



# WOMEN LISTENING TO WOMEN

Voices of the



bristol crisis service for women



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# INTRODUCTION



The Women Listening to Women oral history project began in March 2020. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, its aims were to research, record and celebrate the unique history of the Bristol Crisis Service for Women, a small charity set up by feminist and survivor activists in the 1980s.

More than 20 former staff and volunteers were interviewed – remotely due to the risks posed by Covid 19. Their audio files and transcripts, along with the charity’s organisational records, now form the basis of the Bristol Crisis Service for Women and Self Injury Support Archive, available to the public at Bishopsgate Institute in London ([www.bishopsgate.org.uk/archives](http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/archives)).

The collected voices of the Bristol Crisis Service for Women and the rich history they represent have been celebrated in two exhibitions, one touring and another permanently housed at the Glenside Hospital Museum ([www.glensidemuseum.org.uk](http://www.glensidemuseum.org.uk)); a website ([www.womenlisteningtowomen.org.uk](http://www.womenlisteningtowomen.org.uk)); three podcasts and this booklet.

We hope you find reading about the history of the Bristol Crisis Service for Women as fascinating as we have found researching it.



# HISTORY

The Bristol Crisis Service for Women started life as a feminist collective that offered peer support to women struggling to cope with mental ill health, trauma and distress. It grew out of the Bristol Women and Mental Health Network, set up by women who regarded themselves as survivors rather than beneficiaries of psychiatric treatment, and became a separate group in April 1986.

The 1980s was a time of feminist action around a range of issues, when it felt like women organising together could take on anything. The founders of Bristol Crisis Service for Women had experience of self injury and knew



**I joined BCSW while recovering from ‘cracking up’, and it was immensely powerful to work with other women survivors of the mental health system. The group gave me a new and coherent conceptual framework for experiences that had been secret and shameful, offering a political language for talking about madness. This was empowering and therapeutic.”**

*Tamsin, collective member*<sup>1</sup>



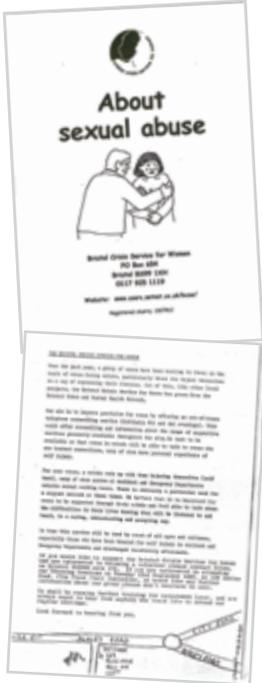
how little help and support there was for women like them, so they took action – opening a telephone helpline in January 1988, run from the back of a charity shop in Easton.

“I joined the setting up group of the Women’s Crisis Service and for the first time in my life met other women who self-injured. I no longer felt a freak, I found some people who understood because they shared similar experiences.”

*Diane, founder member*<sup>2</sup>

“...joining the Bristol crisis line was a real turning point. Here were other women – bright, lucid and accepting.”

*Maggy, collective member*<sup>3</sup>



Bristol Crisis Service for Women staff Hilary (L) and Lois (R) in the office, mid-1990s.



Footnotes

1. Tamsin Wilton, "Madness and feminism: Bristol Crisis Service for Women", pp28-39 in G Griffin (ed), *Feminist Activism in the 1990s* (London, Taylor and Francis, 1995), p. 28. 2. Diane Harrison in *Self Harm Perspectives from Personal Experience*, ed. L Pembroke (Survivors Speak Out, 1994), p8. 3. Maggy Ross in *ibid.*, p13.

## > Volunteer led

Volunteers committed to a fortnightly shift on the helpline and were also expected to pitch in with administration, fundraising and management as well as training and counselling fellow volunteers and even providing childcare. Decisions were made democratically and training took place in volunteers' houses. Helpline shifts ran late into the night on Fridays and Saturdays to cover times women might struggle to access other forms of support. Helpline volunteers would receive an hour's counselling from a more experienced colleague the day after they completed a shift.

