

Newsletter

Edition JULY 2024

£12 p.a. subscription for non-members
or organisations

free for SURVIVORS
who are Members
of CIS'ters

Charity registration:
1184857
(previously 1123125)



CIS'ters IS NOT a therapy group: it is a small registered charity, run by survivors
“we might be victim/survivors, but this is not all that we are, or can be”

2024: Whatever the Weather

Email: helpme@cisters.org.uk Phone: 023 80 338080 (answer phone)

Feedback from the Office

It's been a weird year so far, weather wise – and also so many other things that can, and will, and do, affect us as individuals (you and us) and the small charity that we all call 'ours'.

August is just around the corner and we can only imagine what the weather will be, or not. The Paris Olympics are imminent.

The school holidays are here and it usually means that familial sexual abusers have greater access to the children they target.

We encourage members of the public and family members to be more alert to the dangers faced by children/teens and act on, rather than dismiss something that looks and feels worrying.



Give as you Live
Donate

**WE HAVE EIGHT INDIVIDUALS
UNDERTAKING 10K EVENT IN LONDON
ON 22ND SEPTEMBER 2024**

<https://donate.giveasyoulive.com/campaign/supporting-cisters-vitality-london-10k-sept-2024>

**Please show your appreciation by helping them to raise funds
for us.....**

AS A SURVIVOR – YOUR CHANCE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE !



NHS England is seeking new patient and public voice (PPV) partners to join its sexual assault and abuse services (SAAS) lived experience group.

This group has an important role to play in helping NHS England to develop and improve SAAS, including sexual assault referral centres (SARCs).

Closing date:

**11:59pm
Monday 26
August
2024**

**Interviews:
(30 minutes,
online), will be
during week
commencing
9th Sept 2024**

Individuals on the group have non-recent and recent lived experience of sexual assault and abuse. NHSE are currently recruiting new members and are particularly keen to hear from as diverse a range of applicants as possible.

More information including a role description can be found at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/saas-ppv-application-information-pack/> . The group typically meets 4 times a year, either face to face or online. Requirement to read papers in advance and also be open to take forward dedicated pieces of work as they occur. Support with meeting attendance and preparation can be provided if needed.

Closing date: 11:59pm Monday 26 August 2024

Interviews (30 minutes, online): week commencing 9 September 2024

If you have any queries about the application process, or would like an informal discussion about the opportunity – please contact the team via england.saasadmin@nhs.net

A message from Sally, who became a Member in 2022

“Thanks for the newsletter, it makes a big difference to me.”



Social Media is so full of helpful, and otherwise, quotes and information.

Used selectively it can create a real boost to how we are feeling and useful to assist in maintaining our boundaries.

“Those who have harmed you will create false narratives around you, your experiences, and your character. They are doing this because in order to be honest about who you are, they would have to be honest about what they’ve done.

Resilience isn't about ignoring our problems or tolerating injustice. It's recognising that in any situation we have a choice over how we respond. <https://actionforhappiness.org/>

A really useful quote: “Traumatised people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort”

Quote from: Dr Bessel van der Kolk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTefkqYQz8g>

A MESSAGE FROM Hilda who became a Member in 2017

Thank you for getting my email changed as you know the scammers and fraudsters get more advanced in their methods. Got to be one step ahead of them if can. Cathie has sorted for me as you can see, tell her a huge thank you from me 😊

I have been very tired of late and it quickly got worse, and maybe like a lot of my fellow CIS'ters not hot on self-care but I managed to get a phone appointment and appointments for blood tests done. Low ferritin and high salts and bit of dehydration. Another phone appointment in the morning to see what full tests are and what to do. Self-care is strange to me, but I now drink correct amount water, actually eat bananas instead of buying to look at, as my daughter tells me doing this is really good and she is right. Basically I have over hauled my diet, more walking and dutifully taking my old peoples vitamins. Still trying to get my life fully in order I guess like a lot of my CIS'ters we are a work in progress.

