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November 2014

Pastoral Care News



WILLOWS
ANNIVERSARY
25
YEARS



A Willows Counselling Service Publication

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Director's note

Welcome to our latest edition of Pastoral Care News where we celebrate 25 years of Willows and look forward to our ongoing journey with all that it brings. This issue gives fascinating and different perspectives on the birth and growth of Willows from people central to the development of this amazing service as well as enlightening endorsements from people external to us such as our patron Baroness Jill Pitkeathley, Robert Buckland MP among others.

Most notably throughout this edition we acknowledge the golden thread of God's guidance and faithfulness through the life of Willows.

I hope you enjoy this edition and continue to travel with us.

Best wishes
Tanya



The Roots and Origins of Willows Counselling Service

Mike Fisher, previous Executive Director for 20 years, describes the origins and achievements of the organisation since the idea to start a counselling service was conceived in 1987.

The origins of Willows Counselling Service emerged out of a piece of research that the Revd Ward Jones undertook into GP attitudes to church involvement in patient care. This led to a conference in 1987 taking place for both Medical Practitioners and Church Leaders to discuss the results of Ward's research. I was invited to chair the conference as I was a member of the ecumenical Healing Group with Ward Jones and I was neither a Medic nor Church Leader.

One of a number of outcomes of the conference was that doctors asked if the church could provide counselling for patients as at that time there were no counselling services available to GPs. The then District GP Committee and the Council of Churches both agreed to sponsor a working group to help set this up under the leadership of the Revd Brian Pearce.

Two years down the line Listening Courses were established and plans were underway for the first two-year Counselling Course which led to 28 people being trained as counsellors. The Management Committee, chaired by Dr Chris Cook agreed that there was a need for a Director and Administrator to develop the service. This would enable Willows to be a competent and professional service provided by local Christians and others, to be run as a charity. I eventually became a part-time Director with Glenys Baker as the part-time Administrator, in order to help lay the foundations for a professional counselling service.

By the time the counselling service was launched in 1994, Willows had acquired a property in Cricklade Road thanks to the generosity of a local church.

Counselling began with just two counselling rooms on site and the use of some other rooms in local churches. Much has happened since those early days. The organisation has developed and grown from a seedling into a more robust and vibrant life form. With changes in government policy and recognition of the health benefits provided through counselling many GPs had their own counsellors, although with later cut-backs this service was massively reduced. Willows continued to function as an independent Charity providing professional counselling and increasingly catering for those people whose needs were not being met, or who needed longer term counselling due to complex life issues.

Over the years Willows has been able to both maintain its independence from the damaging effects of the contract culture and also to gain a reputation for working effectively with, Trauma, Abuse and Early Life Issues; which are not catered for in the 'quick-fix' approach so readily pursued by successive governments. A number of Willows staff and counsellors have spoken at National conferences, provided training for Churches and secular organisations and taken part in pioneering new approaches to trauma resolution.

The achievements of the many people involved in Willows, as Trustees, Management Committee Members, Staff, Counsellors, Trainers, Supervisors, Volunteers and many others are too numerous to mention here. Willows has made an impact locally, nationally and internationally in quite a remarkable way for a relatively small local charity. That can only be a result of a unity of purpose and spirit and by God's grace.

Mike Fisher
Former Executive Director

Getting



Revd Ward Jones is currently the Chairman of the Bristol District of the Methodist Church. Back in 1987 he undertook a significant piece of research which culminated in the formation of The Willows Christian Listening Counselling Service.

I was drawn into Health Care back in the early 1980's when I became part-time Free Church Chaplain at the Princess Margaret Hospital in Swindon. The attitude among hospital staff toward chaplains varied greatly. For some, it was indifference but much of this was rooted in the historical predominance of a 'Cure-Care' model within the NHS. For example, if someone is treated for a broken leg in A & E, there is little consideration that this may mean you are unable to walk for 5 weeks, might lose your job or that you have just buried your father. All are irrelevant to what you are treated for.

However, a hard-core of staff, religious and non-religious, mainly nurses dealing day to day with patients whom they knew by name rather than as an admission number, were much more positive. At that time, in what now seem long distant days, there was emerging a new approach to health-care: treating patients as whole people; recognising that whatever the direct reason which leads to you going into hospital or seeing your GP may have knock-on consequences in other parts of your life and affect your overall recovery. Here was a chink of light, which encouraged some of us to engage with how the spiritual dimension might be better understood and owned, not just within the NHS, but also in Social Services and elsewhere.

Started



For me, the first task was to explore what health-care professionals' attitudes really were. In the late 1980's I was preparing a thesis on the interaction between Church and Medicine and needed to do some research to set alongside anecdotal evidence. My survey base was GPs in Bristol. Did they recognise a spiritual dimension to health-care? What were their attitudes and did they actually make use of clergy or Christian lay-folk in what they offered patients? The nutshell summary was a significantly positive attitude in principle; an openness to exploring this subject; and, exceptionally, some practical involvement in responding to spiritual needs.

