



Trustees' Annual Report

1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021

MEET in Oxford provides a low-cost trauma focused therapy service using fully qualified and experienced psychotherapists. We offer the trauma therapies known as EMDR and Energy Psychotherapy to people whose lives are seriously affected now by difficult experiences in the past and who are unable to pay the usual fees for private therapy or access it through the NHS.

MEET in Oxford was founded by three members of Oxford Quaker Meeting and is financially supported by the Quaker Meeting through provision of free counselling space and office facilities. It was formally adopted as a concern of the Meeting in July 2018.

Constitution and current trustees

MEET in Oxford ("MEET") was constituted as a small charity in June 2014 and registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), charity number 1182200 in 2019.

- The charity's registered address is: 43 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW.
- The charity's governing document is the Constitution of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered on 25th February 2019.
- Significant decisions affecting the charity are made at the quarterly trustee meetings when a quorum is present or in writing agreed by a majority of the trustees.

Trustees of the charity for the year were:

**Nancy Browner, Sandra Figgess (Chair), Jane Fisher, Katharine Nicholas (Safeguarding Officer)
Becky Riddell, Karen Stowe, Michael Taylor (Treasurer).**

- All the trustees acted for the whole year except Michael Taylor, who was appointed at the July 2020 trustees' meeting for the period July 2020 – July 2023 and took over as Treasurer from Karen Stowe at the meeting held January 2021. Michael is Emeritus Professor of Social Theology, University of Birmingham and formerly Director of Christian Aid.
- Trustees are appointed for a term of three years by a resolution passed at a meeting of the trustees.
- The trustees meet quarterly. All meetings during this year took place by video call.

The trustees would like to thank Karen Stowe for her commitment, hard work and good humour as Treasurer over several years and during the recent period of change.

Objectives

The object of the charity under its Constitution is:

To relieve the mental distress of persons resident in Oxfordshire who are suffering from the effects of traumatic experiences by the provision of the trauma focused therapies known as EMDR and the energy psychotherapies with priority given to persons of limited means by way of free or subsidised treatment.

The trustees meet this object, having regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit, by:

- providing trauma focused therapy to people living in Oxfordshire, who are referred or self-refer to the charity because their lives are seriously affected by past experiences and who cannot afford private therapy or access it through the NHS;
- offering and allocating therapy spaces without regard to an individual's ability to contribute to the cost of their therapy;
- working with practitioners who give their time unpaid.

Activities and achievements

Therapy with MEET in Oxford is provided by experienced psychotherapists and psychologists with additional training in either Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) or Energy Psychotherapy (EP); these are approaches that facilitate healing through an understanding of the impact of trauma on the body and work with the mind-body connection alongside talking psychotherapy. All therapists are registered/accredited by a relevant professional body and offer at least one session per week to a MEET client.

How MEET in Oxford operates

A core group of six MEET therapists, experienced practitioners in EMDR and EP, meets every week. The group includes two of the three founding members of MEET; three are also trustees of the charity.

The core group:

- discusses newly assessed clients and decides who to accept to the waiting list;
- looks at any challenging issues relating to MEET clients;
- considers questions around the management or development of MEET.

We take both self-referrals and referrals from a range of organisations and services within Oxfordshire. There is more information below about the source of referrals over the past year.

After receiving a referral, we carry out an assessment. This provides an opportunity for MEET to find out more about an individual's needs and to see whether MEET therapies are likely to be helpful, and for the individual to learn more about what we offer so they too can decide whether this is what they need. If it is agreed that the approaches we offer would be helpful, they go on our waiting list until an ongoing therapy space is available. MEET offers a maximum of 26 sessions, with reviews at six and 12 weeks.

At assessment, clients are asked if they would be able to make a financial contribution towards the running of the charity. It is made clear that no-one is refused therapy or treated differently because they cannot afford to donate. We suggest, as a guideline, that someone who is on benefits or the minimum wage may be able to contribute £5-£10 per session, while some clients donate just a couple of pounds. For those on a higher wage or family income we suggest a contribution of £15-£35.

Volunteer therapists

All the psychotherapists working with MEET give their time unpaid. However, we feel it is important that volunteering should not leave people out of pocket and are aware that therapists have costs such as insurance and professional registration fees. We therefore have a policy, where the charity's financial position allows, of paying a small honorarium when a therapist finishes work with a client.

