



The
Apple Tree
Centre

Wellbeing and Therapy for Children, Young People & Families

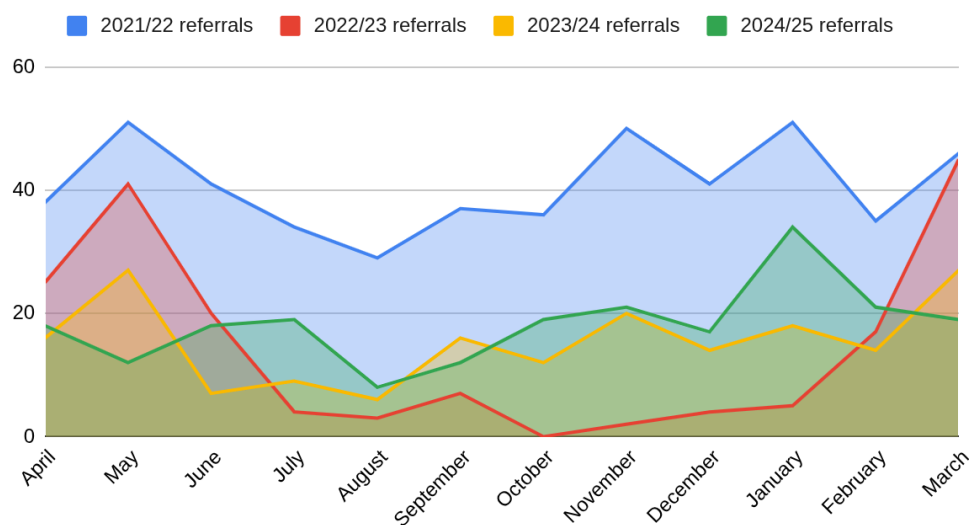
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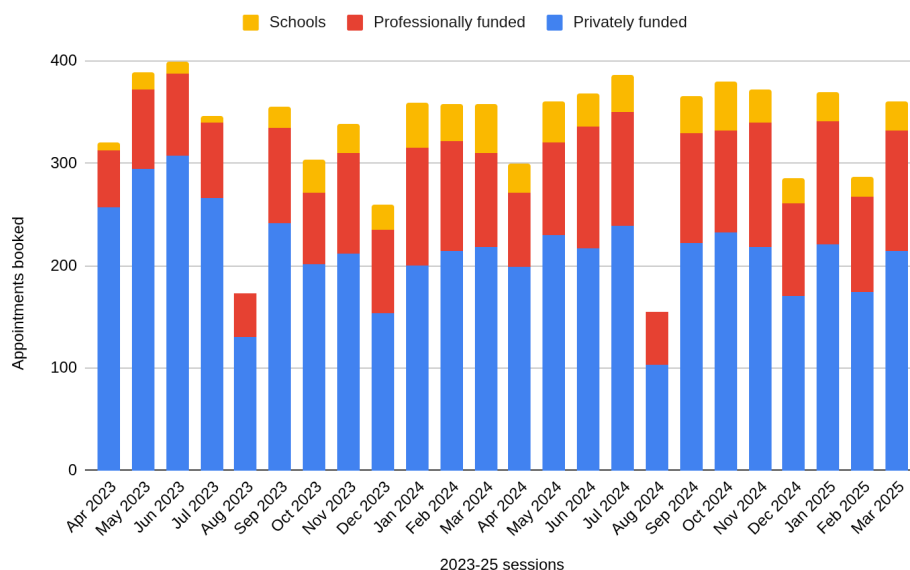
Annual Evaluation Report

Summer 2025

Number of referrals



Appointments offered by month



Big Achievements

Since our last report, we have:

- Run the centre with three employed therapists, six associate therapists and two students on placement.
- Increased our therapeutic service within a Wickersley Academy Trust school from one day a week in a primary provision to include one day a week in a secondary provision.
- Prioritised work with adopted and looked after children and their families.
- Developed in-house written guidance for all Therapists to ensure a thorough practical and ongoing understanding of the Apple Tree Centre policies and procedures, particularly in relation to report writing and record keeping, safeguarding, competence and consent for therapy, and work with parents and carers.
- Designed resources for parents and carers, in particular presenting Therapeutic Limit Setting principles in a style consistent with our overall approach
- Maintained relationships with post adoption social work teams by attending One Adoption meetings alongside providers from Sheffield, Rotherham and Doncaster
- Supported two trainee therapists in placement and successfully recruited one of them as an associate therapist.
- Offered short-term therapy to young people on our waiting list during school holidays.
- Continued to offer one-off supportive appointments to parents and carers in therapists' cancellation slots and in school holidays
- Improved our referral process to ensure that we capture all necessary information at the outset.
- Successfully run a busy and complex therapy service taking account the ongoing challenges of menopause and its impact on both directors
- Worked with therapists to ensure a thorough understanding and a clearer protocol regarding establishing consent, including robust assessment of Gillick competency where appropriate
- Researched and adopted a system of standardised measures for monitoring the effectiveness of our work in relation to adopted and care experienced children and young people, in response to changing requirements of social care teams and funding bodies
- Both directors undertook Clinical Supervision training, to support our personal and professional development and underpin our role in developing trainee therapists
- We provided secure storage for bikes in our garden and have received positive feedback regarding this

- The Centre Manager represented the Apple Tree Centre at a conference of services for LGBTQIA+ young people and their families.
- Offering employment to therapists has enabled us to support one of our team through pregnancy and maternity leave, and arranged appropriate transitions for those children and young people who wanted to continue therapy.

Significant Challenges

- Balancing the needs of clients and therapists in response to the continuing cost of living crisis. We plan to increase our payments to associate therapists for privately funded therapy from September 2025, but this has necessitated an increase in fees for parents and we recognise the financial strain this puts on the families we aim to support.
- Responding to the demands of the ASGSF to provide full cost breakdown quotes for all our services and the subsequent teething problems
- Navigating the uncertainty and unprecedented gap in funding confirmation for our ASGSF funded families as well as their therapists
- Responding and adapting to the subsequent 40% reduction in the Adoption Support funding available to children. We are now sharing information about self-funding with all parents/carers at the beginning of therapy, to give the option of continuing longer term without the pressure of recommending this later.
- Recruiting suitably skilled therapists into our team has continued to present a significant challenge. We are aware of the need to provide robust and sometimes intensive supervision and support to therapists during their probationary period, and are working with training providers to promote adequate and appropriate skills training within qualifying courses.
- Responding to the recent supreme court ruling on biological sex and the impact this has had on our intersex, transgender, gender non conforming and gender questioning clients as well as ourselves. We have invested in additional visual signifiers of our affirming approach and allyship, including flags, badges and stickers, and we contributed at length to a recent government consultation.
- Continued to balance the dynamics of a team of both freelance and employed therapists
- Managing a hybrid team, particularly continuing to support and integrate therapists working purely online within a team which is largely based in the centre. Parents are less likely to accept the offer of online therapy for their child or young person and this has had a knock on effect on maintaining the caseload of therapists who offer online only work.
- There has been a significant leak in the cellar which has been rectified and requires a replacement floor and toilet / sink re-plumbing in.

Feedback from Monitoring and Evaluation

We use a range of non-intrusive measures to collect feedback from the children and families who use our service. We ask all families for feedback at the end of therapy. This information is taken from:

- Notes left in the Comments Box in our waiting room
- Comments made to therapists during therapy sessions and review meetings
- Letters, cards, emails and phone calls to the centre during and after therapy
- Comments made by therapists about their experiences of working for the Apple Tree Centre

We actively look for and monitor feedback relating to key aspects of our Model of Care and Theory of Change. These are:

- Children and families' experiences of change (in themselves and their relationships)
- Experiences of the therapeutic relationship
- Experiences of the Centre

We acknowledge the potential for bias inherent in this method of evaluation. Some of these quotes are selected and recorded by therapists, who may tend to favour positive feedback over negative, and children and families may also find it easier to offer compliments than criticism. We have analysed all the comments collected in our Monitoring and Evaluation folder and identified the following themes, illustrated by anonymous quotes.

Suggestions and complaints:

Music playing in the waiting room: An anonymous suggestion for this was posted into our waiting room feedback 'postbox' however no contact details were left so we were unable to respond personally.