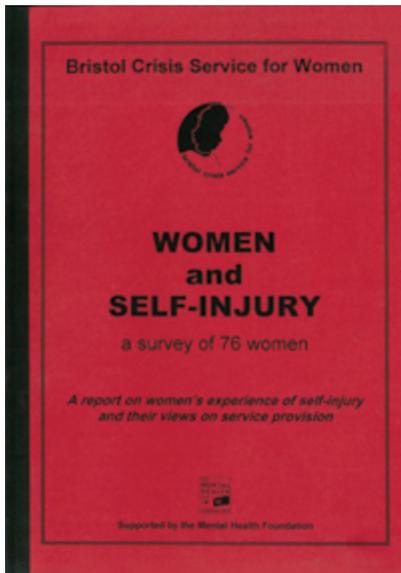


“  
Everyone was just so gentle, do you know what I mean? It was just such a gentle, kind thing to do.”

*Volunteer, 2005-2006*

## By women for women

The women who started Bristol Crisis Service for Women believed in a social model of mental health – that it was the conditions of their lives, not mental illness, that caused distress for so many of the helpline callers and volunteers with lived experience. For them, this meant that it was essential that their organisation was by and for women only, as the trauma they had experienced was overwhelmingly at the hands of men. This trauma was often compounded by dismissive and disbelieving reactions from a wider society that viewed women as inherently emotionally unstable.



This groundbreaking research report was published by Bristol Crisis Service for Women in 1995.

“

**It always felt like we were quite pioneering at the beginning to be open and vocal about what was going on and go: this is the support that's needed for these women; this is how we're going to set it up; and we're going to run it from the perspective of women who've been treated really badly.”**

*Fiona, staff, 2004-2018*

“The kinds of experiences that women have; of having less power and control than men in many circumstances, of being more expected to not express things like anger and distress in various ways... it felt really important to focus on women and why is it that women in particular self-harm a lot.”

*Lois, staff, 2004-2006*

“

**It feels like you're expected to show your distress in a socially acceptable way, so don't be angry, don't be psychotic, don't be suicidal, don't self-harm, but if you could just cry a bit and be a nice victim then it's palatable.”**

*Sal, volunteer and staff, 1996-2021*

> Bristol Crisis Service for Women sought to create a psychological refuge from all of that by guaranteeing a helpline staffed by women who understood. Although not all helpline volunteers came committed to the idea of a women-only service, the empowering experience of training in a women-only group followed by exposure to the harrowing experiences disclosed by the helpline callers soon convinced them of its worth.

“I didn’t join because it was feminist, I joined because I thought, oh, I’m

a woman, oh, I’ve been miserable, I could probably do that ... and then, like, oh, it’s not just me, oh, it’s structural.”

*Volunteer, 2005-2006*



**I think really quickly it became really clear how important it was that it was a woman only space, and that we were able to address things around some of the gendered experiences that obviously a lot of the women we support have.”**

*Clare P, volunteer and staff, 2014-2021*



**You know, it makes you see the world in a different way as you live the rest of your life after being part of a women only organisation.”**

*Melinda, staff, 2004-2007*



**BRISTOL CRISIS SERVICE FOR WOMEN TIMELINE**

- **1986** : Bristol Crisis Service for Women created by members of the Bristol Women and Mental Health Network.
- **1987** : First public workshop held in St
- **1988** : Jude’s, Bristol, with a free creche. Telephone helpline opens and receives almost 250 calls in first year.
- **1989** : Bristol Crisis Service for Women
- **1990** : moves to its own office in central Bristol. First paid employee – part-time volunteer coordinator role, job-shared between two women. Publication of first pamphlet, *Women and Self Injury*

## Self injury: causes...

Once the helpline had opened, it quickly became obvious that the majority of callers were using self injury as a way of coping with trauma they had experienced, often from childhood sexual abuse.

