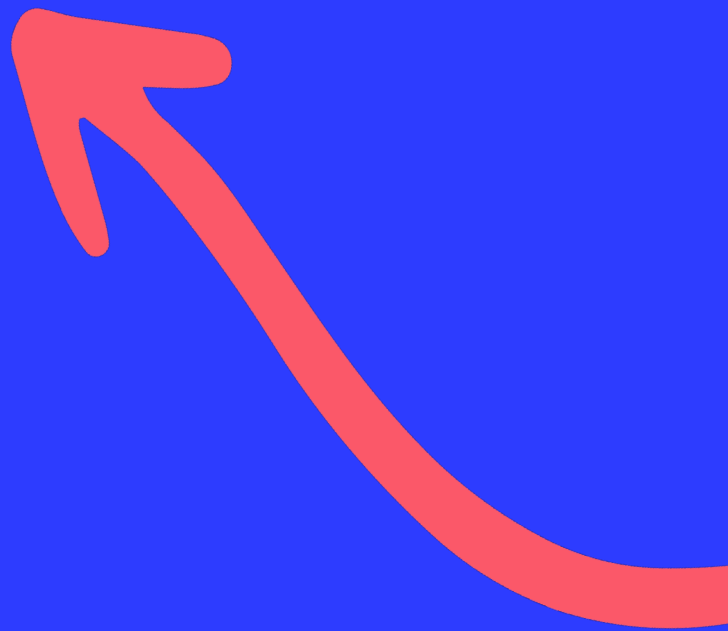




withyou

Supporting women in
the sex industry in
Liverpool

Impact report
November 2023



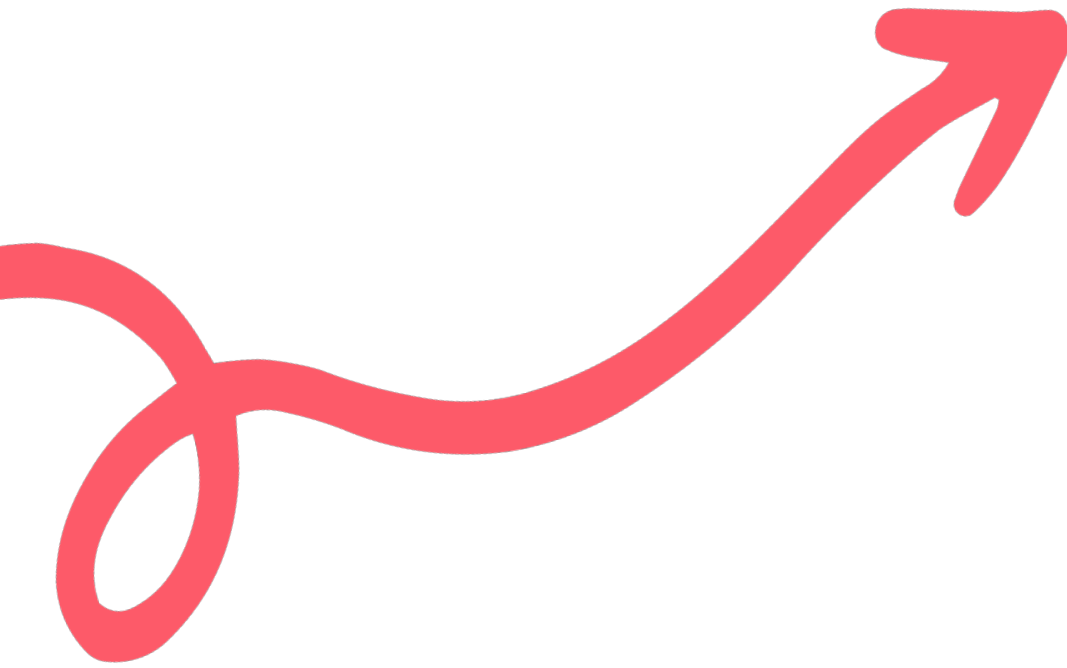
Introduction

WithYou is a leading national charity that supports adults and young people experiencing challenges with drugs, alcohol and their mental health by providing free, timely and confidential support.

We work with people on their unique recovery path, whether it's staying safe and healthy, making small changes or stopping a harmful habit altogether. We also work to end the stigma associated with poor mental health and drug and alcohol use, so that everyone feels able to reach out for help.

We are commissioned by Liverpool City Council to provide drug and alcohol services to adults, young people and their families living across Liverpool.