I still have a *just a little note card* from the small team at CIS'ters saying they were thinking of me and signed on behalf of all my Cisters. The card arrived a lot of years ago. Just knowing CIS'ters is there with this card and the website helps me as it does I am sure my fellow cisters. It helps with the aloneness disconnection feeling that you are there even an email helps so much.

The self-care is working, plenty of water and iron tablets and a bit of fresh air...thank you for letting me know CIS'ters are there in the back ground sadly that was missing as I was growing up but I am so thankful I have that support now. Kind regards, Hilda

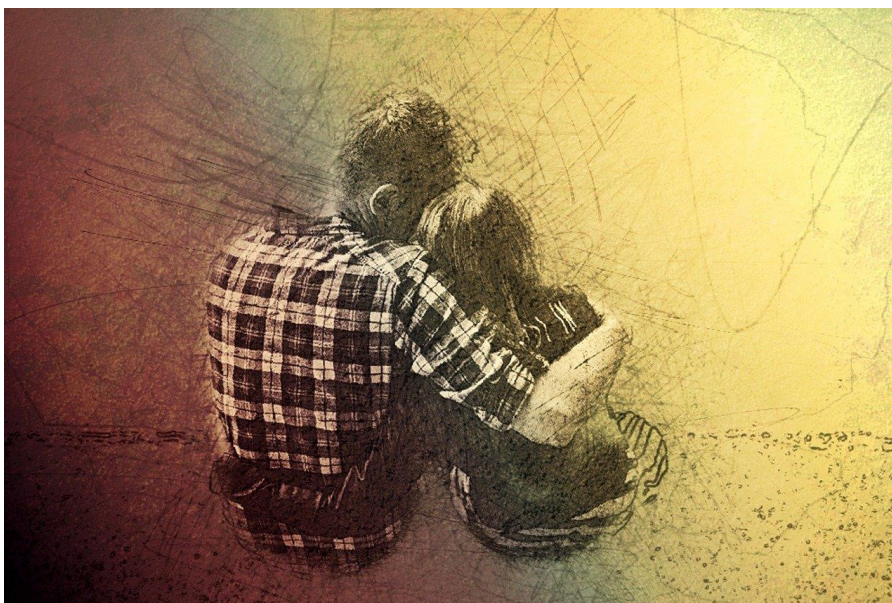
THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES

Establishing firm boundaries creates opportunities to recognise, and then shed, gas-lighters, emotional abusers, needy and greedy manipulators, self-centred narcissists and above all energy draining vampires. Be the best friend you can be, to yourself.

Remember regularly review and redraw boundaries where needed.

I heard a new phrase associated with narcissist abuse, called “dog whistling.” A dog whistle is a whistle that only a dog can hear. Narcissists will do things in public or around a lot of people that they know will bother you. But everyone else is immune to what they are doing. They will do offensive things in a way that no one except you know the context to which they are meaning it. It will appear innocent to everyone else. If you react to it, everyone thinks you are the one that is out of line. The narcissist plays innocent, and you appear to be the unreasonable one. -Maria Consiglio

@understandingthenarc



HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN A HUG IS OK ?

A heartfelt message to all parents. Please stop forcing children to have relationships with emotionally abusive family members. You are NOT teaching them ‘family first’ you ARE teaching them that regardless of how someone treats them they are supposed to love them unconditionally and – believe me – that is not a good lesson to teach any child, as it sets them up for dysfunctional relationships thereafter including being victims of coercive behaviours and that is from any and all relationships.



Source Unknown:

“Self-care is knowing your emotional triggers and doing all you can to avoid surrounding yourself with people who deliberately provoke them”.

Hi CIS'ters, I became a Member in **2022** and wanted to write to you about the Trauma Awareness Card that you sent me when I joined. I have used the trauma card when I went to the gynaecologist. I had to go to see a Dr about my bladder problem. I showed her the card, I had to have two examinations in my privates. I used the card and on another appointment, so people are aware. I told them that I am a Survivor of Sexual Abuse.