“When we used to answer the phone we used to say, Crisis Service for Women, which felt quite apt because a lot of the callers were in acute distress.”

Volunteer, 2004-2006



“**It’s a silent scream. It’s about trying to create a sense of order out of chaos. It’s a visual manifestation of extreme distress. Those of us who self injure carry our emotional scars on our bodies.**

Maggy, collective member<sup>4</sup>

4. Maggy Ross in *Self Harm Perspectives from Personal Experience*, ed. L Pembroke (Survivors Speak Out, 1994), p14.

by Hilary Lindsay.

The office moves to a bigger space in the same building. FACES (For Acceptance and Care to Express Self Harm) self injury self-help group set up by founder member Diane Harrison. Founder member Maggy Ross dies.

■ **1991**

: Helpline calls increasing – 383 answered in 1991/2.

■ **1992**

: Bristol Crisis Service for Women registered as a charity.

■ **1993**

Bristol Crisis Service for Women attends the Challenges to

Psychiatry conference.

■ **1994**

First issue of *SHOUT (Self Harm Overcome by Understanding and Tolerance)* magazine published. *Understanding Self Injury, Self Help for Self Injury and For Friends and Family* by Lois Arnold published.



## ...and treatment

What also emerged was the dismissive and often downright cruel way many women seeking help for their self injury were being treated. Women arriving at A&E with self-inflicted injuries were often made to feel like they were time wasters and their wounds treated without pain relief. Psychiatrists diagnosed their patients' self injury as manipulative, attention-seeking behaviour and refused to treat them until they stopped. Many women were told

that their self injury was evidence of an incurable personality disorder. Mothers were terrified that if they talked to their GP about using self injury their children would be taken into care.

“Women were being doubly hurt, firstly by their experiences that led them to self-harm and then from the responses that they got when they tried to get some help for themselves.”  
*Sal, volunteer and staff, 1996-2021*

Face to face support group for women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse started. Helpline calls increasing – 625 in 1994/95.

### ■ 1995

Ground-breaking report *Women and Self Injury: a Study of 76 Women* by Lois Arnold

published *Needing Attention: an Evaluation of Service for Women Who Self Injure* by Hilary Lindsay published. Bristol Crisis Service for Women organises a conference, *Cutting Out The Pain*, held at Bristol University. Bristol Crisis Service for Women features in a book *Feminist*

*Activism in the 1990s* edited by Gabriele Griffin.

### ■ 1996

Collective structure changed to allow decisions to be taken by a smaller Working Group. *Self Injury Support and Self Help Groups* by Karin Parker and Hilary Lindsay published.

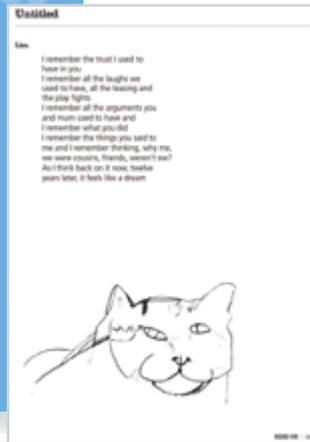
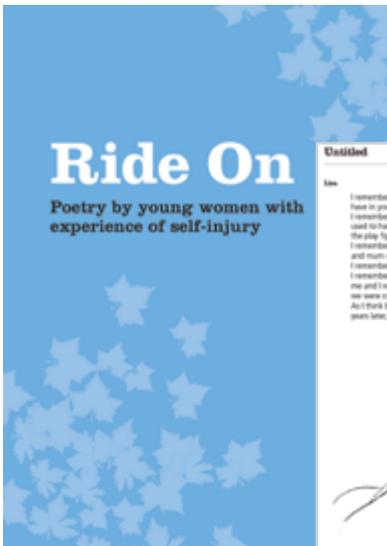
“I asked what sort of experience they’d had in services they’d approached for help. Women would talk about being told by services or workers they’d approached that they were just wanting attention or doing something terrible and wrong and that they couldn’t have any help until they stopped this silliness.”