We have made the decision not to play any music in the waiting room as we would find it very difficult to make a music choice that would please everyone. We also work with a lot of children and young people who have sensory sensitivities and many have fed back that background music contributes to sensory overwhelm.

We have since re-designed our comment forms to include a section that asks the person to provide an email address if they would like a personal response to their feedback.

More fidget toys in the waiting room: An anonymous suggestion for this was posted into our waiting room feedback 'postbox' and we responded promptly to this, purchasing a box of sensory fidget toys on the table for people to use.

No shade on the windows of the Big Playroom: An anonymous complaint was posted into our waiting room feedback 'postbox' saying they felt very hot with the sun coming through the windows in the play room. We responded promptly to this, purchasing and fitting roller blinds to the windows.

Consent from non referring parents:

The Apple Tree Centre received one complaint this year in relation to seeking consent with a non referring parent. We communicated respectfully and thoughtfully and are confident that our consent policy remains robust and should not be amended. We are working on additional information to add to our website, to clarify this policy and the reasons behind it.

The upcoming increase of the fee for private therapy:

We made the difficult decision to increase the fee for privately funded therapy from £70 to £80 to reflect the increasing costs of providing this service. One parent expressed frustration that this was the second increase in fees they had experienced.

Payment for therapeutic reviews

We received one comment saying that charges for reviews had not been communicated clearly. We have checked that this information was shared consistently with parents and carers, and added additional clarification to our new referral response email template and web form.

Experiences of accessing therapy at the Apple Tree Centre

Noticing change:

"[Child] has found working with [therapist] really helpful and supportive and we have been really happy with the way [therapist] has helped [child]."

"We have seen her change over two years from an incredibly anxious person ... to a... young woman, who ... knows her limits and is now able to confidently set boundaries"

"[Young person]'s anxiety has reduced and her confidence has grown, she is now thriving at university."

"It has made him more confident."

"[His teacher told me] he is currently doing really well at school and is better at regulating himself and concentrating."

"[Child] ... is managing social situations and friendships more positively. He feels much more able to cope in challenging situations and we can talk them through as a family."

Immediate impact of therapy:

"We just wanted to say thanks for this morning's session with [young person] - his mood after the session was loads better than before."

"The calmness and low pressure space is exactly what's needed right now - in fact we both left this week and said how calm we both felt afterwards!"

One-off supportive Appointments:

"[Therapist was] calming and welcoming, and we both felt really listened to."

"The chance to talk through my concerns has really lifted a big weight off my shoulders and it's nice to be able to share your summary with my partner."

"We found the session helpful in reassuring us that we are doing the right things with [child] and also in [providing] advice."

"It was ... useful to hear about how the therapy would work and we can talk to [child] a bit more about that before she comes."

Feedback from Social Workers:

"The Apple Tree Centre is a really beneficial resource for us to have in Sheffield."

"[Young person] ... has grown in maturity and I can see how far he has come over the past year."

"[Young person] was really unsure of therapy at first but has been hugely dedicated and really emotionally invested in therapy."

"We are so grateful to you ... for creating the environment he needs."

The therapeutic relationship:

"[Therapist] seemed to have a good rapport with [young person] ... helped her keep on target with work which she struggles with ... and calmed her somewhat."

"[Therapist] was really great for me, responsive and attentive. I'm really happy there may be the opportunity to meet with her ... in future if necessary."

"[Child] really enjoyed the sessions and got a lot from being in a space where she could express herself, with no judgement!"

"[Therapist] took time to build a good relationship with [young person] and gain his trust. This allowed him to open to her and get the best out of his sessions."

"[Young person] has really enjoyed her sessions with you, she says she looks forward to them each week and they have helped her, which is lovely to hear from her, alongside the things [we parents] have noticed."

"He felt listened to and respected and opened up in ways he struggles to with people sometimes. We are ... pleased he had such a positive experience which will make it easy for him to access support again in the future should he ever need it."

"You are a wonderful therapist and I will always be grateful for the impact you have had on my life."

"It has been tough sometimes but u made it that ... 10x better."

Ongoing therapy:

"He felt safe and free to share his stories and feelings. He is aware that the service will always be there if he needs it in the future."

