



Our Helpline: Marking Five Years of Compassionate Care

Established in October 2019, the Birmingham Mind Mental Health Helpline quickly became an essential lifeline for many during the pandemic. Over five years later, this invaluable service has continued to evolve, adapting to the ever-changing needs of local communities in Birmingham and Solihull. With a growing, dedicated staff team and the introduction of translation services, the Helpline has firmly embedded itself at the heart of mental health care across the region, offering vital telephone and online support to those who rely on it.

Delivered with the support of Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust, the Helpline has seen a remarkable increase in demand. In the past 12 months alone, it has received over 17,000 calls and responded to more than 4,700 web chats, highlighting the growing need for accessible mental health support.

To mark five years of Helpline support, we sat down with Omari, a current Helpline Worker, to understand why he chose to become a Helpline Worker and learn why the Helpline is such a vital service for the city and the people who turn to it in times of need.

Omari’s Story

“Before joining Birmingham Mind, I worked as a lecturer in higher education. Though this role allowed me to contribute to my academic development, I felt a strong desire to move away from my theoretical work to engage directly in supporting people. I was drawn to Birmingham Mind because of its core values: its focus on the voices of service users, peer mentoring, and its strong emphasis on empathy and inclusion.

Despite my lived experiences and academic background, I approached the Helpline Worker role with an open mind, with no preconceptions about the nature of the service or the people it serves.

The induction into the role was both challenging and exciting. The transition from academia to frontline mental health work required me to adapt my thinking and I realised quite quickly that it takes a certain type of person to show empathy consistently with those who



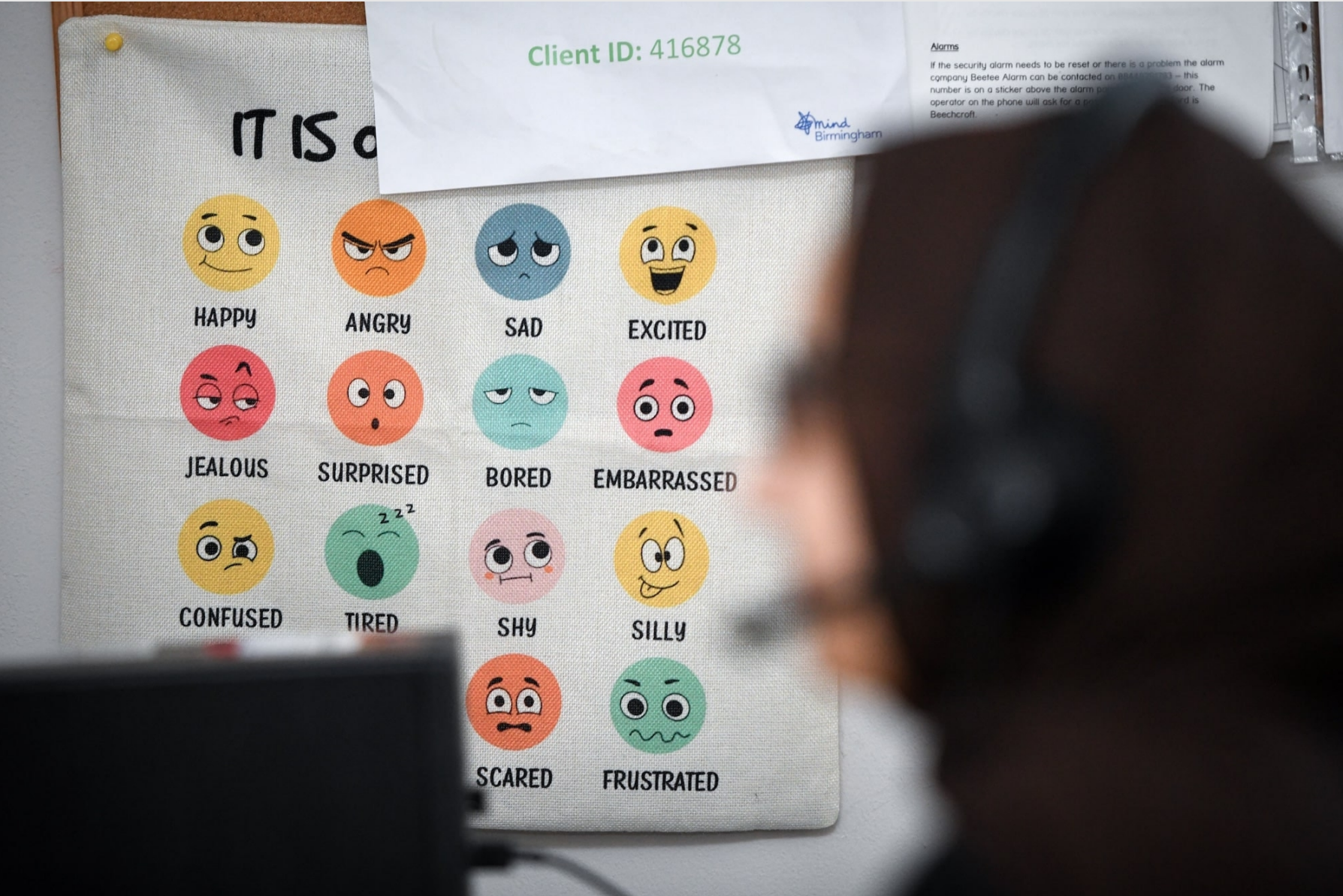
For me, the induction period was invaluable. I would recommend that all new frontline workers take their time to absorb everything during this phase, as it provides essential insights into the emotional needs of callers but also sets boundaries in protecting the wellbeing of call handlers too.

