

BE ME PROJECT

identity ~ truth ~ purpose



10 YEARS



TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT 1ST AUGUST 2024 - 31ST JULY 2025

“

I don't want it to end! It made me look forward to Monday! It was always fun and I always felt very welcomed and comfortable. It starts the week off good and I feel better after Be Me.

Participant

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CHALLENGES

- Continuing sharp increase in the need for mental health support for young people, and emotionally-based non attendance
- Schools acknowledging that they cannot educate without wellbeing intervention
- It is harder to get well qualified course leaders for part time work in the cost of living crisis

OUR RESPONSE

- Exploration of new ways of providing our services that can get to significantly more people cost-efficiently
- Developing new ways of providing longer-term support to beneficiaries and schools beyond the current courses
- Investing in a larger more stable and well trained team



WE HAVE
SUPPORTED
754 PEOPLE
THIS YEAR

CHAIR'S REMARKS

This financial year 2024/25 saw Be Me Project celebrate its 10th anniversary. From a small start in 2014, CEO Lu Mason created the 'She is' course to run in one school when she saw how so many girls needed to build their confidence, positivity and self-esteem. That year she ran two courses. Our 10th year saw us run 141 courses in 22 schools - a record 754 beneficiaries, both male and female. Our analysis of course outcomes has shown that wellbeing grew by 50% amongst our beneficiaries.



It has also been a year of challenges. It is harder to get funding, particularly long-term multi-year, as many grant funders and trusts are hit with an ever-increasing number of applications. Charities are finding it harder to keep going and many have not survived the last year. The demand for our services has increased, as has the complexity of the mental and behavioural needs of our beneficiaries, whilst the cost-of-living crisis has increased our need to provide stable long-term work for our team - all have put pressure on Be Me Project. I have been so impressed with those in Head Office, plus our course leaders and helpers who have trod a difficult path with great wisdom and sensitivity and enabled us to grow the work.

We continue to thrive with a strong culture and a passionate team with lived experience. Funding needs are largely met for the next year, and we are particularly grateful to Joseph Rank for a multi-year core grant that has helped us invest in our structure, as well as the other multi-year funders who enable us to plan with confidence for at least the short/medium term. We are grateful, too, for those who have supported Be Me Project, either through fundraising or regular giving, and for those who have offered their time and expertise to enable us to continue to grow and develop.

The year ahead is already full of new beneficiaries, some new schools, new leaders and several new initiatives that can help with our longer-term resilience.

I want to extend a huge thank you to the many people who are involved with the Be Me Project - whether they provide leadership and direction; admin and processes; fundraise; lead and help on courses; pray and support; oversee finance or design; give and encourage - you are all so valuable and we could not do any of this without you.

Thank you.

Alison Thomas, Chair

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Be Me is a great group project they help build confidence and things like that and I would recommend it to anyone

Participant

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“

It's been great! feel more understood and find it a bit easier to talk about how I feel

Participant

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OUR STORY

Be Me Project has grown significantly since it started in 2014. In 2022-23 we expanded by over 50%. It has continued to grow in each subsequent year, and in the last year reached a record 754 beneficiaries with 141 courses in 22 schools. Our main centre of provision is around our Head Office in Surrey, whilst we also have a significant operation in Cumbria. Our strategic plan is to consolidate and maintain our size through 2025-6, whilst also innovating in new areas to provide longer term beneficiary support through longer term follow on, mentoring and volunteering opportunities.

Our courses are 'free of charge' for the host organisation and participants so that they can be accessed by vulnerable or disadvantaged members of the community. We will continue to ensure that a high proportion of our courses are in areas of social deprivation such as North Leatherhead, Goodwyns and Chart Downs in Surrey, and lower income areas of Barrow in Cumbria.

We have a strong delivery team in place, with course leaders who have lived experiences to draw on, and who are supported with a



programme of wellbeing check ins and training.

