

## **Annual Report**

### **for the year ended 31 December 2022**

This report summarizes the activities of the CHS for the year to 31 December 2022. It includes a review of the activities of our two principal services, namely the Helpline and the Mental Health Services Centre. However, it also looks at other equally important aspects of the CHS, notably the running of our Offices in Avenue des Phalènes, as well as our financial results and publicity activities.

This year saw a long-awaited return to near normal. Although the COVID pandemic is still with us, it seems as though people have learned to live with it. The impact of this on our daily life at CHS has reduced the burden of having to clean rooms after each use and it is nice to be able to walk around the CHS building without having to wear a mask. However, we are now sensitized to the risks of infection (not just from COVID) and have acquired an Air Quality monitor in the main office to ensure that CO2 levels do not get out of control. It is a credit to our office volunteers that we have been able to continue to provide services to our community throughout the pandemic.

#### The Helpline

This has been the first full year of using the Destiny system and whilst not without its challenges, we have made good progress in understanding the main issues and how to correct them before they manifest themselves as problems. The Destiny Fleet application now enables us, on a real-time basis, to check that volunteers have not inadvertently logged themselves out of the system or taken themselves out of the “office” both of which caused phones not to ring.

We are very appreciative of the work of our colleague, Claudia Dumitrescu, who has developed an automated system which takes the weekly Destiny call logs, analyses the data and then populates a series of management reports. This automated process has removed the need for volunteers to manually capture statistics and has the potential to save a significant amount of effort in the future. That said, the Destiny call data cannot capture the essence of a call (i.e., information, support or distress) so we will need to reflect on this point to ensure that valuable trends and insights are not overlooked.

During 2022, the Helpline received around 7,500 incoming calls. This number excludes callers who hang up before speaking to a volunteer. It also excludes calls from a tiny number of callers who, on occasion, can call excessively and have to be temporarily blocked so as to allow other callers to get through to a volunteer. Whilst we aim to provide a full 24-hour service, 7 days a week, there are times when a volunteer is unavailable, especially during the summer holiday months. On other occasions, our volunteers are busy talking to another caller. After taking these factors into account, our volunteers took roughly 5,500 calls in 2022 and spoke for a duration in excess of 1,000 hours. Whilst call numbers are slightly lower than 2021, given the changeover to Destiny in October 2021, the two sets of data are not fully comparable.

We ended the year with a total of 28 volunteers including 4 in training. Whilst we would always like to have more volunteers, this is more than we have had in each of the previous four years. During the year

all new volunteers (as well as a group of more experienced “mentor” volunteers) have gone through the Samaritans On-line Core Development Training Programme which is an excellent resource. The Samaritans training is supplemented by ad hoc sessions arranged by our two Helpline Supervisors, Chana Schneps and Simon Dwyer, which help to focus on specific trends that we see in the types of calls to the Helpline.

We continue to see increases in the number of suicide-related calls to the line, a trend that started during the COVID pandemic but which seems to be accelerating. To some extent this is due to an arrangement with Google who have elevated the profile of the CHS Helpline when people use suicide-related search criteria. This came into effect in May 2022 and also triggered a significant increase in the number of visitors to the CHS website.

It is a tribute to all our Helpline volunteers that they have continued to support not only our community here in Belgium but an increasing number of callers from outside Belgium.

### The Mental Health Services Centre (MHSC)

The MHSC has had another busy year, although intake numbers at 1,155 are lower than the record set in 2021 of 1,402 intakes. Nevertheless, these numbers are impressive and have continued to put strain on all our therapists as well as our office volunteers. As the MHSC continues to operate at full capacity, it is not possible for us to accommodate numbers of this magnitude. Accordingly, roughly 43% of all intakes had to be referred out to other medical practitioners during the year, a slight decrease over 2021 (45%).

At the end of the year, the Clinical Team numbered 19 therapists, the same as this time last year, although this has been impacted by some recent departures. We are sad to say farewell to Lara Brandel and Alessia Ciani who have both been with us for many years, but there are several applications in the pipeline and we will soon be back to full capacity. We also have a further 3 Affiliated Members who offer complementary services such as a dietician, a mindfulness coach and a family mediator. We are always on the look out to expand the diverse services we can offer.

During the year our Clinical Director decided to stand down for personal reasons. The role of Clinical Director is an onerous one and is on a voluntary basis. We will be looking at this issue as a priority for 2023. The remaining Clinical Directorate team of Berta Figueras and Nikki Josephson have recently been joined by Vanessa Goodman and between them they have done an excellent job to ensure the smooth running of the MHSC, especially given the increased regulatory challenges of GDPR compliance and, more recently, a requirement for all psychiatrists to maintain Electronic Patient Records (EPR) which might expand to include clinical psychologists as well.

To address the above challenges, we have established two Working Groups. One has been looking at the related issues of GDPR and EPR, the other has been looking at Governance of the entire organization, not just the way in which we manage the Clinical Team. By the end of the year CHS was on the point of signing a software licence with CGM for their Daktari EPR software. As an initial step our four psychiatrists as well as the CHS Office will use the software. Our clinical psychologists are likely also to subscribe pending the outcome of discussions within their professional regulatory body. The Governance Working Group will not conclude its discussions before the New Year but I am encouraged by the progress they are making.