Within the NHS, the big break-through came with the publication of the Patient's Charter in 1991, which subsequently led not only to a recognition that patients have spiritual needs, but that these should be responded to by health care practitioners. It is a fair judgment to say that this left many health service managers in a quandary. What did all this mean in practice? The rest, as they say, is history. What should be owned however within that history is the commitment of many individuals and organisations to get on with the caring, engage in dialogue, and prove their professionalism with outcomes that make a positive difference in real people's lives. It is why, today, organisations like Willows can be recognised as having a professional contribution to make alongside and in conjunction with the NHS Social Services. Long may this continue.

Setting up the Service

1989 The First Listening course started

Baroness Jill Pitkeathley had known Mike Fisher for several years when he asked her to become Willows Patron. She explains her reasons why she accepted.

It has been a privilege to be Patron of Willows for over 12 years. Though I regret that location and a fully committed life in the House of Lords prevent me doing more, I have always followed its progress with great interest and with increasing admiration. Thinking back to why I accepted the invitation to be Patron, I identified three reasons why I did so. The first was that as a long-time colleague of Mike Fisher and a great admirer, I was always predisposed to do anything he asked me!

Secondly, I have a strong commitment to the charitable sector, honed by many years of being chief executive of a charity, a trustee of many others and now Chair of the All Party Group on Civil Society in Parliament. The voluntary sector is absolutely crucial to the development of services in our nation. I would go so far as to say that not a single public service can be delivered without the support of the charitable sector, whether that is via straight service delivery or by enabling innovation, development of new services or ensuring that the voices and choices of users are heard.

Thirdly, I have worked all my life with deprived people and communities, principally in health and social care. I know that mental and emotional health has long been the Cinderella when it comes to understanding what health is

all about or the contribution of counselling intervention in preventing personal and family breakdown with all the ills which follow from that.

We have been making some progress in this field. It was a huge victory in the passage of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to get mental health and well-being recognised as of equal importance with physical health, though there is a very long way to go in making that a fact rather than an aspiration. GPs are increasingly willing to say that many of their patients need counselling rather than a prescription and we are even having 'Mindfulness' Courses being held for MPs and Peers on Parliamentary premises.

These developments are welcome but need constant pressure if they are to be maintained and extended. This means pressure from local organisations like Willows who are in touch with local problems and local people, having their finger on the pulse of what is needed, which is not necessarily the same as what is being provided; which in fact is often quite different. Having to engage in what we might call the politics; how resources are allocated, making the economic case as well as the moral case for preventive work; being engaged in the endless business of fund raising is not what many of us want to do. We would sooner be providing services directly to those who need them. But the case must be made, if we are to ensure that counselling and emotional support remain where Willows has been so successful, in putting it at the very top of the social, political and yes, even the economic agenda in your own local area. With my warmest congratulations on your 25th anniversary and all best wishes for the next 25.

The Guinea Pigs

The students on the first counselling course nick-named themselves “The Guinea Pigs”. I asked Carole McGiffie (Gait) former Counselling Co-ordinator about her time as one of those students.

When I got to the first meeting everyone looked so powerful and I became aware of my own academic disability. Mike said that if there is something you don't understand we can alter it in the training; so we did and it was noted. This earned the group name of 'Guinea Pigs' in the sense that it was a new course which needed to be tried out and changed if necessary.

I just wonder what prompted you to get involved with Willows?

Passion. I did it because my own parents went through a rocky patch in their relationship. There were fundamental problems in my family and I thought that the “fallout” was worse for the reason that my parents lacked a counsellor. It would have helped for them to talk together. Seeing the needs of others, I had a heart for putting people together rather like a jigsaw puzzle or Humpty Dumpty. I still use the skills within my church today.

Where was the first course held? Who wrote the course and ran it?

It was upstairs at the Tabernacle Pilgrim Centre. Mike Fisher did a lot of the training, and Dave Day came and did a few sessions which I remember were quite good. I felt that if I could get through the course I could help others. I gained some recognition from A.C.C. and counselled for some years in and out of Willows.

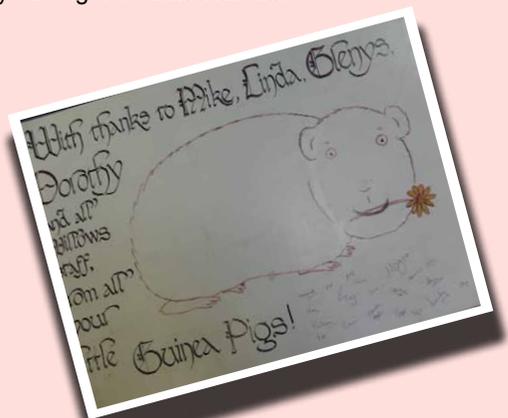
Was there anything about this first course that you particularly remember? Anything funny?