Lois, staff, 1994-1996

“

**Another thing we would listen to was ... when women had been down to Accident and Emergency and they had been punished for their self-wounding. I remember how angry that used to make everyone feel.”**

Volunteer, 1993-2000



Ride On was a book of poetry written by members of Bristol Crisis Service for Women's young women's lived experience group.

Bristol Crisis Service for Women hosts workshops on how to support women who self injure at several conferences.

**1997**

Training pack *Working With People Who Self Injure* published and sells more than 100 copies in first year. Bristol Crisis Service

for Women hosts workshops on how to support women who self injure at several conferences. Website launched.

**1998**

10th anniversary celebration held in central Bristol. Training session for professionals who work with self injury held as far

away as the Shetland Isles. Several national conferences attended.

**1999**

*Good Practice Guidelines for Working With People Who Self Injure* by Hilary Lindsay published. Self Injury Self Help (SISH) group started. Training

## > **Amplifying service users' voices**

Underlying all these unkind and unfair responses was an unwillingness to listen to the women who were using self injury. Bristol Crisis Service for Women set out to change that. It used the information the women who called the helpline gave to shape its services: publishing a series of self help guides for service users, their families and friends; training packs for professionals; and even *Rainbow Journal* self care diaries for under 18s. During the 1990s and 2000s staff criss-crossed the country training hundreds of nurses, social workers, teachers, prison officers and other

“

**“When we did training in hospital settings, often nurses would come to the training, but doctors wouldn't ... it felt as though they thought it was sort of beneath them.”**

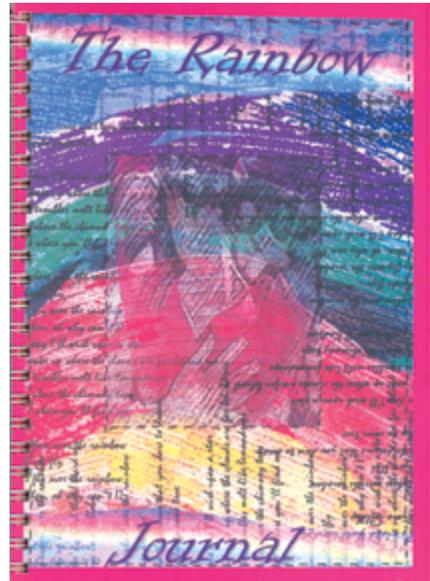
*Lois, staff, 1994-1996*

professionals who worked with people using self injury and spoke at dozens of conferences.

“

**When we started out [training] we would quite often go in pairs because it would be quite hostile sometimes.”**

*Sal, volunteer and staff, 1996-2021*



sessions delivered from Derry to Dorchester and several conferences attended.

### ■ 2000

Bristol Crisis Service for Women starts facilitating the Self Injury Self Help group. Change in collective structure to accept volunteers who do not

work on the helpline.

Bristol Crisis Service for Women highly commended at the Volunteer Action Awards. Bristol Crisis Service for Women hosts stalls at local festivals and a fundraising event with the Gasworks Choir at a local theatre.

### ■ 2001

*Report into Local Needs of Women who Self Injure* by Natasha Du Rose published. Accessible versions of *Women and Self Injury* produced in braille, large print, plain English and words and pictures. Bristol Crisis Service for Women

Bristol Crisis Service for Women also carried out several large research projects co-produced with people using self injury, including women in prisons, young women and people with learning disabilities. Their research was considered ground-breaking, simply because it asked women why they used self injury and what help they wanted. For most of them, it was the first time someone had asked.

“What was incredible really was how willing women were to share so much, and how pleased they were that the research was being done.”

*Lois, staff, 1994-1996*

“I think it really was the first sort of research that was really user-led. It was a very different way of talking about self-harm. Up to then it had been very much from a clinician’s point of view, or a psychologist’s point of view.”