For the financial year 2020-21 this was set at £160 for each client with whom the therapist completed 26 sessions (or a pro rata amount for fewer sessions).

MEET's first employee

Thanks to a single generous donation, it was possible in the course of this year to appoint a half-time worker on a three-year contract. Ana Novaković started work in May 2020. Having someone to manage the charity on a day-to-day basis has enabled us over the past year to review and develop our activities and procedures, including:

- Development of clear procedures for all our activities.
- Review of the agreements we make with clients and with volunteer therapists.
- Production of a handbook for volunteer therapists.
- Production of information on the therapeutic approaches MEET uses, which all applicants receive before assessment.
- Review of policies and procedures including safeguarding, guidelines for offering client places, complaints procedures, payment of honorariums to therapists.
- Referral forms can now be completed and submitted from the website.
- Review of financial reporting.
- More detailed record-keeping.
- All record-keeping is now digital.

Covid 19

Until the end of March 2020, when the Covid pandemic struck and lockdown put an immediate stop to face-to-face therapy, the core group of six MEET therapists were seeing clients in person at the Quaker Meeting House in the centre of Oxford. From April 2020, therapists continued working over video links with most clients, though work with a few individuals had to be paused. Unfortunately, these were often our most vulnerable clients. On the positive side, remote working opened up therapy to individuals who would have found travelling into central Oxford a barrier, and it quickly became clear just how effective it could be.

At times, as the lockdown restrictions eased, where the therapist concerned was happy to do so and with the support of the Meeting House, we have offered a return to in-person appointments for particularly vulnerable clients who could not work online because they lacked the technology or access to a private space. Some clients felt too anxious to take these up but where appropriate we have kept in touch with brief phone calls until sessions can be resumed.

Expanding the service

The fact that online therapy proved an effective alternative to seeing clients in person, combined with the recruitment of someone to handle the extra work, meant that MEET was in a position to expand by working with therapists from outside the Oxford area. During 2020-21 we went from seven therapists seeing MEET clients to 18 and by the end of March 2021 could offer up to 25 hours a week of low-cost therapy to clients who would otherwise be unable to afford it. (There is more detailed information below.)

Many charities offering free or low-cost therapy use trainees. MEET does not and is unusual in this respect. All MEET therapists are fully qualified, experienced practitioners, some of whom work with the charity in order to gain experience in their newer skills of EMDR or EP, others for purely philanthropic motives. All are required to attend a monthly peer support group. This provides an opportunity to meet and discuss with others working in the same modality, enables MEET to

maintain an overview of the work being done with our clients, and is a forum where questions can be raised, challenges discussed, and support requested.

Even working with more therapists, demand for our service continued to outstrip supply. When we judge the waiting list to have reached around six months, we have a policy of closing for a few weeks to new referrals as we don't believe it is helpful for people to stay on a waiting list for too long. During the year, we did this twice - and it is never long after reopening that we had enough referrals to keep all the therapists busy for several months.

Support groups

To provide support to clients waiting for regular therapy appointments, in February 2021 we again offered group sessions for people on our waiting list, run by two of the core group of therapists and attended by eight people. This was a self-support group with the aim of helping people understand their symptoms and teaching a range of techniques known to calm the nervous system, reduce anxiety and lower stress levels. The group ran over four weeks and was well received. One client wrote: *thanks so much . . . for running this course for us. I have been struggling with these difficult symptoms for most of my life, and it has been a journey realising that trauma is a part of my picture. . . Already the handouts and discussions have really resonated with my experiences. . . I somehow feel like I am coming home to an area of understanding that makes sense of the things that I have been noticing and experiencing. This has been encouraging and validating for me.'*

As part of our response to the Covid pandemic, we ran a group for frontline staff (nurses and paramedics) at Townlands Hospital in Henley. Eight individuals attended two one-hour sessions teaching simple evidence-based self-help techniques designed to release stress and distress.

In the earlier part of the pandemic we also offered support groups for frontline staff working in Oxfordshire care homes and social care. There was some interest but no actual take-up.

