

# Counselling saved me - so I now help others

**Volunteers are helping people to cope with stress, trauma, grief and depression - with counselling based in one of our churches**

INGRID Coombs became a counsellor - because it was counselling that helped her to overcome her own trauma.

She was the victim of a hit-and-run accident 17 years ago, and after three years of thinking she could cope, she realised that she needed some help. Her leg was severely damaged and she needed support in dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder.

She initially thought she would just be talking about the shock of the event and the physical pain.

"How wrong I was," she recalls. "The topics of discussion ranged from 'why me?' to 'what if?', from childhood dreams to what was expected of me and how I'm fed up of being 'the victim', to name just a few."

She worked with four separate counsellors over the years, each of whom played a different role. They helped her to make life-changing decisions, find the answers she was looking for, and equip her with the skills to develop into a much happier person.

Given her experience, it's perhaps not suprising that she decided to train to become a counsellor herself. She started her training in 2009, graduated in 2013 and now volunteers with the All Saints Counselling Service (ASCS), based at All Saints Church in Portsmouth.



Ingrid Coombs at All Saints Church and (above right) in the consulting room where she sees clients

She's one of a team of around 15 counsellors, all of whom give their time for free, meaning that counselling is available to all, regardless of their financial situation.

They operate from consulting rooms inside All Saints Church, where confidentiality is guaranteed. Each is set up with two chairs, a low table and a packet of tissues in case things become too much. The counsellor's job is usually to listen to what the client has to say, and to help them to find their own solutions to problems - never to tell them what to do.

Ingrid said: "Being a counsellor is an extremely rewarding job, but above all, it is about helping others to help themselves move closer to the happier, more positive lives they crave."



## What clients say:

**"It helped me 'unravel' personal difficulties and become more confident in dealing with life. Thank you to all involved at ASCS."**

**"I regained my self-confidence through talking, trust and respect. My counsellor was very helpful."**

**"What helped me most was being able to share my thoughts and feelings without burdening family and friends, having time to reflect on my situation and learning boundaries."**

**"My counsellor was gentle and reassuring, and obviously knows her 'stuff'. A very gifted and sympathetic lady. I can't thank and praise this service enough."**

individual every week, for as long as they need. For some people, that security is what they need.

"Trauma comes in many guises and it is only when we allow ourselves to open up and ask for help that we can begin to really deal with what lies beneath. Without the support and help I received from my counsellors, I'm not quite sure where I would be today."

All Saints Counselling Service began in the early 1990s, with the aim of providing a safe space for clergy to talk through issues they were facing. It gradually grew into a broader public service and now works with private individuals from across the local area.

It helps people to work through issues such as grief, depression, trauma, anxiety, stress and abuse, among others. It is a charity, and has recently become part of our diocese's Council for Social Responsibility, and has expanded further.

Team members are all Christians, but they respect the spirituality of the people they see - of all faiths and none. Some people are referred to ASCS by our local churches and may want to talk about faith, but other clients have no link to church at all.

The team now offers coaching alongside counselling, and is partnering on social action projects, such as delivering listening training at the Bridgeway project at St Luke's Church, Southsea, and helping the diocesan safeguarding service to develop and support a team of listeners.

The ASCS director, the Rev Andy Bridgen, said: "In the past year we have seen an increase in people wanting counselling. It is encouraging that people are talking more freely about mental health these days and we are certainly seeing an upswing in people wanting to talk to us, which is great."

## ALL SAINTS COUNSELLING SERVICE

"We would love to expand the service to help more people. We are looking for qualified counsellors to join us and for counsellors in training who are looking for a placement as part of their qualification."

For more details about All Saints Counselling Service see [www.allsaintscounselling.org.uk](http://www.allsaintscounselling.org.uk). To arrange a talk at your church about what the service provides, email: [allsaintscounselling@gmail.com](mailto:allsaintscounselling@gmail.com)