We continue to receive excellent feedback from participants, parents of participants and schools. For example, from two schools this year:

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The courses have proved an extremely effective way for our students to work together to build their emotional resilience. The Be Me Project offered our students a supportive and nurturing environment, which gave them the opportunity to engage with insightful discussions whilst carrying out practical exercises. Students have left sessions feeling far more positive

Senior Teacher

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Knowing the Be Me Project provides a safe, protected time for students struggling in school is really reassuring for support staff. The reality is that we are very stretched at times and these sessions improve the wellbeing of students. Your leaders are so helpful and approachable

Senior Teacher

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Our programme is inspired by a theory of change:

Be Me Project exists to give young people a better start in life. It is based on a theory of change; the outputs from our courses are improved self-esteem and confidence, and greater positivity. As a result, young people are able to better recognise and value their self-worth, enjoy an improved educational experience, strengthen family/peer relationships, and ultimately, they have a better start in life with improved resilience and mental wellbeing.



OUR AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Be Me Project uses its bespoke discussion-based courses to improve the mental wellbeing of vulnerable people in our community, primarily in schools. We have two courses - She Is and Who Am I? - which run over 7-9 weeks with sessions of 1-hour per week, for either boys or girls, typically in Years 8-9 but including some Year 7 and 10.

Specifically, we aim to:

- Improve self-esteem (like being the way I am, perceived wellbeing)
- Improve confidence
- Improve positivity (fewer negative thoughts, managing emotions, less anxiety, better resilience)

Participants complete an emotional barometer survey at the start and end of the course. This means we can measure change and impact of the course against the key outcomes. Improvements in these areas benefit beneficiaries in the short/medium term by:

- Helping them integrate better into the education system/ community
- Build strategies for coping with difficult situations and identifying boundaries
- Build relationships with peers and family
- Signpost to further support or be an aid before further professional support is available

In each course we try to ensure that the participants relate to each other, to help them get the best out of the sessions and to keep up long-term positive friendships. In the longer term, the impact is an improved educational experience and more confident and able members of the community.

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It helped my daughter a lot. She said how good the Be Me course was, which is praise indeed from a teenager! Thank you for giving her the opportunity to learn about herself during these challenging years. I think the opportunity to learn about yourself and your social environment in a safe space was absolutely invaluable and we are so grateful she had this chance

Parent

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HOW WE HELP

Be Me Project supports young people struggling with depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and who are struggling with their mental health. Those who work with us have lived experience so can empathise with our participants and not judge them. A good way to get an overview of how we help is via our 6-minute video on the front page of our website www.bemeproject.org

Over the last three years we have increased our focus on longer term follow up. We have always had individuals who go on to become course assistants, mentors or even help in our office, but we now actively seek to follow up all beneficiaries with the option of drop-in sessions and a contact six months later on, along with providing some positive reminders on our social media platforms. In some schools we now place a regular team in school one lunchtime per week for anyone who wishes to talk. We have been working in many of our schools for 8+ years, and so our leaders have good relationships with pupils across the year groups and with staff. When there are significant incidents, such as a death, we may be asked to go into school and be there to support affected students.



754 BENEFICIARIES
141 COURSES IN
22 SCHOOLS

APPROX. 2
BENEFICIARIES PER
GROUP ARE REFERRED
WITH SPECIAL
EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
AND A HIGH
PROPORTION ARE
NEURODIVERSE

We ask participants, "What one positive thing can you take away from the course, and tell yourself every day?"
Here are some of the replies:

"Focus on the step in front of you, not the whole staircase."

"Keep trying, never give up and don't worry about what others think of you."

"To be kind and to be confident and to be yourself."

"It's okay to be different."

"You don't have to be perfect."

"You don't need lots of fake friends, you only need a few good ones."

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



10 YEAR BIRTHDAY

Be Me Project was ten years old in 2024! In October we held a music, cheese and birthday cake celebration in a local church to thank everyone who has supported us over the years. It was moving to see how some of the young people who experienced the course years ago have grown into young adults.



THREE PEAKS CHALLENGE

Following the success of the national Three Peaks challenge last year, the intrepid team of supporters took on the Yorkshire Three Peaks 12-hour challenge and raised nearly £5,000. As well as raising money, this is a great opportunity for us to hear from those who want to give; for example, one donor wrote on our fundraising page "Thank you for your amazing work! You have helped my daughter more than you will ever know!"