Thank you very much for sending me the Trauma Awareness Card. I will take it with me on all future appointments. *Best wishes to everyone from **Tierra**.*

Trauma Awareness Cards > the ones we send out to our Members originally came from Healthwatch Essex and they can be used anywhere in the country, not just in Essex. It is up to the holder whether they disclose the cause of the trauma as it is NOT printed on the card. We have more if you would like one. Contact: helpme@cisters.org.uk If you prefer you can also use the following website created by Healthwatch Essex. <https://traumahub.uk/card-holders/>

Similar cards are also available via The Survivors Trust website: <https://thesurvivorstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-Non-branded-Patient-Info-Card-Specific.pdf>

LISTEN TO CIS'ters PODCASTS > “Hidden Harm”

Feedback is that increasingly these are being downloaded and are useful to not only victim/survivors, but also to friends, family and support workers/professionals.

<https://cisters.org.uk/podcastsnewsletterssurvivors-voices/the-hidden-harm-podcasts/>

CIS'ters – emotional support for our 500+ Members

Recently we realised that we need to be clearer that we are **not** in a position (nor have we ever been) to offer a 1:2:1 befriending service to our Members.

WE CAN and do offer, from the helpline, the ability for Members to email in and receive an email response from either the helpline team or Membership Secretary, plus we respond to requests for occasional phone calls. This approach appears to work reasonably well, given our limited resources – and we do still encourage Members to email or ring us. It might take a little while to respond, but we will.

A MESSAGE FROM SAL, who became a Member in 1998

Hi Gillian, wanted to give you some feedback on two services I have accessed:

1. The Freedom Programme <https://www.freedomprogramme.co.uk/online.php> is very informative, a real eye opener.

Like any therapy/ personal growth, I did find it triggering dragging up old feelings. But as I had mentally prepared myself, I didnt go too deep and used my healthy coping tools to stay present.

The course explains the different kinds of abusers and their behaviours, which is something that I had struggled to recognise. It also includes exercises to complete, about 10 questions in each category:

- **1. NEW RELATIONSHIPS**
- **2 - INITIATING CHANGE**
- **3 - ASSERTIVENESS**
- **4 - PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS**
- **5 - DEVELOPING NEW NETWORKS**
- **6 - SUPPORT NETWORKS**
- **7 - BEFORE AND AFTER**
- **8 - PARENTING**
- **9 - SAFE DATING**
- **10 - FINAL THOUGHT**

Like many survivors of childhood abuse, I've had difficulty recognising abusive behaviour, it was my normal. While I did recognise the obvious physically violent behaviours in relationships, the subtle coercive controlling/ gaslighting behaviours have been difficult for me to recognise or acknowledge.

I can now see why I often lost faith in my own instincts and judgement and ended up believing the perpetrator when they said that it was all my fault/ I deserved it/ I was mad etc. I now know that their truth is not my truth.

But the biggest healing for me was discovering that my pattern of choosing a bigger, angrier person to protect me from the last person, is a common pattern.

It seems so silly now, but it never occurred to me that they would turn that anger on me. At the time I think I was so desperate for protection, I put up with anything and did not recognise the vicious circle that I was in.

It's been hard to acknowledge that I have been trying to find protection for most of my life, as I consider myself to be a strong, capable, independent person in most other areas. But it has been a useful lesson to learn and now I have a better understanding, I can start to forgive myself.

My final thought:

I had sworn away from relationships forever, too scared that I would end up in another abusive relationship. However, now that I understand the trauma response and have a clearer understanding of what abuse is, the red flags and my own pattern of choices, I can see that a relationship could be possible in the future.

But for now I am happy to be single. I am just over 6 years sober and I still want to get to know me.

2. An Alternative to AA I went to an AA meeting years ago, but found it overwhelming.

So I gave up booze at home, alone. The withdrawals were vile and I knew it was dangerous going cold turkey, but my new GP would not support a home detox! *(continued on next page)*

(continued from prior page)

So I got some supplements and started an **online diploma in Addictions via The Centre of Excellence**. I knew that I needed the distraction and to understand myself if I was going to maintain sobriety.

I have done another 10 diplomas since on various subjects, like PTSD, Domestic Abuse (Nowhere near as good as the Freedom Programme), C.B.T. to name a few.