(She laughed). Most of it really. It was so relaxing and it was great to be a part of something. I was newly widowed and I had written a 'bucket list' of things to do.

Counselling was at the top of the list but in order to do that I had to do some of the other things on the list. For example, I had to learn to drive, before I could get to counsellor training. I think the funniest element was as we began to counsel one another some of the presenting scenarios were very odd and it was difficult to keep a straight face at times. When in role play on one evening someone was representing a stropky teenager they finished the outburst by kicking the cupboard door, very theatrical.

I believe you went on to become a part of the team. What was that role?

My role was that of matching client with counsellor, a prayerful exercise but a rewarding time; trying not to overload individual counsellors. Knowing enough about our team of 'Guinea pigs' to give them appropriate clients. I also served on the Management Committee for a while. Would you be pleased to know that some of those students are still involved in Willows? I am glad some are lucky enough to still be involved. It was my life for a long time, and I have great joy looking back on that period. I am still in touch with friends made all those years ago. Thanks Willows!



Setting up the Service

Glenys Baker the Counselling Service and Office Manager was interviewed regarding her time during the formation of Willows and gives some insight into what was involved.

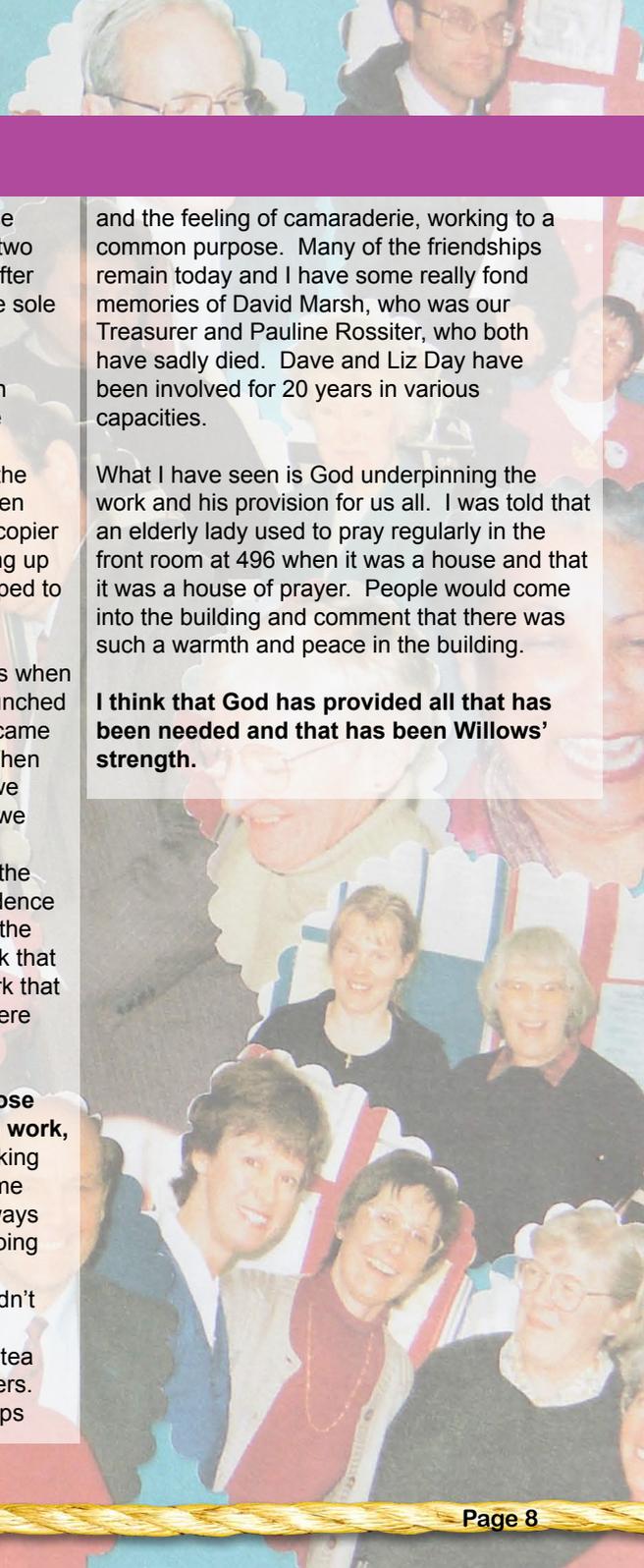
Before I became involved with Willows I worked as a Volunteer Development Officer in Swindon. Mike Fisher and I have known each other for 30 years, having worked on many projects together including setting up a volunteer scheme in Social Services. Mike asked me to join the Steering Group after the Healing Group highlighted the need for a local Christian counselling service, largely because of my experience of recruiting, training and managing volunteers; I later joined the Management Committee.

