Bedfordshire
Mental Health Alliance

Lunchtime Learning Session

Domestic Abuse and Suicide

The growing risk of suicide and its impact.

SAMARITANS
Bedford

Robert Labe

women's aid
luton
A safe place for women & children

Claire Holcombe



Diane Barnes

mind BLMK

Sally Burdenuik

The Context

347 deaths were recorded between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025:

- 150 suspected victim suicides following domestic abuse (SVSDA)
- 125 domestic homicides

Across a five-year period (1 April 2020 – 31 March 2025), 1,452 domestic abuse-related deaths were recorded:

- 641 domestic homicides (44%)
- 553 suspected victim suicides following domestic abuse (38%)

Source: College of Policing - Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP)
https://www.vkpp.org.uk

Risk Factors

- Poor mental health - existing condition and/or caused by abuse
- Other vulnerabilities – e.g. Neurodivergences, social exclusion
- Relationship difficulties
- Financial issues
- Coercive and controlling behaviour of partner
- Alcohol and drug addiction - often a coping mechanism

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Domestic Abuse, Assistant Commissioner Louisa Rolfe, said:

"The work of the Domestic Homicide Project is fundamental in broadening our understanding of domestic abuse related homicides, including suspected victim suicides….Our report lays bare the scale of deaths following domestic abuse, with at least one victim suicide every four days and murder by a partner or family member every three days. "

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, said:

"Every life lost to domestic abuse is one too many and a failure by our systems. I am grateful to the Domestic Homicide Project for shining a light on this issue, and particularly to strengthen our understanding of domestic abuse related suicide."

Minister for Victims and Safeguarding, Laura Farris said:

"Each person whose death is recorded in this report represents a life lost too soon and a grieving family who have gone through unimaginable pain."

The Guardian 2026: *The first teenage girl has been identified as having been driven to kill herself after domestic violence, as police chiefs blamed violent pornography and "toxic" influencers for being behind a rise in teen abuse. Suicides after domestic abuse have outstripped homicides for the third year running, according to the Domestic Homicide Project, which records deaths in England and Wales after domestic abuse.*

Safe Lives: *New figures released in March 2025 confirmed a devastating reality:* ***more people in the UK are dying by suicide following domestic abuse than are being killed by a current or former partner.*** *This is not a new warning—survivors, families, and frontline professionals have been raising the alarm for years.* ***There is a critical need to treat domestic abuse, mental health, and suicide as part of the same picture****—and why early, joined-up support is essential to saving lives.*



DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SUICIDE

Focus:

Risk, Recognition, Response, and Hope

womensaidinluton.org / info@womensaidinluton.org

Women’s Aid in Luton is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Registered Charity No.1160555. | Registered office: 32 – 42 Duke Street, Luton, Beds, LU2 0HH

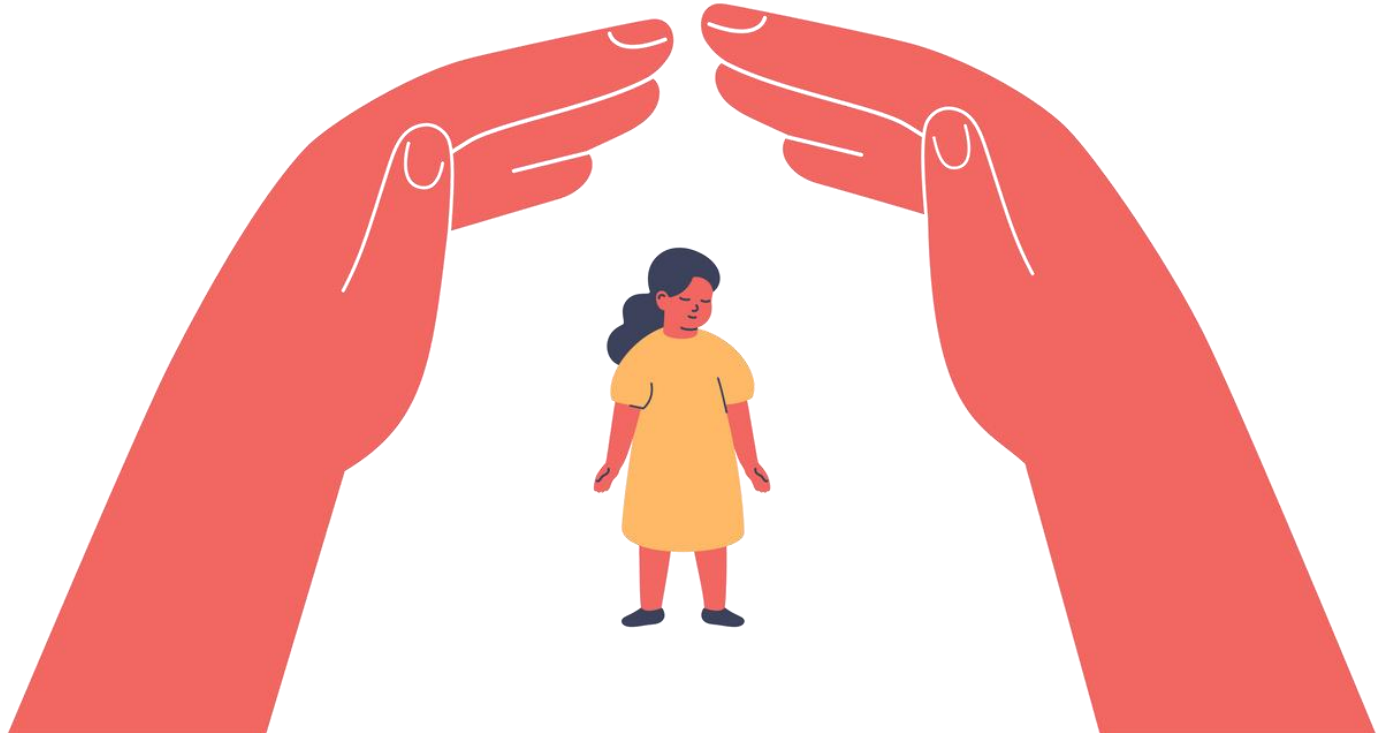
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What **We Offer**