The diplomas are accredited, but I dont know how much clout they would have. However, they have all been brilliant for my personal growth.

My final thought re self-resilience: Other survivors might find these type of courses useful.

Finally, I hope that these TWO reviews are useful and that they may help others, please feel free to share

Take care lovely, Loadsalove, Sal xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Recognising different forms of Abuse



Verbal abuse	→	Displaying behaviour of harassing, labelling, insulting, scolding, rebuking or yelling towards you.
Rejection	→	Constantly rejecting your thoughts/ideas, and deliberately excluding you from social relationships or social interactions.
Gaslighting	→	Making you doubt your own feelings and thoughts, and even your sanity, by manipulating the truth.
Put-Downs	→	Calling you names or telling you that you're stupid, publicly embarrassing you or blaming you for everything.
Causing Fear	→	Making you feel afraid, intimidated or threatened which activates areas involved in preparation for motor functions.
Isolation	→	Limiting your freedom of movement and stopping you from contacting other people (such as friends or family).
Financial Abuse	→	Controlling or withholding your money, preventing you from working or studying, stealing from you.
Bullying & Intimidation	→	Purposely and repeatedly saying or doing things that are intended to hurt you.
Spiritual Abuse	→	Preventing you from having your own opinions about religion, cultural beliefs and values.

healingfromcomplexptsd.com

Effective Cptsd Recovery

A BOOK RECOMMENDATION from Debs, who became a Member in 2008

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel Van Der Kolk

I've had this book on my shelf for a couple of years now & have just dipped in & out of it, always scanning for "the answer" that'll "fix" me as I'm sure many of us do.

Recently I've got it as an audiobook & have been listening to it from start to finish. I'm 2/3 of the way through at the time of writing this. I have to say using an audiobook has been a revelation! It gives me the opportunity to consider what the author is saying much more deeply & listening is much less hard work than reading.

The book explains how & why trauma "wires" us to function in particular ways psychologically &, via altered body chemistry, affects our whole body. The author explains that this "trauma adaptation" (my words) shapes how we behave as children, affects both the way we develop into adults & how we respond to the world throughout our lives.

Dr Van Der Kolk describes how our mother's brain & body chemistry has also been passed down to us in the womb & so, even if nothing traumatic actually "happened" to us ourselves, we are already responding to our mother's experiences & (possible) trauma via our inherited body chemistry, even before birth. So ultimately, we're adapted to her trauma too.

For me, there are lots of "Oh I do that" moments in the book & lots of "Oh that's why!"

Crucially, the book also includes "Paths to Recovery", giving Dr van der Kolk's recommendations for treatments to get us back in touch with our bodies & start to heal. Some of these can be undertaken independently.

I think I've always viewed my trauma as well, that was then i.e. it's in the past & the present is safe. So as long as I can ensure I stay in the now I will remain ok!. But the book, *The Body Keeps the Score* explains why this is not the whole story & has helped me join the dots of my own experience.

This book has made me more accepting of myself I think, less reliant on the "pull yourself together & get over it" mindset that I, & I'm sure many fellow Cisters, have. Accepting that how I am is down to altered brain chemistry & ingrained survival responses allows me to be less punishing to myself - so, it's not just me "not trying hard enough" after all!

I hope *The Body Keeps the Score* helps others as it has me. The audio book is on Spotify, Audible & many other outlets. It might also be free from your local library via the Borrowbox app.

Debs also suggested that we ask Members to tell us one thing that has helped their personal recovery, or improve their resilience. What a really good idea !

So – can you write to us or email us – and let us know:

" One thing that has helped improve my resilience"

It could be journalling, yoga, drumming, art - whatever. Please answer the call from Debs – and fill the next & future newsletters with lots of suggestions.

MINIMISATION OF THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN – PARIS OLYMPICS 2024

What is it about the society we live in ? I had been looking forward to the Olympics and now feel so uncertain because the Dutch and World Olympic Committees consider it ok to accept as a participant a convicted male, who raped a 12 year old girl in the UK. Conversely, you can be banned for life for being caught taking drugs, but seemingly sex offenders get a free pass.