*Suzanne, freelance trainer, 2000 to present*



The Hidden Pain project was co-produced with people with learning difficulties. It created tailored self-help material for people with learning difficulties who used self injury, their families and carers and training guides for professionals.

“**There was a major piece of research done in 1995 by Bristol Crisis Service for Women and it was huge to read what a hundred other people had said about their self-injury and to see myself reflected there. The central core was; just ask people what’s needed.”**

*Clare S, mental health activist*

holds an International Women’s Day event focusing on minority ethnic women.

■ **2002**

Collective structure ended. Registration as a limited company and charity with a conventional hierarchical structure overseen by a

Management Committee. Helpline expands to include a third phonenumber and extends opening hours to include Sunday evenings.

■ **2003**

*Rainbow Journal* self-help workbook for young women and girls by Catherine Lucas

published. Helpline and volunteer advertising is targeted at young women in response to evidence that they are increasingly using self injury.

■ **2004**

Thirty-three days of training delivered to professionals who

Final Report



# hidden pain?

Self-injury and people with learning disabilities



## Hidden Pain



A research project to find out about self-injury and people with learning difficulties

October 2008 - November 2009



Second Edition



## helping yourself if you hurt yourself

A guided workbook for people with learning disabilities who hurt themselves



work with people who self injure, particularly those working with young people.

### 2005

*Women from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups and Self Injury* self-help booklet by Fiona Macaulay published in Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Chinese and English.

Bristol Crisis Service for Women holds workshops and speaks at several conferences about black and minority ethnic women and young people and self injury. The Young Women's Group, an advisory group of young service-users, begins to meet monthly.

*The Pain Inside*, a self-help workbook for women in prison by Fiona Macaulay, is distributed among women's prisons. Calls to the helpline have more than doubled since 2000.

### 2006

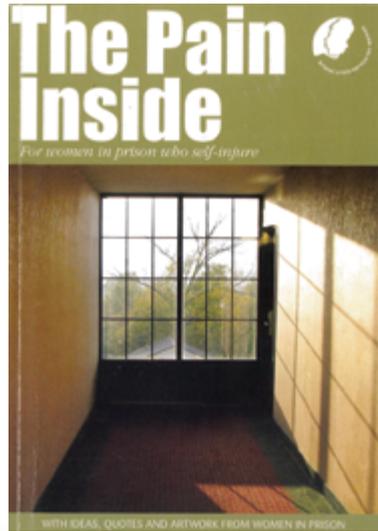
The helpline is awarded the Mental Health Helplines Quality

## Radical empathy

Bristol Crisis Service for Women's approach of listening with kindness and amplifying the voices of its service users marked the organisation out as a radical challenge to established ways of treating women using self injury. Its helpline did not advise women to stop using self injury, because the women who called explained it was a coping strategy and to take it away might leave them unable to cope. Instead the helpline gave callers the space to talk, without fear of judgement or repercussions, about the things in their lives that had led them to use self injury.

“If somebody’s distressed, then acknowledging that distress and treating that person with warmth and respect is often the most important thing you can ever do: it’s really that simple.”

*Clare S, mental health activist*



*The Pain Inside* was a self-help workbook for women in prison co-produced between Bristol Crisis Service for Women and female prisoners.



**I still think helplines should be dustbins where you can just ring up and say what you like and you can put the phone down if you don't like who you're talking to. I think that's fantastic."**

*Volunteer, 1993-2000*

Standard and opens a fourth line. *Ride On*, a book of poetry by the Young Women's Group edited by Lorna Henry, is published.

The training pack *Working With People Who Self Injure* is updated. Bristol Crisis Service for Women

hosts an open morning for friends and family of people who self injure.

Thirty-five training days are delivered, several in prisons.