Services we offer:

- Refuge accommodation
- Helpline Service
- Children and Young People Services
- Wellbeing activities
- Awareness and Prevention Work



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Suicide and **Domestic Abuse**

Why this matters:

- Domestic abuse can be fatal in more than one way.
- Risk is not limited to homicide or physical violence.
- Abuse can create entrapment, fear, isolation and hopelessness.
- Suicide risk should be considered as part of safeguarding.



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The Scale of **Domestic Abuse**

- ONS estimated 2.3 million people aged 16 and over experienced domestic abuse in England and Wales in the year ending March 2024.
- This included 1.6 million women and 712,000 men.
- Police recorded 851,062 domestic abuse-related crimes in the same period.
- Domestic abuse is a public health, safeguarding and social justice issue.



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What the Suicide Data

tells us

2024 data tells us:

- The male suicide rate was 17.1 per 100,000.
- The female suicide rate was 5.6 per 100,000.
- Suicide prevention must be considered alongside domestic abuse safeguarding.





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Why Abuse increases Suicide Risk

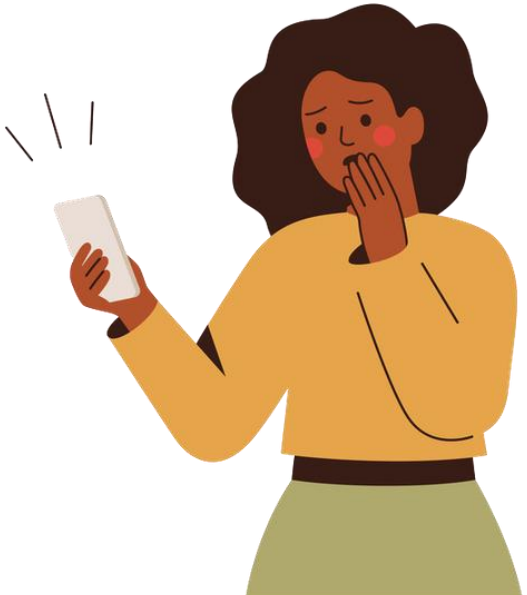
- Domestic abuse may include coercive control, threats, stalking, sexual abuse, financial abuse, isolation, humiliation and emotional degradation.
- Coercive control attacks autonomy, confidence, reality and hope.
- Survivors may feel monitored, blamed, trapped or unsafe to leave.
- The impact can be cumulative and deeply traumatic.

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Key Risk Indicators

- Recent separation, attempted separation or threats linked to leaving.
- Escalating coercive control, stalking or surveillance.
- Non-fatal strangulation, serious assault or threats to kill.
- Threats to harm the survivor, children, family members, pets or self.
- Expressions of hopelessness, feeling trapped or saying there is “no way out”.
- Previous suicide attempts, self-harm, trauma symptoms or recent major loss.

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Respond to Both Risks together

- Do not treat suicidal thoughts as only a mental health issue where abuse is present.
- Consider perpetrator behaviour, access, technology safety, children, housing and finances.
- Use specialist domestic abuse services and safeguarding routes.
- Where risk is high, follow local escalation pathways, including MARAC, police, crisis services or emergency support as appropriate.