We had to start from scratch to plan the first Listening Courses and learnt as we went along.

We held several listening courses, then the first two-year counselling course in 1992. The attendees on the first course nicknamed themselves the "Guinea Pigs" and many of those are still involved in Willows.

I was Course Leader, a grand title but really involved putting out the chairs, keeping the attendance register and taking the fees, doing the refreshments and clearing away. Everything was voluntary, Mike and I were still working full time. When I left my job in 1993 I began to do more with Willows, working from home a few hours a week. There were many other people helping, including Val Foreman and Chris Brierley who undertook all the clerical work in the early days, including typing the material for the training courses. We were given a room in a Church in Manchester Road and they were working there one day when the lock jammed. They were locked in until someone came into the building to let them out. Willows had no telephone and we didn't have mobile 'phones then. We later made sure that the door was kept open when someone was working there!

As the work developed my hours increased from 8 to 21, on the basis that I would only get paid if Willows had the money, then Mike gave up his job and came to work for Willows as Executive Director and many of the policies evolved as time went on. Later, Grace came to work as Training Manager. We were employed on the basis that we would get paid if Willows had the money! We very often didn't until the very last day, but then sufficient funds always came in. I remember David Marsh (our then Treasurer) saying "God is never late, but He does miss opportunities to be early"! Apart from the three of us, there were numerous volunteers, the same as today. I think we all felt we were building something together. A lot of churches felt that there were people who needed help that they could not give and saw Willows as a way to provide this. Several churches gave money or equipment.



Two people in a Church owned a house at 496 Cricklade Road and offered us two rooms downstairs and one upstairs. After three years of sharing, they let us have sole use of the property and later gave the building to Willows. Many hearts were moved to meet people's needs through Willows. In the early days much of the furniture was given to us free, also the photocopier, then when that "gave up the ghost" someone gave us another. When we needed a more professional photocopier and later a computer someone just rang up and offered us some money which helped to buy a printer as well.

Perhaps the most significant event was when we finished the training course and launched the counselling service. Most people came in via word of mouth and churches. When the first client came through the door we were a bit nervous and wondered "do we know what we're doing?" At that time counsellors counselled in pairs but as the work increased and counsellors' confidence grew, they worked singly. At that time the service was free to clients. I don't think that we really envisaged the amount of work that we would encounter in the area of severe trauma.

My memories and feelings about those early years, apart from it being hard work, was that it was fun. We were all working together and coping with whatever came through the door as it happened. I always enjoy working "in the thick of things" doing whatever needs doing at the time. I described my role as the things that didn't fit anywhere else, from keeping the organisation legal, insurances, buying tea and coffee and supporting the volunteers. For me it was the people, the friendships

and the feeling of camaraderie, working to a common purpose. Many of the friendships remain today and I have some really fond memories of David Marsh, who was our Treasurer and Pauline Rossiter, who both have sadly died. Dave and Liz Day have been involved for 20 years in various capacities.

What I have seen is God underpinning the work and his provision for us all. I was told that an elderly lady used to pray regularly in the front room at 496 when it was a house and that it was a house of prayer. People would come into the building and comment that there was such a warmth and peace in the building.

I think that God has provided all that has been needed and that has been Willows' strength.

Developmental Years 1994 - 2001

Grace Hempstock retired from Willows in 2014 after fulfilling many roles within the agency as a Counsellor, Supervisor, Course Development Manager and Trainer. Grace answered questions about her time at Willows

You have been a part of Willows for a long time? Can you tell me how you first became involved?

I was one of what we now call the 'guinea pig' student group – the very first Willows Certificate course in Counsellor Training which ran from Sept 1992 – July 1994. That was where it all started for me – this journey towards becoming a counsellor and later a Trainer!

Tell me about that experience?

On the Sunday before the course was due to start, the minister of my church – Emmanuel URC in Haydon Wick, gave me the information about the course, wondering if I would be interested. A few days later, there I was on my first night feeling very conscious of my lack of education, having left school aged 15 for family reasons. By the end of the evening, I wondered what I had let myself in for and how I would cope with writing assignments, giving presentations, skills practice etc!! But you know what ... I did it ... and those wobbly beginnings became the foundation and focus of my future work.

What has struck you most about Willows as an organisation?

- **People are valued:** Each individual – valued for who they are.
- **God's provision:** In the early days, Willows ran on a shoe-string... and a lot of faith! Somehow, there was enough - and the staff always got paid!
- **Trust** - Willows operates on 'trust' - in God and in each other.
- **Change** – Being involved with Willows is a developmental experience.

You held the position of Training Manager for a number of years and wrote several of the courses.

