with an established director and skilled staff team, a new lease on good quality premises which we have been in since 2013, talented and committed trustees and patrons, and a varied, though stretched, funding portfolio. These are great assets in difficult times.

Issues that we consistently work with include:

- Mental health issues including depression, suicidal ideas or behaviour, anxiety, panic attacks, diagnosis of schizophrenia and personality disorders, psychotic episodes, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, negative self-concept, shame, self-blame, fear and isolation;
- Childhood experiences of physical and/or sexual abuse,
- Trauma through experiences of war and conflict overseas,
- Maternal deprivation, loss and separation, particularly through children being taken into care,
- Inter-generational trauma, in which experiences perpetuate throughout generations, creating familial patterns of abuse,
- Intersectional issues arising from mixed racial, religious or cultural experiences, sexual orientation, mental and physical abilities.
- Domestic violence, whether physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse, and as adults themselves, or as children witnessing domestic violence in their families of origin.
- Sexual abuse, rape, forced marriages, trafficking, female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices.

Our clients are over 18 and on benefits or benefit level income, including part time or low paid employment. Women can refer themselves, or be referred by their GP or other health, care, education, employment or housing professional. We open for four days and one evening a week.

We work with and make referrals to other agencies and services, locally and further afield, and have an established partnership with the BAMER counselling service Nafsiyat. We will seek to extend our partnership working and collaboration wherever we can bring benefits to our client group. We have developed our collaboration with local counselling organisations, including winning a contract in Haringey for short term work with women using their refuge, and will seek further partnerships with related organisations.

We pay attention to gaining objective assessment of the quality of our work through external accreditation by BACP (British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy). We collect data through the national, validated system CORE (Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation) to make visible how well we support our clients to achieve good outcomes; we aim to be a learning organisation – growing our expertise through the experiences of our clients and the work of our staff.

We continually improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our services and organisation, delivering more sessions, improving waiting times and reducing non-attendance. Past performance can be found in our Annual Reports <https://www.mayacentre.org.uk/about/>.

Research and Evaluation

We aim to be a learning organisation, to reflect on how we operate and on what works best for our clients, and to learn from their experiences.

Our clients' experiences are reflected in empirical research about how social and economic trends affect women's mental health. For example, the most recent Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey¹, showed that common mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression, are more prevalent in women. The World Health Organisation 2016 has identified a number of risk factors for common mental health disorders which help to explain how and why they may disproportionately affect women. These include: socioeconomic disadvantage; gender based violence; low income and income inequality; low social status or subordinate social status; and their roles as family carers.

We recognise the evidence that women from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) communities are disproportionately represented as part of these risk factors, for example, some are more likely to have poorer health and have reduced access to health care services compared to the majority of the white population²

Maya service evaluation and internal audit

To understand the effectiveness of our own service, the Maya Centre worked with University College London (UCL) during 2017 and 2018 to evaluate our clinical outcomes and the impact on the women who use the service, using the data we gather through CORE-OM, the routine national data collection tool for psychological therapies.

The main findings were:

- the women who are accessing the Maya Centre service have severe levels of psychological distress and impairment as measured by the CORE-OM.
- around 50% of women who engaged with treatment recovered or improved in their symptoms and functioning following therapy as measured by the CORE-OM
- qualitative feedback suggests that women found the Maya Centre therapeutic, helpful, and a place to enhance their self-esteem and self-worth.
- These independent findings on our treatment outcomes are particularly impressive when considering the complexity and severity of mental health problems which women bring to the Maya Centre. *More details are available here* https://www.mayacentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/FINAL_Maya-Centre-Evaluation_Executive-Summary.pdf
- We would like to evaluate the effectiveness of our approach in further depth, so that we can learn and improve, and share our findings more widely. While we are not in a position to lead a trial, our plan is to collaborate further with academic studies to gain objective feedback on the effectiveness of what we do, and fine-tune our approaches accordingly.

¹ McManus, Bebbington, Jenkins & Brugha, 2014

² Inside Outside – Improving Mental Health Services for Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in England, 2013.