

## **Southmead Project & Bristol Rovers**

### **Case for support**

**Southmead Project is one of the longest established charities in the UK addressing the impact of child abuse, trauma and its correlation with later self-harm.**

*"I came to the service longing for drugs to numb my pain, but what really began my healing was being able to express that pain to other human beings who didn't crumple at the horror of what I had experienced as a child"*

Formed in 1994, Southmead Project is a registered charity (no. 1076617) providing specialist therapeutic and practical support for survivors of child abuse who misuse drugs, alcohol and/or other ways of self-harming in order to suppress the emotional impact of such trauma. We work with individuals and families to re-build their lives free from the destructive impact of abuse-related trauma. We are based in Southmead, North Bristol, and our citywide services include:

- One-to-one counselling and therapeutic group work, both at our premises and at GP surgeries and other agencies across Bristol.
- A weekly family support group, which enable parents, carers and concerned others to share experiences and concerns in a safe, confidential and non-judgemental setting.
- Awareness raising of the impact of child abuse and the need for positive action, including high-profile art exhibitions, delivering training for other agencies, conference-speaking and events.
- Our Caring Dads: Safer Children project, where perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse learn to change abusive behaviour. In turn, this then helps to address the intergenerational cycle of harm.
- Work with universities to increase the evidence base for the correlation of child abuse with later self-harm; the impact on the individual, family and wider community; and the efficacy of trauma interventions.

We receive referrals from over 20 sources, including substance misuse, NHS mental health and criminal justice services. Each year our work benefits over 130 people who come to us seeking help with their plight.

### **The impact of child abuse – some facts**

One in 20 children in the UK have been sexually abused, and a third of these children did not tell anyone at the time. Over 54,000 sexual offences against children were recorded by the police in the UK in 2015/16, but the true scale of abuse is likely to be much greater as most cases are not reported, detected or prosecuted. ( NSPCC website: Sexual abuse: Facts and statistics <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-abuse/sexual-abuse-facts-statistics/>.) Abused children often grow up believing that they are fundamentally unlovable. They suffer from agonizing shame about the actions they took to survive and maintain a connection with the person who abused them, particularly if the abuser was someone they knew, who they depended on, which is often the case. It is common for children to grow up thinking the abuse was their fault. The devastating consequences of child sex abuse can endure throughout adult life, and include severe difficulties forming and maintaining close relationships; low self-esteem; depression and anxiety; chronic physical health conditions and disabilities; and regular suicidal feelings.

### **Substance abuse and self-harming**

A range of studies have found that child abuse can lead a person to self-harm to deal with the painful feelings caused by unprocessed trauma and the Department of Health Drug misuse and

dependence: UK guidelines on Clinical Management (2017) recognises the high rates of trauma exposure in substance misusers...

*“No one ever asked me why I started taking drugs. Why? Why did no-one ever ask me why? It was just that you were taking drugs, and you were evil, and you were a bad person”*

*“I was dropped by the NHS, dropped by drugs and alcohol services because as soon as I wanted to talk about abuse, they didn't want to go there. It makes you feel like you have to keep it quiet, just forget about it - how can you when that is the reason you're taking drugs in the first place?”*

### **Raising awareness**

Our awareness-raising work aims to lift the lid on the world of abuse; its impact on the individual, family and wider community; and the need for acknowledgement and action. This aspect of our work includes the design and delivery of specialist training for other agencies, conference-speaking and running events and exhibitions.

*“As well as providing support to victims and survivors, the Southmead Project has also taken a step forward in raising awareness about child sexual abuse. In creating the Wall of Silence, the unheard have been given a voice” – Sue Mountstevens, Police and Crime Commissioner for Avon and Somerset*

### **Training**

Our objectives for the training we deliver are for participants to:

- Understand the possible consequences of childhood abuse and what we mean by ‘complex trauma’.
- Be introduced to research on the neurobiological effects of trauma and how this knowledge can contribute to a person's recovery.
- Know how the impact of abuse can be linked to drug and alcohol misuse.
- Be introduced to the three-stage model of recovery from trauma.
- Learn simple and effective techniques to help clients ‘anchor trauma’ and stay safe while reducing their dependency on drugs/alcohol.

### **Research**

Southmead Project works with universities to increase the evidence base for the correlation of child abuse with later self-harm; the impact on the individual, family and wider community; and the effectiveness of trauma interventions.

### **Who benefits?**

Southmead Project works with adults (16 years and over) who have experienced extreme levels of emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse, and misuse drugs, alcohol or other ways of self-harming (such as eating disorders) to suppress the emotions that follow such trauma. Most experience very low self-esteem, emotional detachment, guilt, suicidal thoughts or attempts, avoidance of human contact and severe isolation. Around 30% of clients are from the Southmead area, and 70% are from the wider Greater Bristol area. They will have multiple and complex needs and face a combination of problems in addition to substance abuse and mental and physical ill health including the prospect of homelessness, contact with the criminal justice system and family breakdown. They are often trapped living chaotic lives and fall through the gaps between services and systems, which in most cases are designed to deal with one problem at a time. The long-term benefits of our work include an improved ability of our clients to access training, employment and secure housing, and for parents to care for their children. The wider impact includes improved community safety, a reduction in drug culture and helping to break the intergenerational cycle of

harm.

*“It’s very hard to find a service that understands PTSD. Even after diagnosis, I was told you have PTSD but I’m not sure where to refer you. I felt abandoned”*

**Contact details**

For a further information or to speak to someone, please contact us on 0117 950 6022 or visit our website at [www.southmeadproject.org.uk](http://www.southmeadproject.org.uk).

**Southmead Project**

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Registered charity number (1076617)