Yes I did – much to my own amazement! I still remember feeling awe-struck by the 'blank piece of paper' which would eventually become the 'Introductory Course' – the first ever course I wrote. Here, it is important to own that

Mike Fisher believed I could do it – before I dared to believe that of myself!

Later, alongside Mike, I developed Willows Diploma Course. I also wrote and delivered a six week course on Working with Loss and Bereavement. These courses emerged out of my own training experience - including my own Diploma Course at the University of Bristol - but also from my own 'life' experience.

Can you describe to me what significant developments have happened for Willows during your time as Training Manager?

Willows Training courses are validated by 'ACC' (Association of Christian Counsellors) – and initially, also recognised by the Open College Network. However, Willows Diploma course – whilst still being validated by ACC, is now also validated by CPCAB (Counselling & Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body) This involved initial submission of all the course material to CPCAB for approval – and currently involves 4 visits each course from an External Moderator. Willows training has a really good track record with CPCAB and I believe this has quite significantly raised Willows Training profile. The current Diploma students are the 5th group to undertake this course with Willows.

You have seen a lot of students go through your hands as a trainer on the courses. What feelings does that leave you with?

Just a bit 'gob-smacked' ... and very humbled! A few years after I left school, I remember ringing my 'headmistress' to enquire about the possibilities of becoming a teacher. The answer was a compassionate "No"... due to my lack of education. Now, when I attend a Willows Workshop, the larger number of participants will have, at some time, been 'my students'. I now find it quite thrilling that the majority of Willows current trainers have at some time been on a course which I led! It's all part of a developmental process!

How has the field of counsellor training changed over the years?

Gaining a qualification now is very much 'evidence-based'. Hence the dreaded 'criteria' in multiplicity which need to be 'met' by students and the completion of a portfolio! Our Diploma students also have to pass an externally moderated exam, which was not the case in our early days.

There is now greater understanding of the significance of neuroscience, brain function and also how trauma is stored in the body – along with the use of 'mindfulness' or developing greater awareness of what is actually happening in 'the body' and also making use of psycho-educational tools which can help make sense of some of this for clients.

There is also a greater emphasis now on the counsellor's willingness and 'requirement' to work with 'difference and diversity' which is now a core aspect of counsellor training.

How many years of service have you given to Willows?

In total, 22 years – almost one third of my life!

What has kept you with Willows for so long a period?

It is a practical outworking of my own Christian faith – a 'calling' or vocation. I said recently at a Church Meeting, 'I have three families: my own family, my church family and my Willows family'. Through Willows, I believe I have been able to help 'make a difference' in the lives of hurting people as well as latterly helping train others who share that same desire to make a difference in God's world!

What will you remember from your time with Willows?

People ... how unique and special we each are – in all our 'humanness'! And the continued outworking of some words of Carl Rogers: **"I am becoming" – that is a life-long process!**



Achieving the Vision

Talking about larger premises for Willows 2001 Training onsite.

More space required
Looked at extending 496, buying next door property or build on car park.

To overcome lack of space developed links in community. Outreach and satellite counselling centres. Links with KASH, Clivey Project.

Received £40,000 Mental Health Specific Grant.
Received £200,000 private donation.