News article dated 30th July 2024:

Dutch child rapist Steven van de Velde was BOOED before losing debut Olympics beach volleyball match - amid furious backlash over decision to let sex offender who raped 12-year-old British girl compete. He was sentenced in 2016 to 4 years in a UK prison; but served considerably less.

The Dutchman had travelled from Amsterdam to the UK and raped the girl at a house in Milton Keynes. Despite being told by a judge that his conviction was 'career ending', van De Velde resumed his volleyball career after serving just 12 months of his four year sentence.



THE COURAGE OF SIMONE BILES AND OTHER VICTIMS OF DR NASSAR

In the same year 2016, Dr Nassar the team doctor for the USA gymnastics team, was finally charged with sexually assaulting, including rape, of at least 265 young women and girls under the guise of medical treatment.

The amazing Simone Biles was one of his victims and suffered a physical and emotional breakdown (during the Tokyo Olympics) resulting from not only the abuse she endured but also the way in which the authorities had, for decades, ignored what was happening.



She has reached a stage where she is now ready to compete again, and is taking part in Paris 2024 Olympics. We can only imagine the additional heartache of knowing that Steven van de Velde, a known sex offender who raped a 12 year old child in the UK, has been permitted to compete at the same games.

More information available via following links:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwR_KQeQ4Z0 and also

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nhXchOtMLg&t=14s>

REMEMBER NATIONAL 24/7 HELPLINE <https://247sexualabusesupport.org.uk/>

Currently there is a government funded crisis line that is open 24/7 and is for anyone aged 16 and above who lives in England or Wales and who is a victim/survivor of rape, child sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment or any other form of sexual violence – at any point in their life. The line is also open to their friends, family or anyone else who is trying to support them.

If you don't have access to the internet, then you can still contact them via free number 0808 500 2222

THE EROSION OF BIOLOGICAL FEMALES BY STATUTORY SECTOR

Increasingly we are being contacted by Members who have anxiety about the seeming never ending erosion of not only *women-only-spaces*, but also what they feel is an attack on biological females.

The following was emailed to us by one of our Members, but did not provide us with the original link, so we do not know 'who' wrote it. So for the moment we will define it as author unknown. We have included it as it is a sentiment that is shared by the many Members who are contacting us about the same issue.

Author unknown: *"Our complaint is about ALL police forces and the IOPC as well. The following document <https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/news/iopc-publishes-guidance-ending-victim-blaming-violence-against-women-and-girls> was published on 7th March 2024. It highlights an obvious double standard within the police and criminal justice system where on the one hand they promote sensitivity to 'victims' of crimes – but conversely the volume of females who commit sexual crimes is being inflated by the inclusion of male offenders of sexual crimes who then rebadge themselves as females prior to court appearances/conviction.*

Thus a known male sex offender, is convicted in the national crime statistics as a female – therefore making it appear that a female has committed the crime, and not a biological male.

As a female victim of serious sexual crimes I find it beyond anger that a male offender can simply rebadge themselves as a 'female' and then their crime be assigned to a 'female offender' rather than as a male offender statistic.

Politicians and other statutory leaders are all supporting the erosion of female victims and male offenders - and it is why I, and so many of my peers, will continue to lose faith in the Criminal Justice system in the UK - and it is 'written large' as to why.

So, please, instead of standing with your backs against the wall - just turn around - and read what is written on it in very large letters. A biological male committing a sexual crime against a female is a male offender statistic, and is NOT a female offender.

*My message to government, politicians, the Crown Prosecutors, the Judges, the Courts, the police, the prisons, defence solicitors: **you are ALL colluding with male sex offenders and therefore guilty of institutional abuse against women and girls.***

IMPORTANT – WE NEED FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS!

CIS'ters is facing some major challenges, financially and also due to limited workforce. We need your help to review some of our services and give us feedback – on both the quality and content of the newsletter (should it be less pages etc?) and also on our website. The website in particular is facing a major financial upgrade and so your views are critical. Have we organised it the best way? What is missing ? What is not needed?