Referrals, self-referrals and enquiries

In the course of the year we received:

Referrals: 38

- Most clients (31) self-refer.
- Many (17) of these have been signposted to MEET by a professional or other organisation, while others (2) have been recommended by a friend or, in one case, through a support group at another charity.
- Organisations either signposting or referring to MEET in Oxford included Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service, Women's Centre at the JR hospital, University of Oxford counselling service, NHS therapists, Relate, Victims First, GP.

Enquiries: 64

- Enquiries are made by phone, via the website or by email.
- 41 were from people enquiring about therapy for themselves, 15 were from referrers/organisations, 8 were from family members or others.

Clients we worked with in 2020-21

- Over this year, we finished working with 24 clients.
- In addition, work with six clients was suspended* and 22 were continuing with regular therapy appointments at 30/04/2021.
- In total, we helped 52 individuals over the year.
- Data is collated when a client's sessions end. The data below is therefore based on the 24 clients with whom therapy ended in the course of the year.

*In four cases, therapy for these individuals was paused because they were not able to continue with sessions online during the Covid pandemic. This was either because of the technology (eg no suitable device, no Wifi) or because they had no private space.

- **Age of clients:**

20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	Not recorded
7	7	3	3	2	1

- **Gender identity:** 23 identified as female, one as male.
- **Number of sessions** provided (the maximum offered by MEET is 26):

26 sessions	Between 20 & 26 sessions	Between 10 & 19 sessions	Fewer than 10 sessions
16	2	2	4

- At the start of therapy, the following **issues** were identified (23 clients, no data available for one client):

Childhood trauma	PTSD symptoms	Adult trauma	Anxiety/depression	Psychiatric diagnosis
20	18	15	21	5

- Clients are asked how they choose to describe their **heritage** (data available for 19 clients). 11 described themselves as White British. Others described themselves as: Pakistani (1); Caucasian (1); White Caucasian (1); White Irish (1); White Greek (1); White Italian (1); French Algerian (1); White Dutch (1).
- From June 2020, we started recording the **source of referrals**.
- Over a 10-month period (June 2020-March 2021), we received 38 referrals.
- 31 were self-referrals. Of these, 15 were signposted from: the Oxford University Counselling Service (7); an NHS service (2); another therapy service (2); Relate (1); Mind (1); Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (1); disability mentor (1).
- Seven referrals were received from (one from each): Elmore Community Services: GP; Oxford University Counselling Service; Psychosexual Service JR; Oxfordshire County Council Personal Adviser; Victims First; St Mungos.

Practice Based Evidence

We use a [PCL-5](#) form, which assesses the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, as an objective means of evaluating progress. The form is a 20-item self-report measure developed by the US-based National Center for PTSD.

Clients complete the form when they are assessed and again when they finish therapy. A reduction of at least 10 points in their score over that period indicates a significant reduction in trauma symptoms and is regarded as clinically meaningful. An increased score, no change, or a clinically less significant improvement of less than -10, usually indicates that a client was undergoing further adverse life experiences during the period of therapy.

We have been doing this since 2017 and at the end of March 2021 had collected data for 54 clients, laying the foundation of a small project to provide practice-based evidence for the efficacy of the methods we use. Given that most of our clients have complex trauma histories starting in childhood, and many are still living in challenging circumstances, we are encouraged by the results so far, with some clients showing tremendous improvement.

EMDR				Energy Psychotherapy			
10 clients				44 clients			
Downward change less than 10 points, increased or unchanged	Downward change of 10-19 points	Downward change of 20-29 points	Downward change of 30 or more points	Downward change less than 10 points, increased or unchanged	Downward change of 10-19 points	Downward change of 20-29 points	Downward change of 30 or more points
2	0	3	5	10	12	9	13
20%	0%	30%	50%	22%	27%	20%	30%

78% of all clients documented above had a significant drop in PCL-5 scores (approximately the same for both Energy Therapies and EMDR).

Over this period, more therapists were using Energy Therapies to work with trauma than were using EMDR. If you would like to see the full table, which gives detailed scores and shows the number of therapy sessions each client had, please email admin@meetinoxford.org.

Clients' evaluations

When sessions end, clients are asked to evaluate the therapy they have received and respond to questions including: What did you learn about yourself from the therapy? What has changed for you as a result?

Please see below some of the responses.