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## Financial Results

The last three years have seen the CHS maintaining a surplus and, despite the challenges of the pandemic, we have been able to generate another surplus in 2022 of €12,403. Whilst smaller than our 2021 surplus of €22,767, this year's result is better than budget by nearly €4,000.

A brief summary is shown in the table below:

	<b>Total CHS</b>		<b>MHSC</b>		<b>Helpline</b>	
	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>
	<b>€</b>	<b>€</b>	<b>€</b>	<b>€</b>	<b>€</b>	<b>€</b>
<b>Receipts</b>	155,440	147,555	117,531	115,152	37,909	32,403
<b>Expenditure</b>	(143,037)	(124,788)	(107,401)	(92,511)	(35,636)	(32,277)
<b>Surplus (Deficit)</b>	<b>12,403</b>	<b>22,767</b>	<b>10,130</b>	<b>22,641</b>	<b>2,273</b>	<b>126</b>

The Mental Health Services Centre continued to perform well during the year. Whilst expenditure is considerably higher than in 2021, this was largely anticipated. Our total expenditure for 2022 was in line with our budget as were the respective costs for the MHSC and Helpline. Inevitably, utility and property costs are the principal culprits for these increases although we have also seen some one-off expenditure during the year associated with our plan to adopt the CGM Daktari software.

The Helpline showed a small surplus this year thanks to a healthy increase in donations. We received our first foreign donation through Transnational Giving Europe (TGE) of over €11,000. This was a wonderful surprise (albeit sourced by two of our former Board members) and validates all the efforts put in to be accepted by TGE as an organization to which donations made through TGE will qualify for tax relief in the donor's home country.

Despite seeing a return to normal life post COVID, our event income has yet to pick up to the levels seen pre-pandemic. We repeated our 50KM walk again in 2022 but didn't achieve the same level of contribution as in 2021. We will reflect on this and tweak our formula for 2023! Although not reflected in this year's results because donations are treated on a cash basis, December 2022 was an excellent month with over €7,000 of donations coming in through the British Chamber of Commerce in Belgium and the Brussels British Community Association. Our thanks to these two long-time supporters who have made sure that 2023 will start on an extremely positive note.

During the year we again drew down €15,000 (2021: €15,000) from the cumulative US Dollar and Euro funds held on our behalf by the King Baudouin Foundation. Although donations into these funds are received on a regular basis, they are only taken to income when physically received into the CHS bank account. As at 31 December 2022 there was approximately €40,760 (2021: €37,600) and US\$10,936 (2021: US\$5,936) still held by KBF and available for draw down in future years. Cash balances at 31 December 2022 are strong at just over €178,000 excluding our rental guarantee.

## Other matters

At Board level we have seen a number of changes. We say farewell to Alessia Ciani and Marc Hansen and thank them both for their commitment to CHS. We also welcome Jonathan Murray, the current COO at the International School in Brussels (ISB) and Patrick Oliver, a retired lawyer with a wealth of Brussels-

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based experience, who both joined the Board before Christmas. We are all looking forward to working with them both in 2023.

As is the usual practice of the Clinical Directorate, both Nikki Josephson and Berta Figueras stood down from the Clinical Directorate at the end of 2022. It has been a great privilege to work with Nikki and Berta during a difficult year where they have both done more than their fair share of heavy lifting! We welcome Marta Nordhoek who joins the Directorate as from 1 January 2023 and she will work alongside Vanessa Goodman who has agreed to stay on. We hope another member of the Clinical Team will join Vanessa and Marta before too long.

It had been standard procedure for one of the Clinical Directorate to be elected as the CHS Clinical Director and join the CHS Board. As part of our Governance review, we will be considering alternative constructs that aim to improve clinical team engagement at Board level but also help spread the workload more evenly between members of the Clinical Directorate.

2022 saw yet another edition of the CHS calendar with a further increase in the number of copies printed. We also introduced our School Calendar Cover art competition this year following the inspirational painting by a student at St John's International school that was our 2022 cover. We received an interesting variety of entries. In retrospect, our guidance to students was a little too abstract such that none of the entries were judged suitable for our calendar cover. However, the three best entrants were all featured in this year's calendar. We will endeavour to be more clear next year! Our thanks, as always, to Geoff Brown and Victor Osweiler and their team of helpers in producing the 2023 calendar.

### Conclusion

2022 has been another year of challenge but a year in which further progress has been made. We continue to enjoy a sound financial position, the Helpline has an increasing number of volunteers to cover the calls, and the statistical data we now collect from Destiny provides us with an opportunity for re-evaluating how we allocate our resources. Whilst 2022 was a difficult year for the Clinical Team, I am confident that we enter the New Year with a clear vision of what needs to be done to address the increasing regulatory burden that Mental Health practices now have to face.

My thanks to the entire CHS family, as always, for everything they do to support our community here in Belgium and beyond.

Jeremy Jennings  
President – 17 April 2023