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Trauma Informed Language

- Instead of: “Why didn’t you leave?” ask: “What has made it difficult or unsafe to leave?”
- Instead of: “At least it wasn’t physical,” say: “Coercive control and threats can be extremely dangerous.”
- Avoid over-promising confidentiality.
- Explain clearly when you may need to act to prevent serious harm or loss of life.



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What Hope looks Like

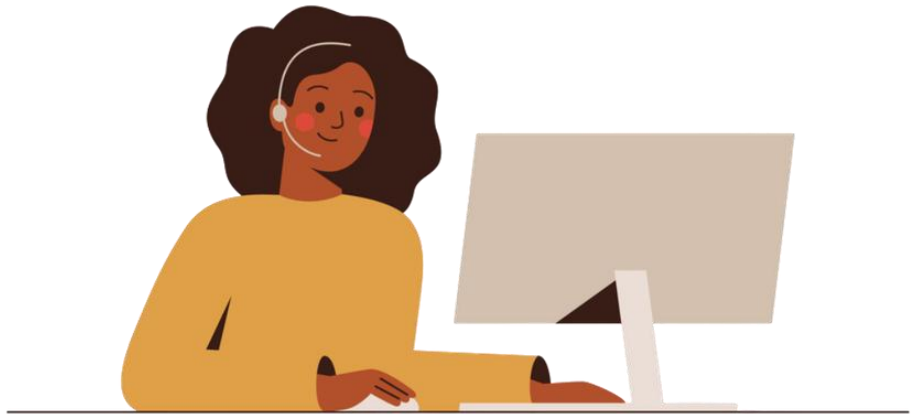
- Hope is practical, not just reassuring words.
- Hope is a safe phone call, a careful referral and accurate documentation.
- Hope is believing the survivor and not blaming them for the abuse.
- Hope is understanding that the perpetrator’s behaviour is the source of risk.



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Support Available

- Domestic abuse is a suicide prevention issue.
- Suicide prevention is a safeguarding issue.
- If someone is in immediate danger, call 999.
- If someone is at immediate risk of suicide or cannot keep themselves safe, call 999 or attend A&E.
- Samaritans: 116 123.
- National Domestic Abuse Helpline and local specialist domestic abuse services can provide support and safety planning.



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CHUMS Suicide Bereavement Service

Diane Barnes

Service Co Ordinator

Our Service

Emotional and Practical Support for those in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire bereaved by suicide.

INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES

- Emotional and practical support
- Individual CYP and adult support
- Peer support and befriending
- Individual support for adults.

PARENTS, SCHOOLS & COMMUNITIES

- Advice for parents and carers
- Support for schools, workplaces and communities
- Professional training

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

- Inquests
- Finance, legal or housing concerns
- Advice around talking about the death

Postvention is Prevention

Timely, appropriate support can help to:

- Reduce the short and long-term impact of suicide bereavement
- Support emotional and physical wellbeing.
- Reduce isolation and strengthen connection
- Identify additional needs and connect people with specialist support
- Help individuals and families rebuild and move forward with hope

Effective postvention forms an important part of wider suicide prevention.

Suicide and Domestic Abuse



Suicide Bereavement can be traumatic, lonely and isolating - further compounded by factors such as Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse and the suicide bereaved

Suicide bereavement often adds significant complexity to grief, including feelings of guilt, anger, confusion and disbelief.

Where domestic abuse has contributed to the death and where the bereaved person has experienced abuse, the risk of complicated and prolonged grief may increase.

Key considerations for the bereaved

- Providing a safe space practically and emotional along with stability is important to establish before support can be effective.
- Practical support may need to take priority before emotional support can be fully accessed.
- Complex grief can impact coping strategies and may affect the wellbeing of both the bereaved person and their family.
- Services should adopt a trauma-informed approach, recognising the impact of domestic abuse, trauma responses, hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, and distressing memories.
- Bereaved individuals benefit from a confidential, non-judgemental, and compassionate environment in which to explore their grief.
- Recovery from domestic abuse and suicide bereavement usually fluctuates and may require longer-term support and additional services to build resilience and adapt to a “changed and different life."

Relationships

Understanding the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved is often key to bereavement support.