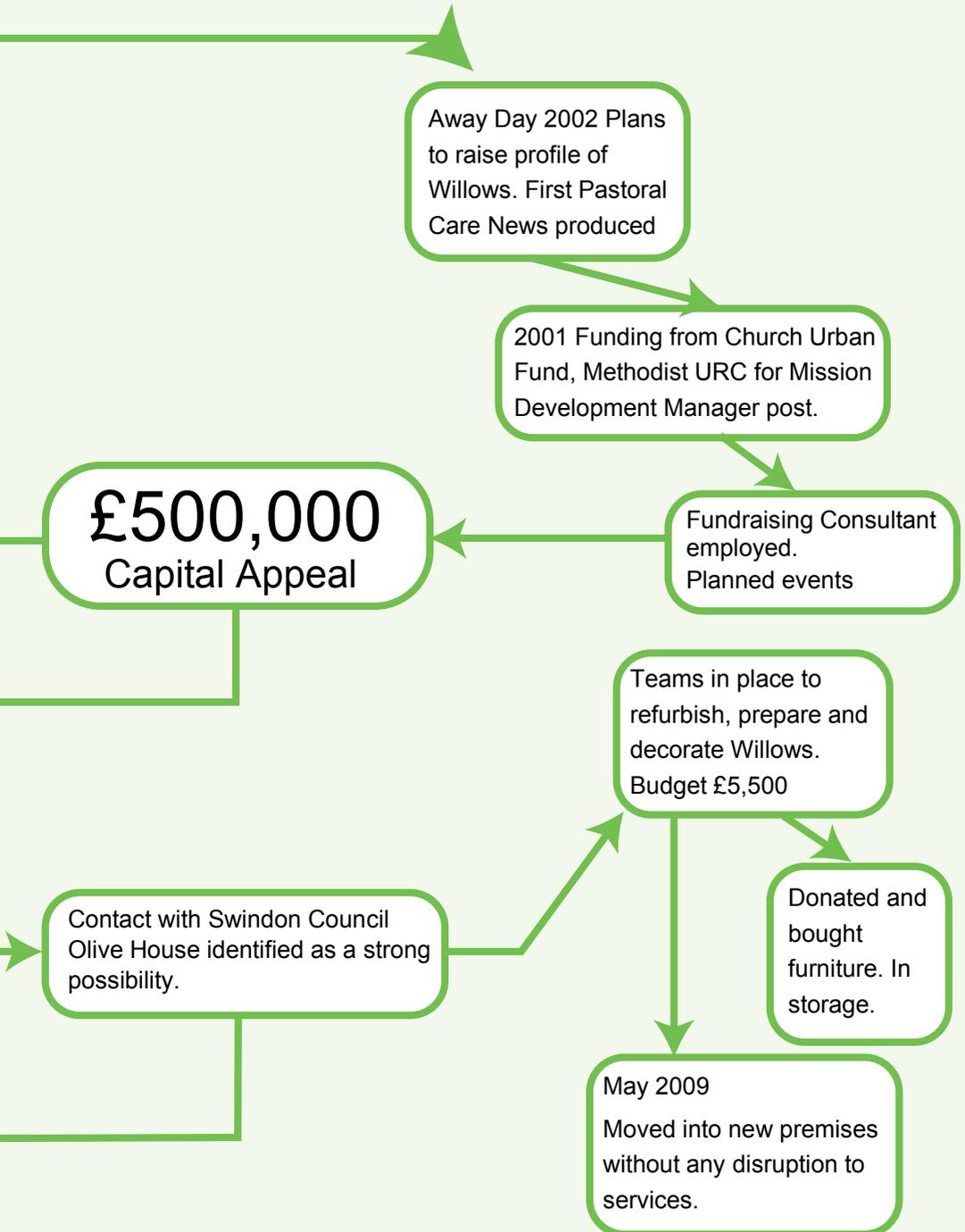
Over the years we considered 20+ premises. Bath Road, Ferndale Rd. Holy Trinity Church project. Auction to buy house in Highworth Road failed

Olive House.
100 year lease
Cost £365,000 plus repair works
= TOTAL £508,000

The final week before signing was fraught. Both solicitors still negotiating

We had to sign by 5pm on the day we did, or we would have lost the £40,000 grant. Credit given to Hugh Ellis Solicitor for his help

A flowchart of Events 2001 - 2009



Achieving the Vision

A GP's PERSPECTIVE ON WILLOWS

I arrived as a GP in Swindon in 1991 and was excited to discover that a counsellor called Mike Fisher had been working hard to develop a service to train and deliver counselling services in Swindon. Local GP surgeries supported the idea of the development of provision of counselling in primary care. This led to the formation of Willows in Swindon and for me it led to a long and valuable association with Willows.

Doctors and counsellors alike are increasingly recognising the many interactions between mind and body or, alternatively expressed, between spirit, soul and body. 'Stress' is seen to be a contributor to many medical conditions and psychological wellbeing remains a key goal both for life in general and in relation to causing and sustaining conditions labelled as medical.

I have thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the team of trainers on level 3 and level 4 courses since they began to develop in the early 1990s; I have been able to lead training sessions for students which focus on various aspects of mental health and dis-ease, introducing a range of perspectives reflecting physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual approaches.

The services of Willows have gradually developed as the counsellors have developed in experience and maturity; Willows has emerged as a significant service for clients who require longer term or complex input and support.

Provision of psychological services in both doctors' surgeries and community mental health teams is affected by economic constraints and increasing service needs. As a consequence there is a limit on the number of individual appointments available, and patients tend to be directed toward courses delivered in small groups. This works well for many patients but some still require in-depth one-to-one work and for these patients I value the expertise that Willows is offering and developing.



I hope that Willows will be able to further consolidate and develop its important role in supporting psychological well-being in Swindon in the years ahead.

Dr Stephen Brooke

Senior Partner at
Victoria Cross Surgery, Swindon



Avril Fray was on Willows first training course and has been the current Training Manager with Willows for the past 11 years. The vision for training courses to be held on site became a reality in 2009 when we moved to new premises.

I have been involved with Willows since the first two-year Certificate course in 1992. It had been on my heart for several years to train as a counsellor and for me there was the added benefit that Willows was a Christian organisation. Later, in 2000 I completed the Willows Diploma Course.

I joined the staff as Training Manager in April 2003 I was thrilled to be offered the job and felt it was a joy to be working with such a well-established agency with a good reputation.

