

Survivors West Yorkshire and their male-focused Ben's Place online counseling service is survivor-led and focused.

Our vision is to support the development of a range of evidence-based services that are gender-informed and accessible across West Yorkshire.

Our aim is to create a specialist service which easily connects survivors and their supporters to professional services that work well for them.

Our focus is on internet support whilst exploring and developing new off-line options for survivors.

Our objective is via innovation and collaboration to support the self-empowerment of all survivors of sexual violence-abuse by developing robustly evaluated psychological interventions.

Supported by self-help knowledge and social action involvement projects which allow survivors to become an authentic expert resource to support policy and service improvements.

Tell us about your organisation –

Survivors West Yorkshire is a specialist sexual violence support service with a core focus on male survivors of sexual crimes. We use digital tools to deliver localised counselling to boys/men, through our pioneering service Ben's Place. However, we've operated in Bradford since about 2000 becoming an unincorporated org in 2001. So, we've been operating here for a long time.

Why was the organisation founded (what was the initial aim/need) –

In 2000 there was a major CSA report published by the Waterhouse enquiry which looked at sexual violence in a children's home in North Wales called 'Lost in Care'. Our founder was in looked-after care in North Wales during the period the inquiry looked at. In the late 1990's he was working in community mental health services as a Residential Social Worker. When looking for services for his own CSA experiences he found no services in West Yorkshire for male survivors. This prompted him to create Survivors West Yorkshire (SWY). Whilst based in Bradford SWY has always served survivors across the entirety of West Yorkshire so as not to limit our offering.

How has that changed if at all? –

The core aim has stayed the same, to deliver high quality services that are CSA/Rape survivor led and created. If survivors are supported well using a trauma inform and responsive model - they find creative ways to heal and grow often. We are pleased to see the increasing awareness across sectors of being trauma responsive.

What are you most proud of about your organisation –

We are most proud that we've supported 1000sofsurvivors over the last 19 years mostly without core funding. We are also proud of a series of reports we have commissioned over the years under the title "A View From Inside The Box". They have looked at the needs of survivors. We've produced 4 reports in all. Some people have said they were ahead of their time.

What is your greatest challenge in the industry and how could others help you overcome it?

Our biggest issue is the same issue which is facing everybody –funding. The challenge is not to be jaded by that endless process of finding and applying, and keep building quality and sustainability into your service. Remembering it's not about you, it's about your service users. Staying true to yourselves, sticking to what you know. We have been quite good at doing this, but it is still a challenge to stay true one's values in world which seems to forget values at times.

Have you received any support from Community Action along the way?

We've received a lot from old BCVS. We use DIVA and bfunded has been really helpful. We hope it keeps going, it's one of the most useful resources.