During my first few weeks, I learned that no-one can be an expert in every aspect of mental health. The vast scope of knowledge required for the role, whether it's understanding different mental health conditions, regional signposting services, or providing advice. It's through collaboration and reliance on my managers and colleagues that I learned the importance of trusting those around me and recognising that it's okay not to have all the answers. I work as part of a very skilled team.

As a Helpline Worker, I encounter a broad range of calls. Our calls are incredibly diverse, from people experiencing severe loneliness (we can often be the only person they talk to that day) to callers close to experiencing a mental health crisis. My role is to provide a safe space for callers to share their experiences, fears, and frustrations.

“Often we are catching people when they are beginning to fall.”

Many of our callers are well informed about their mental health triggers and will use our service to keep themselves safe and well during their difficult times.

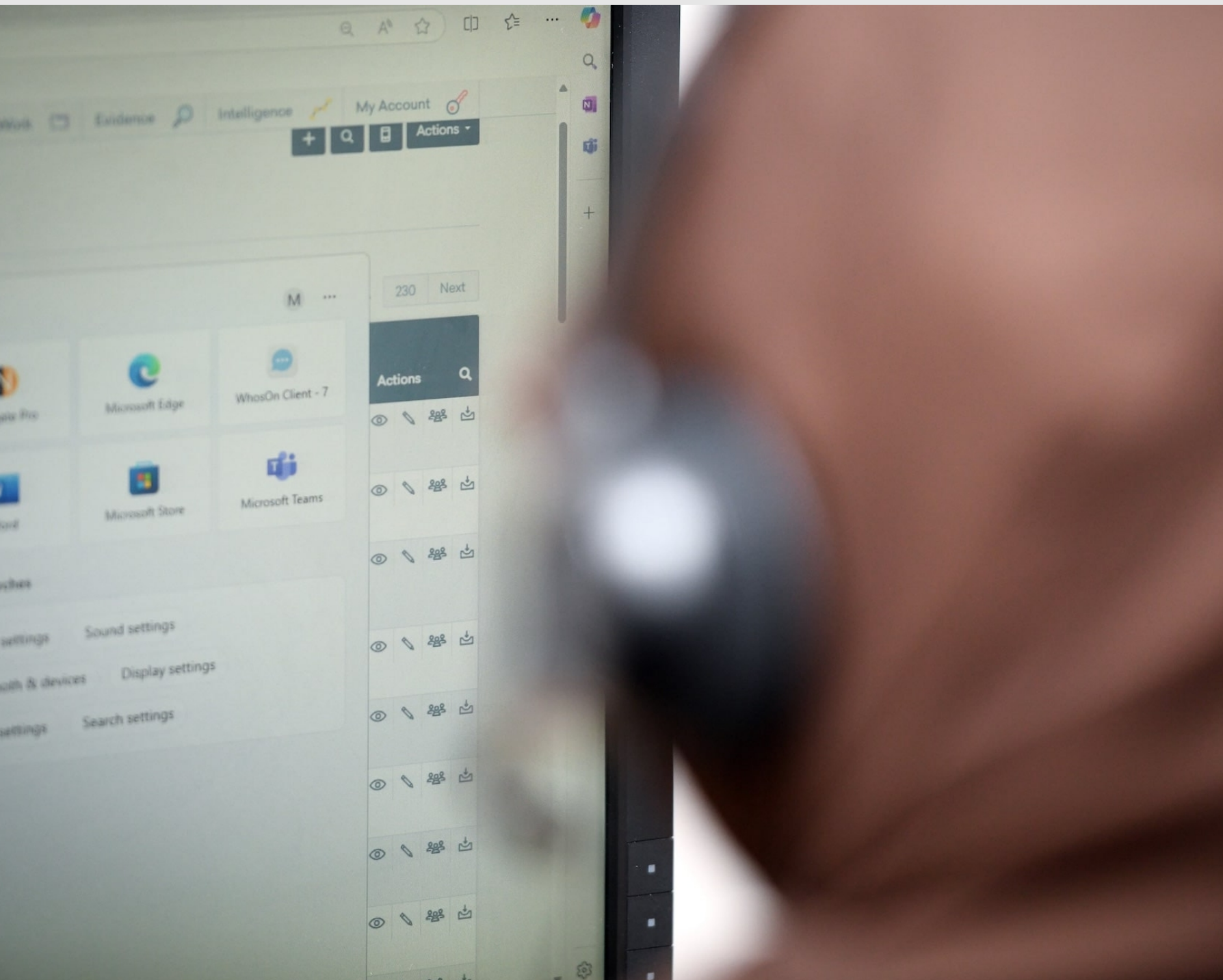


Calls can range from brief 10 minute conversations to lengthy 2.5 hour discussions, this allows our callers to express themselves in a way that suits their immediate needs. This flexible approach ensures that every caller receives the support they need, whether they are calling out of frustration, anger, fear, or simply to be heard.

Birmingham & Solihull is incredibly diverse and the mental health needs of its population reflect this diversity. Offering an accessible service is vital, as language barriers can impact the effectiveness of support. At least 2 or 3 of my calls each week require translation support and we use the Language Line Service to do this. We engage daily with individuals from various cultural backgrounds and callers are typically aware of their need for a translator, and will ask for the translation service, there is an expectation that mental health services are able to provide this.

There are so many reasons why I love being a Helpline Worker, my role is not just confined to taking calls from members of the public, as a team we frequently engage with professionals, including CMHTs (Community Mental Health Teams), GPs, and even ambulance staff. This diverse range of callers reinforces the multi-faceted nature of the job; we often help professionals navigate the mental health challenges their clients are facing.