TEAM

We have a team of six people employed part time by the organisation, including a Senior Management Team of two, a Grants & Trusts Manager, an Office Manager and two of our key course leaders. Our office in Dorking is a hub for all of our Surrey leaders and we also have regular course leader meetings and evening training sessions to ensure good communication, shared values and good quality control. This year we carried out a survey of our team engagement, and received top scores for 'Proud to be a Member of this Charity', 'Proud of the work I do', 'Understand the Goals and Objectives', and the 'Vision and Goals are important to me'. The team asked for more opportunities for training and to talk to each other, and we have implemented regular team meetings as well as more social events.



LOCAL NETWORKING

We meet with local charities and organisations to share and learn, including Mole Valley Partnership, Surrey Youth Focus and Surrey Community Action, and we attended the Community Foundation Surrey 20th birthday and their networking events.



CHURCHES

We remain very grateful to those churches and individuals from churches who support us. Be Me Project took part in the Guildford Diocese Youth Catalyst conference, where we led a session for 60 young people on identity and influences, and we also worked with this organisation for their mission week in a Church of England school.



IN SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES

Several of our schools have given “thank you” donations to our work or fundraised for us to contribute to the cost of a course; we are always encouraged by this kind of support. We aim to work with schools beyond the courses by taking part in their initiatives such as wellbeing events at three of our schools; one for parents and two for young people. We also support school community projects where we can, for example we took our beneficiaries to a school project at the hospital garden. Our CEO also managed to get up to Cumbria in term time this year, to see the schools there in action.

We now collect teacher feedback; 87% said they had seen evidence that courses had impacted positively on the emotional wellbeing of the students that attended.



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Be me is a really good place to express yourself and find the good in each other.

Participant

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PARENT FEEDBACK

Nearly 1 in 5 parents responded to our first parent survey to find out the impact they have seen in their child from our courses. 70+% said they had seen an improvement in confidence and positivity in their child since attending a Be Me course and well over half said that the course had helped their child a lot. As a result of feedback, we have instigated a parent page on our website.



ONGOING GOVERNANCE

Of note, we assessed and improved our quality assessment, revised our fundraising strategy, carried out a strategic review and looked at succession planning.

NEW INITIATIVES

We are exploring the idea of having service delivery partners with a new cost structure across a range of locations for our Who Am I? course and we trialed this in the summer term. We will develop this further in the year ahead, as a potentially exciting way of reaching a wider range geographically. As part of this initiative, we revised our course handbook, adding many more optional activities for leaders to draw on. We are also trialing wellbeing workshops where courses are not suitable, either in school, or in the community in school holidays.

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A great community that can be easy to talk to. A break away from everything else. Really loved this!

Participant

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“

I really love doing Be Me because it is one hour every week I get to relax and chat. It's really fun and relaxing. It has helped. If I could do it again I would.

Participant

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FUTURE STRATEGIC AIMS AND ASPIRATIONS

We will continue with our much-needed courses to enable amazing changes in young people's lives and will expand into more schools within our core area of Surrey: at least two new schools in the next year. Specifically, we aspire:

- To build on our strong roots in the community, consolidate our existing partnerships and grow new partners, so that we are known throughout Surrey and Cumbria as a source of support for young people.
- To grow our teams with more volunteers and course leaders, investing in their wellbeing and training, and providing them with regular, sustainable work.
- To develop our longer-term beneficiary support, including, where we can, a weekly lunchtime additional session so that pupils can connect on a regular basis and continue to improve their wellbeing. We also aim to grow some of them into 'young leader' roles.
- Secure new multi-year funders to expand and provide long-term sustainability for our work.
- Explore the role of service delivery partners as a way of expanding our work cost-effectively.

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I have loved seeing Be Me Project grow over the last ten years into the wonderful charity it is today.

Our early ideas and passions have flourished into huge opportunities and over the years this has had a lasting impact on lives. I never tire of seeing young people grow in confidence and self-esteem, learning to recognise their unique value and worth. In a world where they face increasing new challenges, watching them rediscover joy and hope is heart-lifting and means I never tire of leading this wonderful organisation

”

Lucy Mason, Be Me Project CEO

