



Could Raphael, the Jewish Counselling Service, be one of our community's best kept secrets? Certainly, when I mention the name, I am often met with blank looks, a response that has hardly changed since I became involved with the organisation some 14 years ago.

So what **is** Raphael? A registered charity for over 30 years, with the honour of having the Chief Rabbi as a Patron, Raphael provides a wide range of counselling services to individuals and couples whose relationships and feelings cause them distress at home, at work or socially. They may be dealing with bereavement, illness, relationship difficulties, trauma, depression, anxiety, lack of confidence, low self esteem, or generally struggling with the daily stresses of life. Such is the ever increasing need for our services, Raphael's counsellors are currently seeing more than 90 clients each week, whilst over 100 clients completed their counselling in the past year alone.

To meet this demand, our highly skilled, voluntary counsellors provide a safe, confidential, non-judgemental space in which thoughts and feelings can be discussed. As a member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and being bound by its Ethical Framework for Counselling Practice, training and supervision for Raphael's counsellors are provided in-house to ensure that professional standards are maintained.

Clients can self-refer, or be referred by family, friends, GPs, Rabbonim, or welfare organisations.

Clients come to Raphael for a safe haven to discuss their emotional problems, often because they have no-one else to whom they can turn, or because they simply don't want to divulge their feelings to those closest to them. Maybe they think their problems will be summarily dismissed or maybe they just don't want 'to trouble anyone'. Adults, unlike children, are good at masking their real feelings, at pretending that all is well.

Emotional illness can't necessarily be seen and, unlike a broken leg, it is not instantly obvious. If you notice someone with a limb in plaster, it will register that they have a condition which will heal within a matter of weeks. The vital difference between such a person and someone who is experiencing an emotional crisis is that an emotional crisis is rarely visible, is longer lasting and will take time to resolve, if ever.

We are often asked to categorise our workload by 'trends'. Unfortunately, our work cannot be pigeonholed in this way.

However, one trend we can't deny is that, perhaps inevitably, our clients are becoming less and less able to meet the cost of their sessions. And so it is precisely at those times, when counselling might be most beneficial, that financial constraints send it to the bottom of the priority list. But Raphael turns no-one away for financial reasons.

The following brief case study, which has been amended to protect client confidentiality, is just one example of how Raphael helped a client:

Naomi lived alone and had no close relatives. She had been having counselling for depression and low self esteem for nearly a year when she was made redundant. Soon after, she wrote to cancel her counselling sessions as she could no longer afford them. Her counsellor wrote back saying she felt it would be helpful to meet at least once more to talk about what had happened and that she would be there for Naomi's next session time. Naomi attended this session and together they negotiated a manageable reduced fee.

Naomi had convinced herself that she wanted to stop rather than admit she needed help. It had been difficult enough for her to start counselling in the first place, as she couldn't afford to pay the full amount even then, so she felt reluctant to ask to pay less. The counsellor's response, however, enabled her to experience, despite her evident concerns, what it was like to be accepted unconditionally. As a consequence, her continuing counselling saw her bouts of depression become less frequent and less intense and she finally found a new job.

So what of the future? Raphael counselling has always been available in London and the Home Counties and we have recently identified other regions that would benefit from our services. We are very excited by the first part of our expansion plans, which means that counselling services are now available in Redbridge and surrounding areas.

To learn more about Raphael and the services it provides, or to read about it in our clients' own words, please visit our website.

And if you, or someone you know, might benefit from Raphael's services, please phone 0800 234 6236 - a trained counsellor will respond to your message, usually within 24 hours.

Roberta Coffey - Chairman

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