Working 5 shifts, across a 7 day week, often covering hours from 9am-5pm or 3pm-11am, this work is demanding but hugely fulfilling. I not only take Helpline calls, but also chat with people via Time on Line (our web chat service) and manage enquiry emails. These additional services ensure that Birmingham Mind can meet people's needs in real-time, regardless of how they choose to seek help.



Mental health support work is inherently emotionally demanding, challenges faced by our callers, don't come well-formed in neat little packages and often the calls we receive are highly unpredictable. However, through support and training, I can stay calm and be compassionate, even when faced with time critical intense situations. “Challenges faced by our callers, don't come well-formed in neat little packages” Reflective practice is embedded in our weekly work.

Regular supervision sessions with my line manager provide an opportunity to reflect on difficult calls, seek advice, and discuss my emotional response to situations encountered.

My journey from lecturer to Helpline worker has proven to be a transformative experience. By actively listening to callers, trusting colleagues, embracing reflective practice, and maintaining a resilient mindset, I know we are making a difference and I am proud to be part of Birmingham Mind Helpline Team.”

Birmingham Mind has seven Discharge Navigators, working across multiple hospital wards in Birmingham and beyond who are funded by Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Discharge Navigators are a valued member of Hospital Discharge teams, without them these barriers prevent patients from leaving hospital on time, this can lead to beds being blocked to new patients and clinical staff taking on the role of securing benefits and sourcing accommodation. It's an integral role in the recovery of the individuals we support, and although our care doesn't continue once supported accommodation is in place, our patients stay with us in our hearts for a long time. Debbie recalls one patient's words that stayed with her:

“I’ve had numerous hospital stays in my lifetime, but you’ve done more for me in the short time I’ve known you than anyone else ever has.”