■ **2007**

*Helping Yourself if You Hurt Yourself*, an accessible book for people with learning disabilities,

adapted by Fiona Macaulay and Professor Pauline Heslop of the Norah Fry Centre at Bristol University from previous Bristol Crisis Service for Women publication *Self Help for Self Injury*, is published.

■ **2008**

20th anniversary celebration at

> Over the decades, hundreds of women from all walks of life have volunteered to work on the Bristol Crisis Service for Women helpline. They commit to at least a year on the helpline, for which they undergo a lengthy training and regular supervision. This equips them with the ability to bear witness to women in great distress without becoming overwhelmed by it.

“It wasn’t something you could just do as a sort of a hobby. You had to have a certain commitment to it and you had to have a certain strength of mind to do it and to keep at it.”

*Sarah, volunteer, 2003-8*



“

**When you sit next to self-injury, you know it’s really, really tough. There’s something about the willingness of people to do that, that has to come with a capacity to bear the grit of it and the pain of it.”**

*Jenny, staff, 2008-2012*

**“Just being able to sit with someone in their suffering and sort of dignify it a bit has been a really important lesson, a very good thing to have done.”**

*Volunteer, 2005-2006*

### **A life-changing experience**

Some volunteers come with their own histories of self injury. All have to dig deep into their feelings during their training to access the profound levels of empathy and listening skills required for this peer to peer work. The impact of this can be life-changing. Many volunteers have found

Bristol Council House.  
Launch of Text and Email  
Support Service (TESS) for  
women under 25.

#### **2009**

The *Hidden Pain* suite of  
resources for people with  
learning disabilities, their families

and carers is published and 400  
packs distributed. Created by  
Fiona Macaulay and Professor  
Pauline Heslop, it includes: a  
DVD; booklet for family and  
carers; self help workbook; and  
training pack for professionals.  
Bristol Crisis Service for Women  
hosts conferences in all four

countries of the United Kingdom  
to launch *Hidden Pain* and  
speaks at several European  
conferences.  
Forty-four training sessions are  
delivered from Exeter to Essex.

#### **2010**

New website  
[www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)



their calling at Bristol Crisis Service for Women and gone on to develop careers in counselling or psychology. Others have been inspired to seek therapy and for the first time talk about difficult experiences in their own lives.

“I think it changed my life completely, honestly. I just learnt so much about myself and I don’t think I would have been able to do that if I wasn’t

being in a place where emotions are accepted and understood, where self-injury is accepted and understood, where women’s experiences are accepted and understood. I think it’s really transformative.”

*Jess, volunteer and staff, 2018-present*

**“The Bristol Crisis Service for Women, you know, the training, inspiration, support ... it just grew me and it helped me to find my way into therapy.”**

*Volunteer, 1993-2000*



**The care really was the best thing, that we cared equally about ourselves and each other as we did about the people who would call and anybody who called would be cared for. I think that was the best thing – to feel cared for and to feel enabled in my ability to care for others.”**

*Stephanie, volunteer, 1995-1998*

launched. Bristol Crisis Service for Women awarded the Queen’s Medal for Voluntary Service at a ceremony at Buckingham Palace. Twenty-nine training sessions are delivered across England and Wales.

■ **2011**

Telephone helpline closed due to lack of funding. Seventeen training sessions and seven one-day workshops are delivered.

■ **2012**

Six workshops and 13 training

sessions are delivered.

■ **2013**

New training for schools on working with young people who self injure developed. Five workshops and 13 training sessions delivered, including to schools and colleges.

## > **New technologies for a younger audience**

In 2008, to reflect the new technologies used by a younger generation, a text and email support service (TESS) was launched for women under 25. Volunteers who previously had trained to work on a phone helpline had to learn how to provide emotional support in 160 characters. It proved surprisingly effective and opened up the service to young women who did not have the privacy to make a phone call. By 2010 TESS was open every night of the week.



An early poster for the Text and Email Support Service (TESS).