If you would be willing to complete a survey form, please let us know – either by phone message (remember to give your full name) or by emailing us via helpme@cisters.org.uk

You have the future of these two specific services in your hands. So, please, help us to do our best to make sure that the newsletter and our website meet your current needs, and of others (now and in the future).



WE RECENTLY UPLOADED SOME ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS ON TO OUR WEBSITE

(with the kind permission of GINA (a counselling service based in Birmingham))

<https://www.cisters.org.uk/the-impact/cervical-screeningexaminationssmears/>

<https://www.cisters.org.uk/the-impact/intimacy-and-sexual-intimacy/>

<https://www.cisters.org.uk/the-impact/retraumatisation/>

<https://www.cisters.org.uk/the-impact/toxic-stress/>

CIS'ters Philosophy



We are here to listen – from a peer perspective (biological female, familial CSA survivors)

As peers we are here to help you discover what you are feeling – not to make those feelings go away.

As peers we are here to help you identify options – not to make decisions for you.

As peers we are here to discuss steps with you – not to take the steps for you.

As peers we are here to help you discover their own strength – not to rescue you and leave you still vulnerable.

As peers we are here to help you discover you can help your self – not to take responsibility for you.

As peers we are here to help you choose – not to keep you from making difficult choices.

As peers we are here to provide emotional support for change.



Philosophy – of being a Member of CIS'ters

I am here to listen to myself and to take one step at a time.

I am here to discover what I am feeling – I know I can't make these go away – but I can make connections for a better understanding of myself.

I am here to explore my options – and decide a path I would like to take – Knowing always if it is not the right option for me I have the power to change the path or option.

I am here to empower myself and to take the necessary steps that are right for me.

I am here to discover my own strengths – and to recognise my vulnerabilities are not weaknesses.

I am here to discover I can help myself – and take responsibility for myself.

I am here to make choices – and have the courage for making difficult healthy choices.

I am here to learn and to provide myself support for change.



Peer Support – led by, and for

Feedback from survivors who make contact with us, including those that go on to become Members, explain that they value above everything else that our team members have lived experiences i.e. biological females who, as children, were sexually abused by a member of their immediate/extended family.

Consistently they assert that the greatest value in their contact with us, is that those they communicate with, within our frontline teams, are 'like them'.

The challenges and difficulties currently being experienced by our Members, and 'new to us contacts' is reflected within our existing Membership and our small Workforce. There is an unquestionable appreciation of the triggering experience when attending (or choosing not to attend) a health screening, a visit to the dentist or optician for example. Also contact with specific family members, or the million and one other circumstances that can be a reminder of being a victim as a child, within a family, and the harm that was caused. Survivors are familiar with professionals/others using the term "trust me". Survivors rarely believe that the professional truly understands that 'trust' is something that has to be earned. 'Trust me' has been our opposite experiences/outcome as children.

Based on consistent feedback and as per our constitution, our Trustees have continued to place emphasis on the requirement to maintain a workforce based on individuals' lived experience. We continue to be 'led by and services delivered by' individuals who were born female, continue to identify as female and who, as children/teens, were sexually abused within a familial environment.



Tolly's Tool Kit (a self-help resource written by Members)

Whilst other self help products do exist elsewhere, none capture the reality of being a female-born victim/survivor of sexual abuse/rape/exploitation within a family environment.

The toolkit comprises 12 Sessions, and pilot stage will be completed by the end of March 2025.

Funding is required to complete that phase of the work (*hence our current fund raising initiative for this, and other stuff we do!*).