CONSIDER

- For the bereaved abuse within the relationship between bereaved and deceased, can complicate the grieving process
- Where the deceased was abusive , those bereaved may experience additional feelings of anger, relief, guilt and isolation especially when others may not have been aware of the abuse – leading to further feelings of isolation.
- The bereaved may grief the loss of a relationship while also feel guilt at thinking “life maybe better going forwards”

- Where the deceased was a victim of abuse, the bereaved can feel additional anger towards those responsible manifesting in a need for justice and accountability.
- The bereaved may have a strong need to understand the circumstances around the death
- Providing opportunities to tell their story can be important to healing with particular attention being paid to “ not all bereaved people have good memories”

BSBS Criteria & Referral Pathway

Criteria

- All age service
- Referred living in Bedfordshire
- Timely referral after death provides positive outcomes

Referral pathway

- Link: Bedfordshire Suicide Bereavement Service | CHUMS
- website referral form: www.chums.uk.com
- Enquries: Telephone: 01525 863924 Email: bsbs@chums.uk.com

Research

“Evidence from England demonstrates that people who have experienced intimate partner violence are significantly more likely to experience suicidal thoughts, self-harm and suicide attempts. Domestic abuse, particularly coercive control and psychological abuse, is increasingly recognised as a significant factor in suicide risk and suicide deaths.”

[thelancet.com], [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov], [thelancet.com]

Research

“While the ONS does not currently publish a national measure of suicides attributable to domestic abuse, ONS analyses identify domestic abuse as having significant long-term impacts including suicide attempts. Complementary UK research has demonstrated a strong association between domestic abuse and suicidality, and national domestic homicide monitoring now records suspected victim suicides linked to domestic abuse." [ons.gov.uk], [vkpp.org.uk], [thelancet.com]

mind BLMK

Crisis Services

- Recovery Lounge
- Crisis Café MK/Phoneline 01525722225

crisiscafe@mind-blmk.org.uk

Recovery Lounge/Crisis Cafe

We are open 365 days a year from 5pm to 11pm

Locations:

- **Bedford Wellbeing Centre**
- **Florence Ball House Bedford**
- **The Lawns Biggleswade**
- **Luton Wellbeing Centre**
- **The Lighthouse Leighton Buzzard**
- **Milton Keynes Crisis Café & Phoneline**

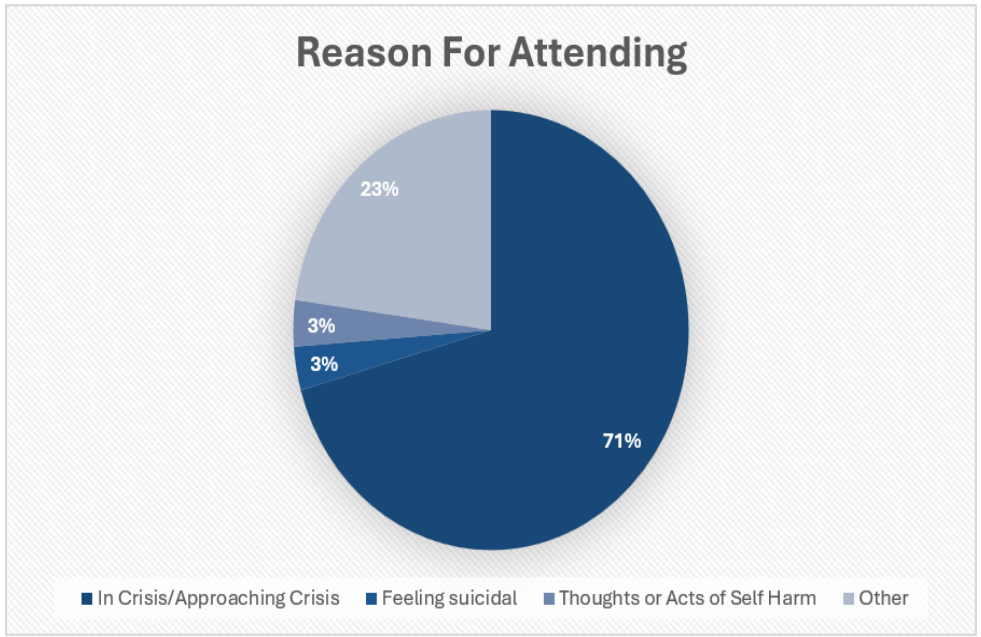
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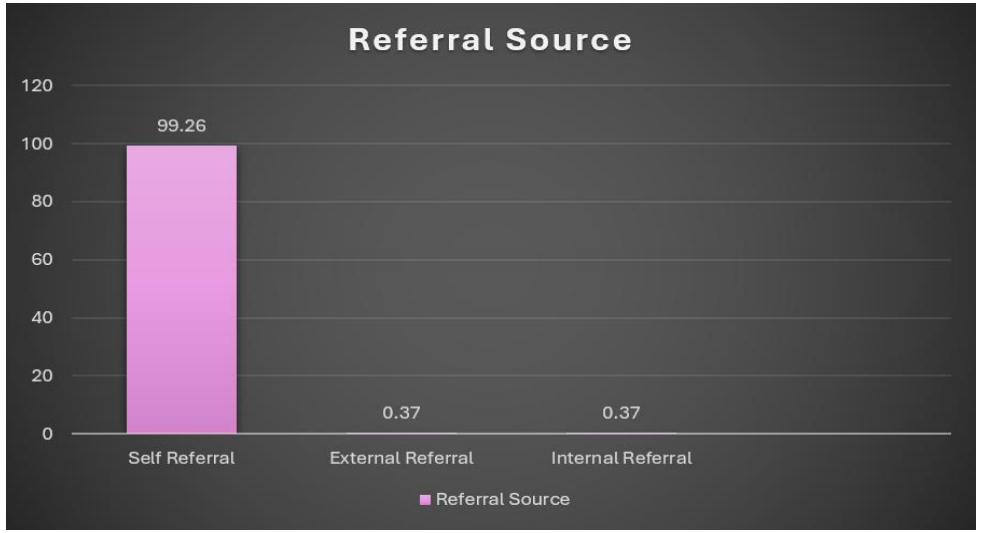
Recovery Lounges & Crisis Cafe