One of the first jobs I had to undertake was to convert the two year evening Certificate Course into a one-year day time course. I appreciated Roberta's help, (one of our trainers), for the many hours we spent on this task. As space was so limited in 496 Cricklade Road, Willows courses were held in hired rooms, for example, Anglia House, Rodbourne Baptist Church. I negotiated to use Gorse Hill Baptist Church which was a lovely venue for students but all the training materials and paperwork required were transported back and forth between Willows and the venue. I would often go down to Gorse Hill to sort out paperwork and meet the trainers and students. Part of our vision for Willows was to have training facilities on site.

Life changed dramatically when we moved to The Willows Centre in May 2009. It was wonderful to have a training room on the premises and I feel we haven't looked back since. It is of great benefit for students and trainers helping students to integrate with other Willows personnel, use the facilities, including the library and I am available if they have any queries or need assistance.

There is also the added bonus of a patio area outside the training room which is frequently used by students during breaks.

It has been a great privilege to have seen Willows grow from strength to strength over the years, to have worked with a super team of trainers and to watch so many students develop in their self-awareness and become skilled and competent counsellors.

Gilly Price the current Counselling Service Manager remembers what it was like to be part of the Development Plan to move to larger premises.

Some sort of miracle was needed to make this work

I became a member of the Willows' staff team as Counselling Service and Office Manager in September 2001 following completion of my counselling training with Willows. I remember taking the minutes at my first Management meeting and going home feeling very excited about the idea of developing the services and raising funds to move to larger premises. Then, at the next meeting we were contemplating cutting staff wages to help ease the finances! At that time I wondered which way it would go and that some sort of miracle was needed to make this work. Since that time, I feel I have been in the midst of seeing just that, God at work. Dave Day sent out a letter to all our regular donors which miraculously turned the finances around.

After a staff Away Day in 2002 we realised that many of the contacts in Churches and many donors had moved on, and that Willows was still largely unknown, so we set about putting together "Pastoral Care News". Willows intention was to support people involved in pastoral care in the community by providing an awareness of life issues which affect us all.

Willows vision was for larger premises and we employed a fundraising consultant to help us raise funds. Income came in via unexpected gifts, the largest being £200,000, which was an amazing chance meeting with someone I met on a conference. Mike worked tirelessly, as it was felt that if the Capital Appeal failed we could not start again; no second chance. Following viewings of many properties and a failed

auction bid, we felt deflated. It was mentioned that we might contact Swindon Borough Council and Mike and I viewed Olive House. This was an amazing moment. It was as if God had heard all the things on our 'wish list' and given them to us. It was perfect, but needed work. Mike and the team set about making this dream become a reality. In total Willows raised £500,000!

When I look back at the photos of the rooms and what we have achieved, I cannot believe we did it. After major building work was carried out to the foundations in the Training room, there was a budget of £5,500 to carpet, decorate and furnish the property. My Excel program was red hot working again and again the costs to achieve this. Proudly, in May 2009, we moved into The Willows Centre without any break in the provision in counselling sessions. Teams of people, packed, moved, painted, stripped and rubbed down paintwork and I remember the ceiling collapsing in one room just as someone walked out. It has been an amazing journey and we now have seven counselling rooms. We have often commented that Willows' strength is its vulnerability and how the foundation of our Christian faith has been a resource to us over the years. I have been proud to be a part of Willows as we have faced all the challenges and witnessed the miracles which have taken place.

Grand Opening Day 11th September 2009

Robert Buckland Member of Parliament for South Swindon reflects on attending the opening of the new Willows Centre

Willows Counselling Service is one of the jewels in Swindon's crown. In this, its 25th anniversary year, I have been reflecting on my association with the charity. It predates my election as South Swindon's MP, when I was delighted to be invited to the opening of the service's new premises in the heart of my future constituency.

After ten years of planning and seven years of fundraising, half a million pounds was raised. Finally, Willows moved from a terraced house in Upper Stratton to its new building in Prospect Place in Old Town in 2009. It was more than three times the size of the old, cramped accommodation, and far more central. That was crucial, given that the cornerstone of the Willows ethos is to be accessible to as much of the community as possible.

I was extremely impressed with the charity's new home, with its six counselling rooms, as opposed to only two at its old base. It also has more office space, a library and training suite. The organisation also often provides a safe haven for those who have suffered neglect and abuse as children, and the new premises has meant even greater care for even more people.

I am proud to have been associated with Willows, and I am sure its work will go from strength to strength in the next 25 years and beyond.



The Challenges Ahead



Tanya Orr Executive Director reflects on how Willows can continue to provide a place of acceptance and understanding to the clients who seek counselling with Willows and also to continue to offer professional counsellor training to work within Willows.

Willows is an exceptional organisation! We have developed gradually and built each new venture on the solid ground of previous work. Our presence is not only accepted but respected in our local community as well as nationally. This is undoubtedly due to the sterling, dedicated work of Mike and the team from the early days through until now, the huge outpouring of good will from supporters, staff, volunteers and the acknowledging that God is at the very centre of all we do and how we are.