**There was just this intimacy and real connection with the girls and women using the service – even though you couldn't hear each other, you couldn't see each other. And that was really powerful and affirming because one of the things that got said repeatedly by people using the service was, I wouldn't have been able to say what I just said to you if I'd had to be in the room with you."**

*Jenny, staff, 2008-2012*

### ■ 2014

Bristol Crisis Service for Women changes name to *Self Injury Support*.

Telephone helpline reopens with two phone lines operating three days a week.

Self Injury Support hosts a national networking conference

for organisations that work with people who self injure.

Self Injury Support sets up the Local Helplines Forum, a peer support forum for local helpline managers.

Bristol Women's Voice creates a short film about Bristol Crisis Service for Women for

International Women's Day.

New training on Understanding Borderline Personality Disorder developed.

Twenty-one training sessions delivered to schools, councils, NHS trusts and more.

### ■ 2015

Self Injury Support and Self

“

I remember being a bit blown away really by how much of all that empathy and connection you could get in a text message, because it's not something that I'd done before.”

Clare P, volunteer and staff, 2014-2021

**TESS** Text and email support services

Self Injury Support

For girls and women affected by self-injury

Want to talk?

But don't want to phone?

Text or email us we are confidential

We won't tell and we won't judge you

Or call Women's Self Injury Helpline on **0808 800 8088** for confidential anonymous emotional support

Text: **07537 432 444**  
Texts cost normal rate

[www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)  
and click on **Get support**

Open Tues-Thurs 7pm-9.30pm



Volunteer feedback for the TESS service manager.



Injury Self Help jointly develop and deliver training for A&E staff on self injury. Self Injury Support leads the Self Injury Network Group (SING) for organisations and agencies that work with young people who use self injury in the Bristol area. Self Injury Support hosts a series of arts-based wellbeing

workshops with theatre group Lady Strong's Bonfire. Seven workshops and 21 training sessions are delivered in schools, prisons, probation services, councils and NHS bodies in Britain and Ireland.

**2016**

The Text and Email Support

Services (TESS) adds a webchat facility. Telephone helpline is open five days a week with two phone lines. Self Injury Support works with the National Institute of Healthcare Research on how best to develop research on

## > Funding

Funding this work has been a constant struggle, however, and in 2011 the telephone helpline was forced to close. The staff and volunteers were as devastated as the callers, not least because Bristol Crisis Service for Women had just been awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. Although Bristol Crisis Service for Women continued to offer training, and support for young women through TESS, it was not until 2014 that it was able to secure funding to restart the helpline.

"Where the need was and where the money was never quite married up and that was always really difficult."

*Fiona, staff, 2004-2018*

“**I think I've got six or seven redundancy letters over the years, but we've always pulled through at the end.**”

*Staff, 2002 to present*

"Funding uncertainty is the biggest challenge, because it really impacts the way that you can deliver a service effectively."

*Jess, volunteer and staff, 2018-present*



BRISTOL CRISIS SERVICE FOR WOMEN	
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE PERIOD 31st SEPTEMBER 2018 to 31st MARCH 2019	
<b>INCOME</b>	
Grant from N.I.J.S.U.	1000
Grant from Bristol City Council	704
Donations	100
State of Jane Hartley	820
Building Society Interest (cont)	62
Sale of Assets	0
	2686
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	
Training	200
Workshops	0
Recruitment Expenses	120
Bookbinding	90
Printing	480
Printing, Postage and Stationery	100
Advertising	100
Subscriptions	30
Literary Books	100
Hardware	10
Repairs	10
Representation	10
	1040
<b>EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE FOR THE PERIOD</b>	<b>1646</b>

A press photo of Bristol Crisis Service for Women receiving the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service from the Lord Lieutenant of Bristol.

self injury that includes service users.

- **2017**  
The Text and Email Support Services and telephone helpline merge.  
Launch of DistrACT app, developed with help from Self Injury Support.