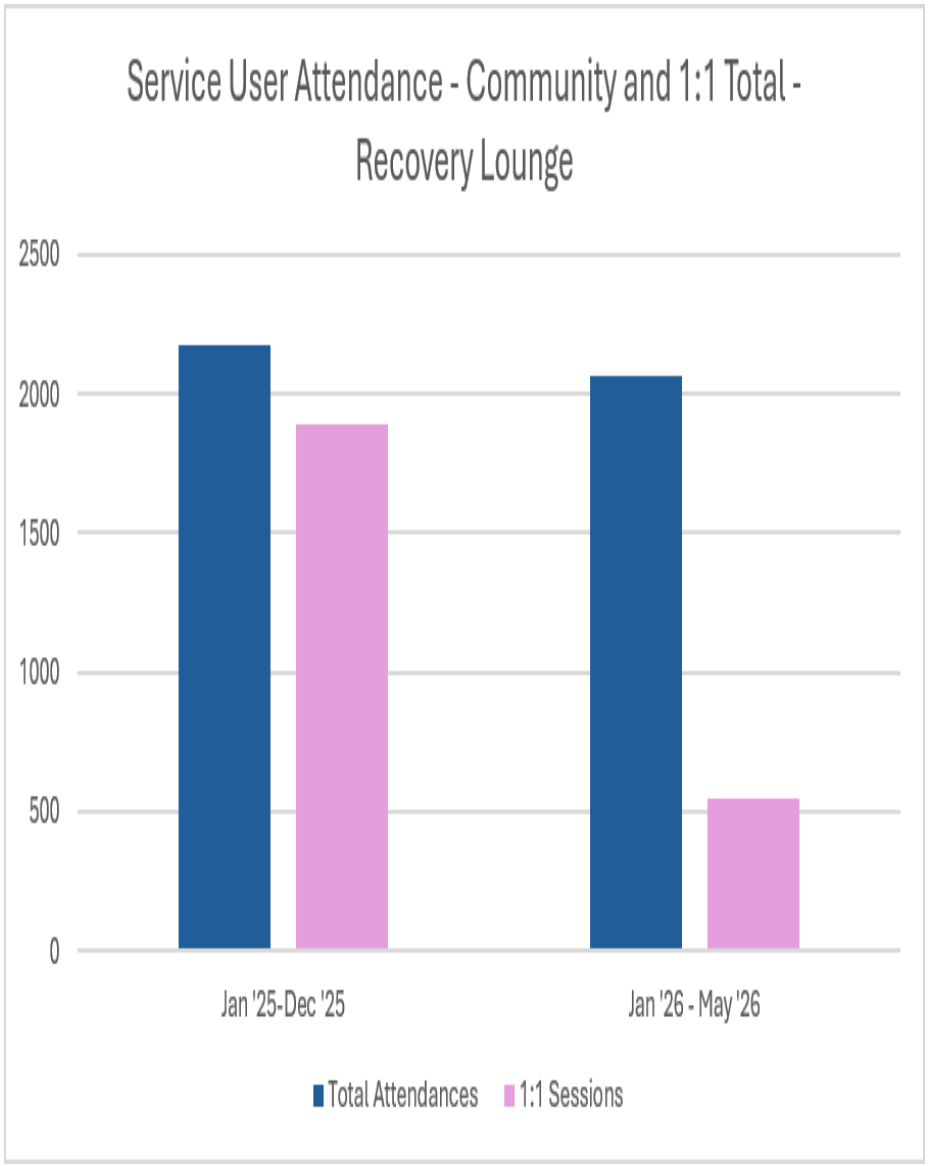
- We work collaboratively with East London NHS Foundation Trust and Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust to deliver services that support individuals in the community, helping to prevent crises and reduce avoidable use of emergency services, including 999, A&E, and Crisis Teams. This enables NHS resources to be used more effectively and improves outcomes for those we support
- The Crisis Café and Recovery Lounges provide a non-judgemental and safe place for those experiencing crisis or to prevent them from entering into crisis.
- We give all service users unconditional positive regard providing a person-centred approach to their care.
- We recognise crisis and prevention of crisis is unplanned, therefore operate a drop in model where no appointments are required.
- We have a clear crisis pathway with NHS, police and ambulance colleagues ensuring duty of care of our service users.
- Working in line with Right Care Person ensures that service users receive the support they require from the right service. This reduces pressures on statutory services and helps to keep people well in the right environment.