"I honestly do not know where we would be without the support, reflective space and positivity that you provide to my child. It... has touched every part of her life and that of our family."

"He missed your sessions over the Christmas break - amazing progress for him!"

"Coming here has helped me with my emotions ❤️"

Review sessions:

"We as parents learnt a lot, through our review sessions with [therapist] and through observing changes in [young person]'s reactions to situations at home."

Experiences of the Centre

"A big thank you to all the centre staff for making this as easy as possible."

"The Apple Tree Centre is a cosy, friendly and very un-intimidating place to be."

"We were always contacted professionally and with respect ... We had a lot of confidence in the service, and appreciated everyone's flexibility and efforts to make it as accessible and tailored to [young person]'s needs... as possible."

"Thank you so much for being so good around communication, it's really made everything a lot easier."

"The waiting room is fun and exciting. I like the trees on the wall and I like the toys."

"Please get some adult friendly comfy chairs."

"I like it here."

"I love it! It is so fun!"

Impact of Centre Manager:

"Thank God For Fred!"

Therapists' experience of working at the Apple Tree Centre:

"I am always struck by the detail and thorough work that you have done throughout the years - I [want] to appreciate you and thank you for all the background work that you do to make ATC so excellent."

"I really appreciate such a comfortable atmosphere with colleagues"

"I find the directors really helpful and approachable"

"I really value the peer support around client work"

"I really appreciate all the learning opportunities I get at the centre, like completing EHCP reports and working with parents"

Student therapists' experience of placement at the Apple Tree Centre

"I've really valued your encouragement, reflections and expertise... [To supervisor] for the time and effort you have put into supervising me. [To team] Your calming presence and wise words were very much appreciated. Doing my placement with you has been a really rewarding experience. It hasn't always been easy, but I feel I have learnt a lot."

"My experience at The Apple Tree Centre feels as though a strong foundation has been laid that I can continue to build on throughout my practice"

Plans and Priorities

We reviewed all areas of our work and identified the following priorities for the coming year:

- Continue to recruit appropriate therapists who can commit a substantial number of hours per week to the Apple Tree Centre, to strengthen our therapy team and maximise our use of the building's resources
- Continue to prioritise professionally funded work, particularly Fostering and Adoption Support, through strong links with social worker teams
- Continue to lobby our MP's to ensure the continuation and increase to a sufficient level of funding of the ASGSF.
- Maintain our partnership with Wickersley Academy Trust.
- Make contact with local therapy training providers to offer placements and supervision and potential support in relation to practice skills training.
- Offer placements and supervision to other suitable trainee therapists who may contact us
- Design a 'quick start guide' to working at the Apple Tree Centre as well as a 'quick start guide' for trainees on placement

We have identified the following areas for improvement over the coming year:

- More regular individual meetings with Associate Therapists - we have improved but there is still work to do
- Holding regular full team meetings with both employees and associate therapists
- Continue to improve the referral process, ensuring we have addressed questions around parental consent and clarified that expectations match what we are able to offer before families reach the top of our waiting list.
- Continue to ensure that therapists understand and are able to communicate with parents and carers regarding the purpose of therapeutic reviews, and that these are arranged regularly with sufficient notice

We have reviewed our pricing policy for private work as well as the sessional rates offered to therapists, and highlighted the following points:

- Around 50% of our appointments incur VAT. Because of our policy of charging a standard rate for all therapies, this takes up a substantial part of our income on those therapies affected.
- Due to the increase in business costs and the overall cost of living, we will increase the sessional rate offered to Associate Therapists to £40 per privately funded appointment as of 1st September.

- Due to the 40% cut in the Fair Access Limit of the ASGSF funding we have not been able to increase our fees for professionally funded work for the financial year 2024-5. The rate paid to Associate Therapists for professionally funded work increased to £45 on 1st June 2023 and remains the same.
- To ensure that we can continue to offer a sustainable service, and due to the increasing costs of running a small business (including tax increases), we will increase our charge to private clients to £80 per session from 1st September 2025.

Overall, we agreed that our main priority over the coming year will be to recruit into, strengthen and consolidate our core therapeutic work by reinforcing links with referrers and commissioners, and by investing management time in support and training for our therapists.