Throughout our 25 years we have faced and survived many challenges including significant ill health of key personnel and at times serious financial constraints on our service. Although each has been testing we have managed to “keep on keeping on” continuing to provide our core activities of supporting clients, training and equipping counsellors. Through each challenge we have learned not only what “presses our buttons” but also where our hidden strengths are, and most significantly that God has and will lead us in His path. Our history prepares us to face the challenges ahead of us.

None of us know what the future holds for us individually or as Willows but we can anticipate some challenges we are likely to meet in the coming days.

Finance will always be a challenge and therefore always on our agenda. As a small voluntary sector organisation who desires to make our counselling accessible on the basis of need, not ability to pay; we will always be seeking to increase (or at least maintain our income. Our particular expertise in trauma counselling has brought us clients who have slipped through or not

been adequately supported by a health service in economic crisis. We are not given financial support to fill this gap in provision.

Capacity in terms of space and room availability is becoming a challenge. Despite more than doubling our number of counselling rooms since moving to these new premises, there are two days when we have no more capacity. We will keep this under review and seek to be creative, encouraging people to book sessions on less busy days. However this will be an ongoing challenge as our referrals have increased 40% in the last year alone.

Professionalism of counselling will in a paradoxical way present us with challenges. While in favour of ensuring minimum standards for counselling, training, competence and accountability I have concerns that the “policing” of counsellors through mandatory registration will reduce counselling to very black and white ways of working without allowing for the greys in therapy. These grey areas include, working longer term with clients who have a history of trauma and those with significant attachment issues, no longer recognising the benefit of counsellor experience in favour of some generic tick box type standards. Despite the above challenges, my desire for Willows is that we will be what the following poem from **John O'Donahue** describes –

*“May this be a safe place.
Full of understanding and acceptance.
Where you can be as you are,
without the need of any mask
of pretence or image.
May this home be a place of discovery.
Where the possibilities that sleep
in the clay of your soul can emerge.
To deepen and refine your vision
for all that is yet to come to birth.*”

TRAINING

As part of our continuing training programme new Level 3 and Level 4 courses commenced in September. The next Level 3 course will commence in September 2015 and the Level 4 Diploma in 2016.

A Level 2 Introduction Course commenced in October and the next one is planned for April 2015.

Each year we hold a Myers Briggs Type Indicators training and the next one will be held on Saturday 2nd May 2015.

Willows continues to hold training days at Harnhill which run from 10 am until 4pm at a cost of £35 (3 courses booked at the same time cost £90). To book this training call the Harnhill office on 01285 850283

The 2015 programme is as follows:

14th February

“When I meet Thou: Working at relational depth in therapy” Kaitlyn Steel

14th March

“Hoping and not Hoping: An exploration of the dance between hope and despair in therapy with the survivors of complex trauma” Sue Wright

9th May

“Mindfulness” Linda Thomas

13th June

“Childhood issues that impact adult life” Miranda Marsh

For more information on any of the above courses, please contact:

Avril Fray Training Manager at Willows.

Telephone number 01793 426650 Email: training@willowscounselling.org.uk



“If we have faith and listen to what is on our hearts and apply it with competence and commitment. We will eventually see the outworking of God in what happens”.
Mike Fisher 2014

How Can You Help Us?

Willows is a leading provider of counsellor training enabling us to help 3,000 clients since opening. People like 'Tracy' who has been living with the effects of childhood trauma and abuse.

You Can Help Us Achieve our Silver Jubilee Appeal Target

£10,000 will help client's like 'Tracy' to benefit from longer term counselling to help regain her confidence and self-belief.

Thanks to You

Our 2014 Silver Jubilee Appeal letter has raised £2,500

The Kentwood Choir Fundraising event raised £1,300



You Can Donate Now by sending you gift payable to
Willows Counselling Service at the address below
or <https://localgiving.com/donation/swindonwillows>

Future Fundraising events

Next event 2014

Cake Stall 22nd November 2014 from 10.00 am – 3.00 pm at Christchurch Charity Market, Old Town. There will be lots of Christmas stalls with crafts and items for sale. Do come and support Willows.

Future events in 2015

27th February 2015 Encore Concert at St John's Church Haydon Wick.

March 2015 Supermarket Bag Packing at Morrison's. This raised £900 last year.

April 2015 Easter Hamper Raffle

How To Contact Us

You can telephone us on
01793 426650,
Monday to Friday,
9.30am to 4.30pm.
At other times you
can leave a message
on our answerphone.

You can write to us at:
Willows Counselling Service,
Willows Centre,
11 Prospect Place, Old Town,
Swindon, SN1 3LQ.
Or email us at

willows@willowscounselling.org.uk

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