"Incredibly grateful for this life altering experience. . . I have better boundaries with family members, better understanding that not everything is my responsibility! I understand the underlying causes of my difficulties and the need to be patient with process for gradual change. . . I am seeing my world in a different light. . . as if I am looking through different glasses." (PCL5 score 58-14)

"Before this, I bounced along at the bottom, only occasionally feeling happy. I had real down moments before. . . It's amazing how different everything is now." (PCL5 not recorded)

"As a result of the therapy: I am becoming more open to the possibility of experiencing emotion. I am approaching myself in a kinder and gentler way, looking at things with curiosity rather than judgement." (PCL5 score 48-23)

"I am so much more aware of things that I was not before and I feel better equipped with emotional knowledge. I also have practical (therapeutic) tools that I use to manage my mood. . . at the end of my period of therapy, I feel much better and can really recognize the benefits of this type of therapy and doing it for an extended period of time." (PCL5 score 41-24)

"I have felt 'normal' again for the first time in two years. I might not be able to maintain this for long periods but it's amazing to realise that it's possible for me to feel normal at all, since I'd given up on it. Old triggers have not resulted in the usual reactions (or any reaction). . . this last month the past has not been intruding on my present in the way that it has done for at least 40 years. . . This sounds dramatic, but this therapy really did save my life. . . I'm incredibly grateful for what MEET has made possible for me. Thank you!" (PCL5 score not recorded)

"It's been exhausting doing this work because I've finally been honest (about what actually went on my childhood). . . I feel less vulnerable when I have flashbacks and more able to deal with them when they happen. It's easier to be kind to myself. I can be rightfully angry. I do have resources I can use and I have grounding techniques." (PCL5 42-28)

"I am now able to think about my trauma as an event that happened in my past, rather than something that is part of who I am. . . As a result of the therapy I feel better equipped to manage stressful situations (including but not limited to PTSD symptoms) and to experience my own emotions. . . I no longer engage in all-or-nothing thinking and instead see relationships as a space for negotiation and conversations, where it is safe to disagree." (PCL5 score 36-29)

"I learnt that I had stored very strong emotions within my body and mind that I actively did not want to uncover because it felt unsafe to do so. . . That it is safe to talk or begin the process of talking about the darkest fears . . . that the "real me" was still there under all that mess. . . I would just like to thank you all for the life changing treatment and for making this treatment available me and the wider community who are suffering." (PCL5 score 57-33)

Making EMDR and Energy Psychotherapy better known in Oxfordshire

One of the aims of the charity is to raise the profile of the trauma focused therapies EMDR and Energy Psychotherapy in Oxfordshire. We do this primarily by disseminating information and by giving experienced psychotherapists the opportunity to practise these approaches:

- We provide experienced therapists, who have added EMDR or Energy Psychotherapy to their therapeutic repertoire, with the opportunity to practise these skills in working with trauma. We refer clients to them who are already assessed as suitable for these methods.
- Our supervision groups, which MEET in Oxford therapists are required to attend, provide an opportunity for discussion with peers and for sharing knowledge and experiences.
- We held our first meeting (online) of all the therapists working with MEET in Oxford. We plan to do this regularly and hope it will allow therapists working in both modalities to share and discuss their different approaches, ask questions, request ideas, and learn from each other. Of the therapists working with MEET in Oxford at the date of this report, nine use EMDR, six use EP, and three are qualified in both.
- We work with a range of referring organisations including NHS specialist services and Oxfordshire charities. This offers an opportunity to disseminate knowledge and understanding of the approaches we use and, through our work with the individuals referred, to demonstrate their effectiveness in working with trauma.

Acknowledgements and thanks:

It is our therapists, trustees, donors, referrers, clients and the Oxford Quaker Meeting who make MEET happen.

- MEET benefits enormously from the generosity of its therapists, all of whom give their time *pro bono*. They offer one or more sessions each week, run MEET groups, or contribute to the management of the charity. Without them, MEET would not exist, and we are immensely grateful.
- We are supported by the Oxford Quaker Meeting, which generously provides rent-free therapy rooms and the support of the Meeting House managers.
- The continued grant from the Quaker Mental Health Fund UK (previously Retreat York Benevolent Fund) helps us to plan ahead and is much appreciated.
- We are also grateful to our clients who contribute what they can, everyone who makes financial donations to MEET in Oxford, and our trustees who give generously of their time.