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Working with women in the sex industry








WithYou in Liverpool have been supporting women in the sex industry to access drugs, alcohol and mental health support since July 2021.

We work in partnership with other organisations and charities to deliver a community service, which includes sexual health screening, housing support and domestic violence support. The clinic works on a first come first served basis, with no appointments necessary. Clients are able to drop-in between 1–3pm and access WithYou services and the services provided by all our partners.

Between July to September 2021, WithYou in Liverpool undertook outreach in an area where women who engage in sex work often work, known locally as the “red light district” of Liverpool. Outreach focused on promoting harm reduction messages and practices, and completing engagement to better understand why this cohort of women were underrepresented in WithYou’s Liverpool services.

Following this engagement, WithYou identified several barriers to women engaging with with drug and alcohol services, including:

-  The location of services
-  Long waiting times
-  Lack of flexibility
-  Lack of understanding of their needs
-  Judgement and discrimination

What did we do?

In November 2021, WithYou launched a pilot in the All Saints Church on Sheil Road, where many women who engage in sex work see clients. This approach took the drug and alcohol services directly to women, rather than asking women to travel to WithYou's hubs, which enabled us to enhance service delivery to better meet their needs.

The pilot included a drop-in service, where women would receive an immediate risk assessment before being given access to:

- ✓ Opiate substitute treatment (OST) therapy
- ✓ Harm reduction advice about illicit drugs and alcohol and naloxone training
Pregnancy testing and support with aftercare, condoms, sexual health advice, sexually transmitted disease testing and referral to treatment if needed
- ✓ Bloodborne virus (BBV) testing and referral to treatments
- ✓ General health checks with the service nurse
- ✓ Support around sexual and domestic abuse
- ✓ Housing support with links to local women's hostels and shelters
- ✓ Referral to mental health services
- ✓ Provision of donated clothing, sanitary products, toiletries, food









Group work which largely focuses on confidence and self esteem building

Key partners



Working with local partners across the sector was crucial to the development of the All Saints offer – bringing essential services together for a ‘community clinic’.

WithYou’s key partners for the pilot were:

-  Merseyside Police: The first police force in the country to employ a Sex Worker Liaison Officer, through links with Red Umbrella Fund.
-  The Hep C Trust: Provided support with BBV testing
-  Axxess Sexual Health Service: Provided sexual health screenings
-  YMCA Together: Provided access to residential rehabilitation
-  Streetwise: Provided late night outreach
-  Pearls Project: Provided holistic support for women
-  IDVA Service: Provided support with domestic violence
-  Creative Support Housing: Provided housing support

“It is clear that this drop-in has a profound impact on the clients who use it. In the space of an hour, our client engaged with all of these different services who are joint working together to ensure she gets the exact help she requires. I must highlight that without your service what took an hour could take our client weeks or months to do.”

–Housing First worker

What impact did we have?

The All Saints pilot ran for two years. In that time, WithYou worked with 244 women who engage in sex work across Liverpool.

The pilot has enabled us to engage with a marginalised group of women, who are often very vulnerable to challenges around drug and alcohol use, domestic violence and physical, mental and sexual ill health.

In November 2023, to review the All Saints pilot, we used a simplified questionnaire with 40 women supported by the service. This included the following questions:

- What has gone well?
- What could be improved?
- What other services would you like to see at All Saints?
- Do you think All Saints should go back to running group work?
- Do you think offering support around drugs and alcohol in hostels is a good idea?

The feedback we received has been positive and informative. Attendees reported that it was successful due to its accessible location and face-to-face engagement. They also said that women felt safe and comfortable around a female-led team. The feedback also highlighted that 90% agreed there is a need for group work and additional drug and alcohol support in local hostels.

"I feel comfortable as the clinic is run by women. It's an opportunity to form relationships and trust as well as making women safer with harm reduction advice."

-Client

"The service offers a safe space for vulnerable women and stability with OST (Opiate substitute treatment)."

-Client

Across the 2 year pilot, WithYou have provided:



What did we learn?



1. Communicating directly with clients and bringing services directly to the cohort had a very positive impact.

Our staff were able to speak and work directly with clients, allowing stronger relationships to be formed and a better understanding of the backgrounds and livelihoods of our clients. This allowed us to better tailor our services to meet their needs and support highly vulnerable women with an innovative approach.