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Recovery Lounge Data

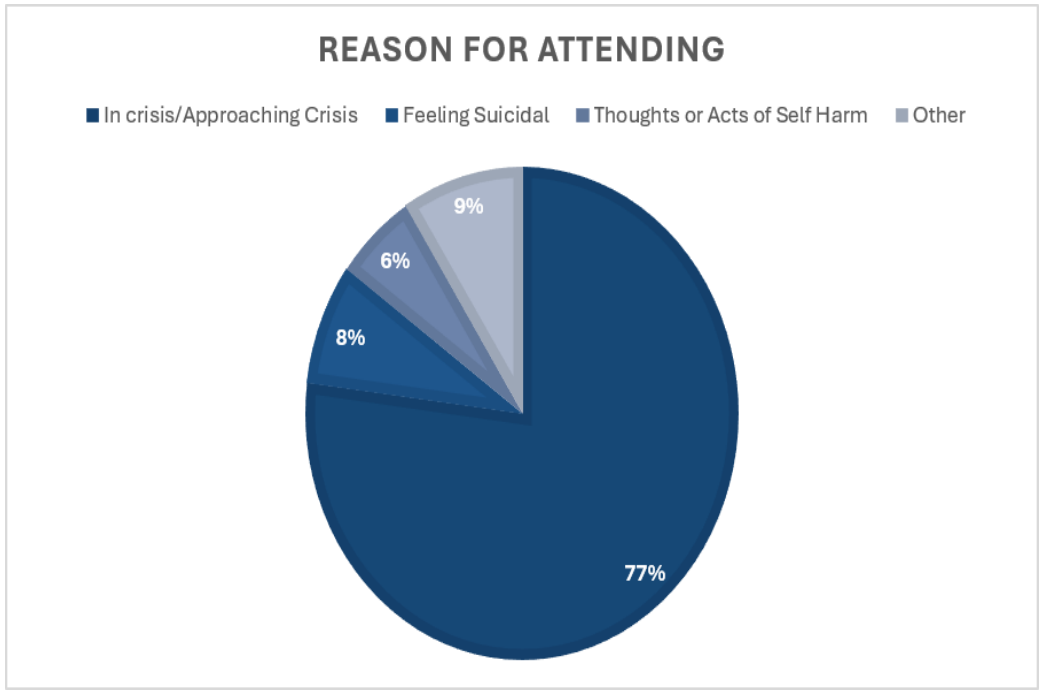


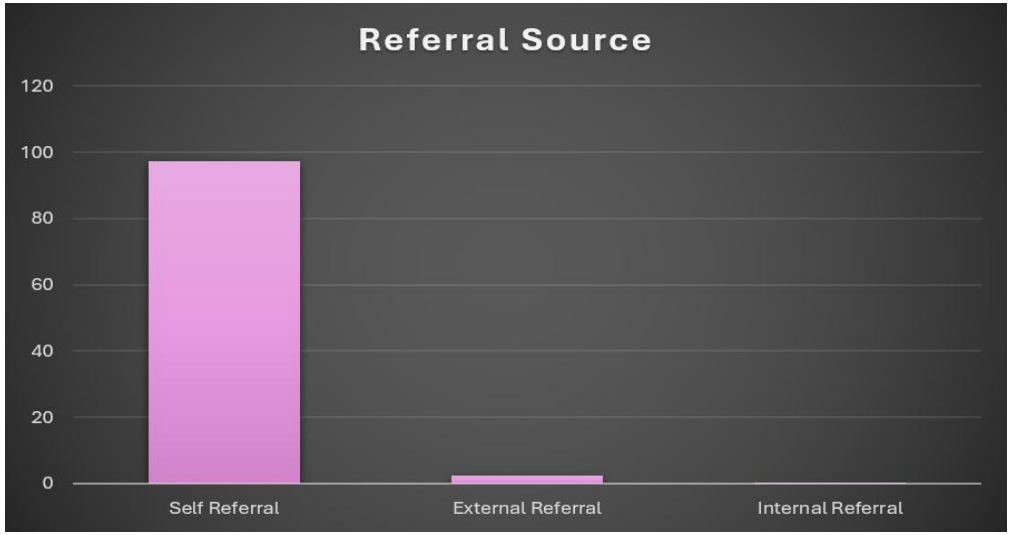


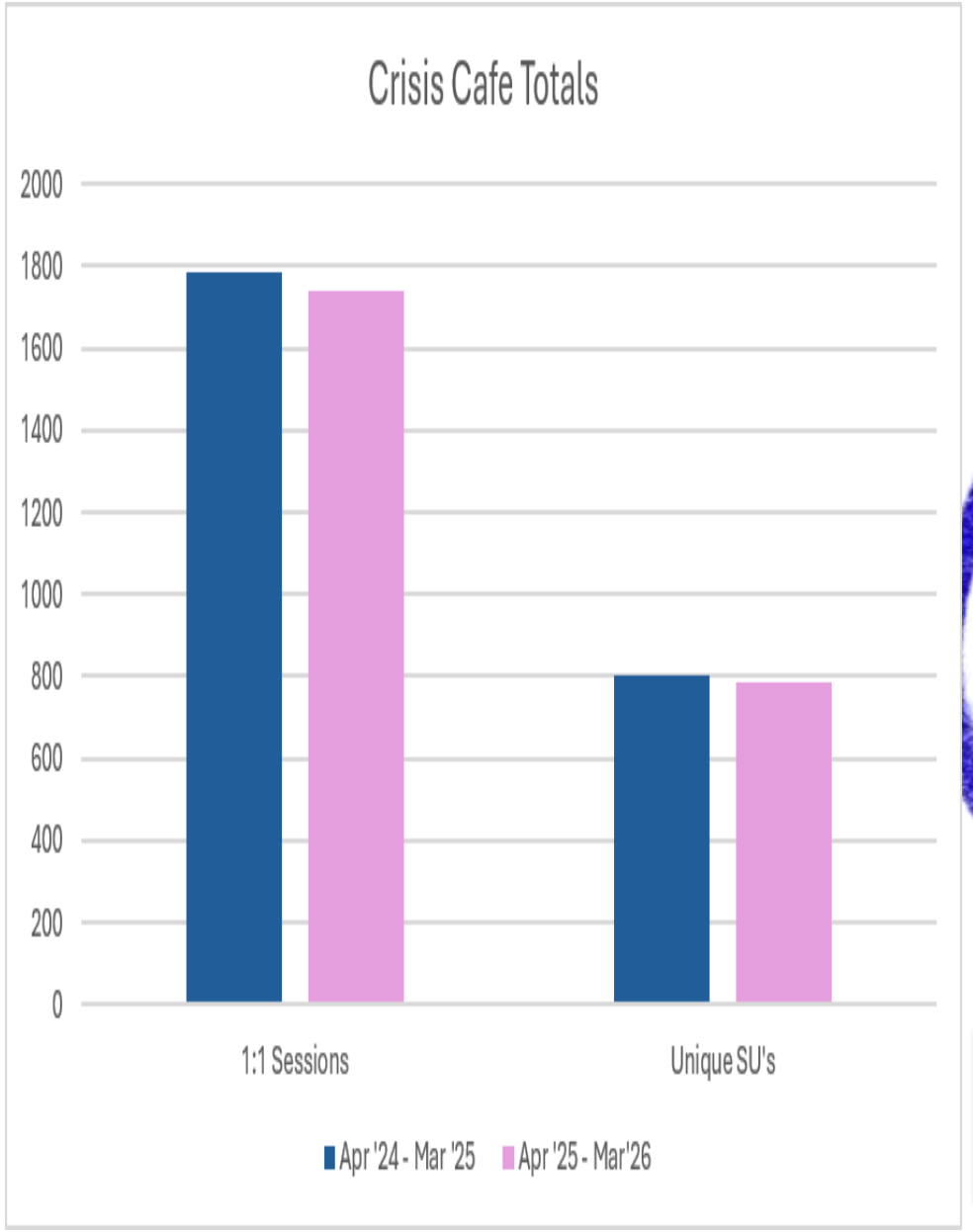


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Crisis Café Data







Recovery Lounges & Crisis Cafe

- The data shows that 98.79% of service users were de-escalated safely without intervention of statutory services
- This reduces the impact on the NHS, Ambulance Service and Police Services
- 96% of Service Users said they could better cope with their mental health after attending the Recovery Lounge and Crisis Café
- 90% of service users felt less suicidal and had less urge to self-harm
- 94% of service users stated they would return for support in the future if they need further support

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Recovery Lounge/Crisis Café

Service user feedback:

"I was really scared to go to the Crisis Café for the first time but the staff were really friendly and let me take my time telling my story."