- **2018**  
Office expands to include a dedicated helpline room and kitchen.
- **2019**  
Visible Women activist networking event celebrates 30th anniversary of Bristol Crisis

- **2020**  
Service for Women/Self Injury Support.  
Lived Experience A&E Follow Up Service launched to provide one-off confidential peer support and information to people who have presented at A&E with self injury.



**Are you a woman affected by self injury?**

Get in touch by phone, text, email or webchat for confidential, emotional support.

All services open  
Tues - Thurs  
7-9.30pm

**Women's Self Injury Helpline**  
Call FREE on 0808 800 8088

**TESS Text and email support services**  
Text: 07537 432 444

For email and webchat: [www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)  
and click on Get Support

All of our services are available to women and girls of any age affected by self injury

We provide emotional support and a space to talk about whatever you need to. We are here to listen to you and won't judge you or tell you what to do. All our services are confidential and anonymous and provided by female volunteers who have received specialist training.

You can also visit [www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk) for self help resources.

Registered charity no. 1092209



Bristol Crisis Service for Women staff fundraising in fancy dress on International Women's Day

## Self Injury Support

In the same year the helpline reopened, Bristol Crisis Service for Women finally took the long discussed step to change its name to Self Injury Support. We continue to provide text, email and phone support for anyone in the UK who identifies as a woman, powered as always by our dedicated volunteers.

“There’s so many women out there who want to volunteer, which I always find absolutely amazing. It’s such a hopeful thing to know how many

compassionate, wonderful women are out there in the world, or even just in Bristol!”

*Jess, volunteer and staff, 2018-present*



**The difference that we made to individuals, you know, women who said, nobody has ever listened to me before, nobody’s ever understood me before and nobody’s ever been on my side or stood up for me before: the wonderfulness of that.”**

*Lois, staff, 1994-1996*

## > **How far we've come**

Much more than just our name has changed since Bristol Crisis Service for Women opened the first helpline in 1988. Self injury is no longer a hidden problem and its use as a coping mechanism is better understood, in part because the voices of people using self injury are now part of the discussion about how best to help and support them. Since 2004 the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has published guidance on best practice in treatment of self injury. Its most recent quality standards require that "People who have self harmed are cared for with compassion and the same respect and dignity as any service user."<sup>5</sup> Bristol Crisis Service

for Women, alongside other survivor groups and user-led organisations, has undoubtedly played a role in raising awareness and bringing about these important changes.

**“Bristol Crisis Service and groups like ours and individual campaigners and decent people and allies in services, I think we did turn a tide. I think we did something quite remarkable actually.”**

*Clare S, mental health activist*

“What I have noticed in 40 years of supporting people around self-harm is that attitudes and understanding have improved tremendously.”

*Suzanne, freelance trainer, 2000 to present*

“

**I think the ground up approach that services like BCSW have provided have really rippled out to a kind of culture change.”**

*Jenny, staff, 2008-2012*



5. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs34/chapter/List-of-quality-statements> Accessed 29/11/21



### Looking to the future

There is still more to be done. Though awareness has increased, so has the use of self injury – among men as well as young women. Funding for statutory services, as well as voluntary sector organisations like Self Injury Support has not kept up with need. The controversial diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder is still widely used for people who self injure. The structural problems of society that lead to children and women being abused remain. Support for self injury is needed more than ever.

“I think things have changed and not. I think it’s out there more, but I still

think there’s huge amounts of work to do. I think people are still very disbelieving really of the amount of abuse that does go on.”

*Volunteer, 1993-2000*



**Broadly in mental health I think there’s too much of ‘we need to break the stigma, we need to raise awareness’. I think we have awareness, what we need is resources ... and we need the sort of structural things that cause this stuff in the first place to be tackled but that’s far too dangerous!”**

*Volunteer, 2005-2006*

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Find out more about the history of Bristol Crisis for Women at  
**[www.womenlisteningtowomen.org.uk](http://www.womenlisteningtowomen.org.uk)**

For support and information around self injury visit  
**[www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)**

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