Feedback from clients suggested a need for increased group work to keep clients engaged with the service. The group worker then developed, delivered, and monitored a timetable of activities which was distributed to partners, service users, and local hostels. Communicating directly with clients had a very positive impact in creating a safe and familiar space for highly vulnerable women, whilst understanding how we can continue to meet their needs.

2. Working collaboratively with other partners helps meet the needs of our clients.

Working collaboratively with other local partners has helped us increase the offer of the All Saints pilot. The feedback given by our clients indicated that after six months of the pilot, there were too many partners attending at one time. This issue was resolved by the development of a framework to ensure partners have specific roles and attend on a rota basis to adhere to health and safety recommendations and meet the needs of the clients. Communication between partners was crucial to collaborative work. Monthly discussions with all partners involved debrief and risk assessments.

3. Empowering our staff to support this cohort is essential to ensuring engagement with our services.

We ensure that all staff are trained and have the knowledge and skills to work confidently with women who engage in the sex work industry. We achieve this by supporting the Advanced Practitioner to study and complete an ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advisor) qualification. All staff were supported to complete mandatory training around sexual health, domestic violence and in ensuring a trauma informed approach is always applied.

Having direct communication with our clients better informed our practice. It allowed staff to be aware of issues such as interpersonal challenges between clients and to ensure that they don't attend the same groups in the future. Staff also attended a weekly meetings, disseminated information to staff supporting clients and arranged monthly meetings to discuss issues and risks.

Moving forward



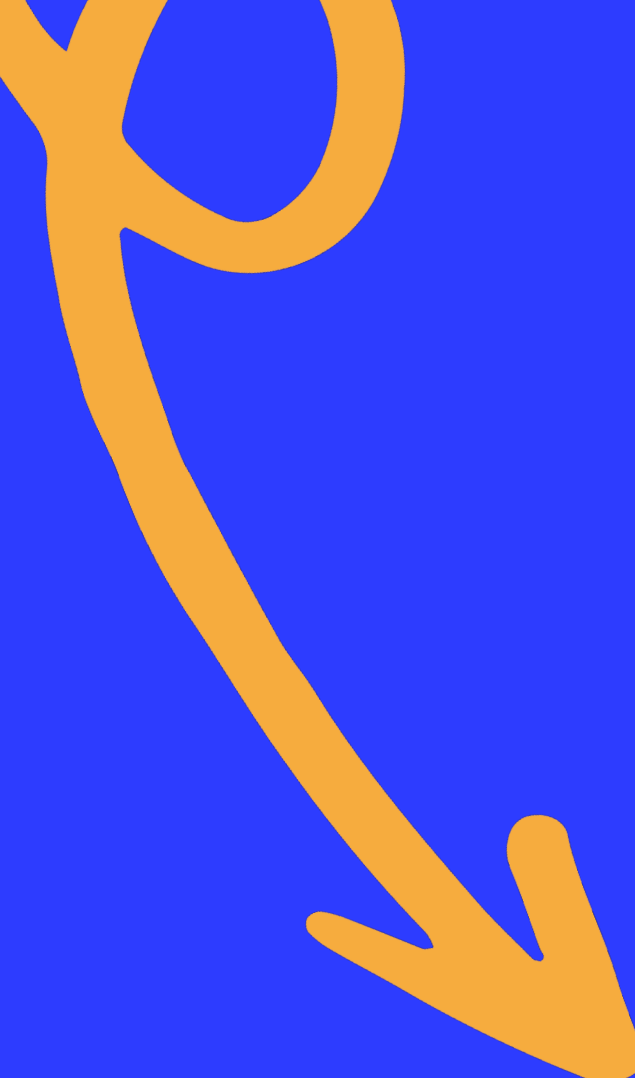
From initial findings and feedback offered by key partners and clients, it is clear that the All Saints pilot is a much needed provision and has had many positive outcomes for women engaged in sex work across Liverpool. We have provided holistic support for high risk vulnerable women, who were previously excluded from a number of support services, through a partnership approach to delivery.

Taking into account data and feedback accumulated across the two year pilot, WithYou will continue further provision and support in the community for women who engage in sex work.

With the pilot concluding in November 2023, the IRIS (Inspiration, Resilience, Independence, Strength) Project – our new model of best practice – will be launched on 12 December 2023.

Initial findings indicate that moving forward, there is a need for:

- 1. Early interventions**
- 2. A need for increased work in women's hostels and shelters**
- 3. Trauma informed practice**
- 4. Peer support and lived experience workers**



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