I couldn't keep safe & thought about going to A&E, but the Recovery Lounge was there for me

It has been a lifeline for me. I really do not think I would be this far without it.

There's always someone there who will listen, even when I don't know what to say.

I feel strong and like I can face tomorrow after visiting the Mind Team tonight.

The Recovery Lounge gave me hope to carry on.

For additional information, please contact:

Sally Burdenuik – Operational Crisis Services Manager

Sally.Burdenuik@mind-blmk.org.uk

Mind BLMK and Bedford Samaritans are working proactively together to reduce suicides, raise awareness and we try to ensure effective suicide prevention measures are in place in organisations, for public and emergency services, in the community and at specific locations (e.g. railways).

We are members of the multi-agency BLMK Suicide Prevention Steering Group, and we work jointly within Bedfordshire Hospitals to improve support for vulnerable patients, including victims of domestic abuse, particularly in the Emergency Department.

Bedford Samaritans represent Samaritans on the Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership and supports the new Domestic Abuse Suicide Prevention Plan.

Signs that something is not right

- Many people struggle to cope at one point or another of their lives. Reaching out to someone could help them know that someone cares, that they are valued, and help them access the support they need.

- Everyone copes and reacts in their own way, but there are some general signs to look out for. For some people, several of these signs might apply - for others just one or two, or none.

Can you put in the Chat examples of signs or indictors that something is not quite right.

Notice behaviour changes **Listen for hopeless statements** **Listen to language around feeling a burden, feeling trapped or isolated.** **Not wanting to talk to or be with people** **Not wanting to do things they usually enjoy** **Not replying to messages or being distant**	**Listen too, for sentences like:** ***"There is no way out, they are better off without me, no one will miss me, I wish I was dead"*** **Are they saying "*What is the point? Nobody can help me; I cannot do this anymore?"**
Talking about feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless Talking about feeling trapped by circumstances they can't see a way out of	Being restless and agitated Angry and aggressive behaviour Being tearful and emotional Finding it hard to cope with everyday things
Engaging in risk-taking behaviour, like gambling or violence Using alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings	A change in their normal routine Being tired or lacking in energy - sleeping or eating more or less than normal

SAMARITANS

A safe space to talk

A range of resources on www.samaritans.org

We are there for those in distress, who are suffering from trauma, or just need someone to talk to.



Emotional and mental wellbeing support available 24/7

"Being listened to lifted a huge weight off my shoulders" – Samaritans caller

"I just wanted to talk to someone without judging me , telling me what to do …It helped me to be able to say anything that was on my mind" - Samaritans caller

Resources:

- Samaritans – 116 123 - telephone helpline 24/7 for emotional and mental wellbeing support for those in distress and for those who have suicidal thoughts. samaritans.org – for a range of resources.
- Women's Aid Luton - 01582 391856 / womensaidinluton.org / info@womensaidinluton.org - supporting women and children affected by domestic abuse. We provide refuge, emotional and practical support.
- Bedford Women's Centre – 01234 316801 / info@bedfordwomenscentre.org.uk - one-to-one support, mentoring, workshops, support groups for women to promote healthy relationships and eradicate Domestic Abuse.
- Mind BLMK - https://www.mind-blmk.org.uk/how-we-can-help/out-of-hours-support/recovery-lounges-formally-known-as-crisis-cafe-2/ - Crisis café MK/ evening Recovery Lounges in Bedfordshire
- Chums - Emotional and Practical Support for Children and Young people and families in Bedfordshire bereaved by suicide - **Phone:** 01525 863924
- Stay Alive App - https://stayalive.prevent-suicide.org.uk/ - tools and resources for those with suicidal thoughts or those worried about someone
- BLMK Suicide Prevention Hub - Homepage - Suicide Prevention Hub - the Hub is a single point of reference for suicide prevention information and resources for professionals and organisations across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes.
- The UK's National Domestic Abuse Helpline is a free, confidential 24-hour service run by Refuge, available **on 0808 2000 247**, offering support, safety planning, and access to specialist services.

Awareness & training

- Mental Health & Wellbeing Training for Organisations | Laura Burke Training – for organisations staff /volunteers who operate in Bedfordshire and MK – includes Domestic Abuse & Suicide training courses
- Women's Aid - womensaidinluton.org / info@womensaidinluton.org
- Mind BLMK - Training and Education - Mind BLMK
- Samaritans (local) – bedford.outreach@samaritans.org – awareness, Listening Skills, Talking About Suicide
- https://suicidepreventionhubblmk.co.uk/training/ - a range of free and paid for training and awareness

Questions or Comments?