Feedback extract from participants in the Toolkit Pilot Phase:

"I was surprised at how much I do find helpful and didn't realise until I wrote it all down"

"Understanding my resilience and why I have struggled with this for so long has helped me to realise I need to be kinder to myself, as I didn't have anyone to show me or be a positive influence"

"This has been helpful to enable me to break down all my experiences into smaller sections rather than getting overwhelmed with too many memories and feelings"

"Window of Tolerance (WoT) was explained a lot better than mental health services did. It makes a lot of sense to help with stress"

"It's made me realise I need to do more mindfulness to help keep me in the WoT. When I fluctuate I think I need to give myself some breathing space"

"Easy to follow. Great session. Easy to understand"

"What surprised me is the realisation I don't care enough for myself/prioritise my own wellbeing"

"Getting better at noticing if I am in a child or adult state. Makes me feel hopeful that things are moving forward"



Weekend (Residential) Workshop for Members:

In May 2024 we held our annual weekend residential workshop. This has been a regular event since 1999, though in 2020 and 2021 it was postponed due to the global pandemic. **We do need to charge a fee to attend this event, but it is heavily subsidised.** CIS'ters is a national charity and therefore some delegates travelled long distances to attend.

The weekend workshop continues to be a led by-and for survivors event. The team are all volunteers and all but one is a current member of CIS'ters who role model that 'as individuals we are more than a survivor and that this title should not limit us'.

Feedback extract from 2024 workshop participants:

Delegate, who joined in 2021:

As survivors of sexual abuse within our family, as children, we live as dark isolated secrets that society sees as 'ick'. I had to wait for over forty years before I felt safe to talk and that was only possible with the emotional support of CIS'ters. Sexual abuse is complex, and society needs to understand how common it is and how to improve safeguarding.

Delegate, who joined in 2016:

Being part of CIS'ters, led and delivered by females with lived experience has helped me so much. I have previously been supported by other charities for survivors, but there is nothing quite like CIS'ters. It is unique and a lifeline.

Delegate, who joined in 2023:

Unless you have experienced sexual abuse as a child, where the offender is part of your family, you will never really understand the terror, shame and loneliness that you feel as a child and still as an adult. The impact on your life is everlasting. The past cannot be changed.

To be part of CIS'ters and then to attend the weekend workshop made me feel heard, it validated my feelings, it gave me courage and it made me feel as if I belong. The feeling of being cared for and about, is so powerful.

Unable to have a normal childhood cause so much hardship in my life. Even as an adult the suffering still continued. Being able to connect with other female survivors of sexual abuse within a family, is invaluable – and it enables you to let go of all that you try to forget on a day to day basis. CIS'ters helps people like me, and I hope you can see that too.

Delegate, who joined in 2021:

If you are not a survivor of sexual abuse as a child, within a family, I cannot even begin to make you understand what it means to be surrounded by people 'like me' and especially being set NOT in a therapeutic/clinical setting – but where we are free to share in laughter, tears, joy and sadness, and learning.

Maybe if you have ever experienced feeling isolated and then finding your 'tribe' you may understand. Being a survivor and getting to share a beautiful female only safe space with other female survivors is that times a million.

In 2023 I arrived at the weekend workshop with depression and left without depression and it hasn't been back since. Such is the power of a deep connection and being seen and loved, as a member of the community which is CIS'ters. In 2024 I attended my 2nd event and left as I arrived, feeling good.

If I have a blip during the year, I know I can email the office and someone will respond. So far I haven't needed to do that. Being part of CIS'ters means that I belong.

As someone who has previously spent (elsewhere) many hours in every therapy I could try, and engaged in anything research said would be good for my well-being I can honestly say that weekend offered by CIS'ters to members, is the most healing thing I have ever done.



(We are) the Shadow Children

A message to our inner child

On the other side of colour
On the far side of the mirror
Stand the shadow children,
Hands and faces pressed against the glass
That no-one sees.

Their dark eyes see all
Their lips speak nothing.
For this is the place of fear and darkness
Where no one would venture willingly.

But to rescue the children
You must be brave,
Take a candle and light their way.

Their stories may chill you
Their cries may haunt you
But once having seen them
You can't turn back.

ANON



Shoes, well trodden
Like the memories that haunt me.

Shoes red

Like the blood I let to show me I am real
Shoes too tight
Reminiscent of the tightness of my chest
As I held my breath
In the middle of the night
As he crept towards me

Curled up, in the shadows of my mind
Painful thoughts and feelings
Too frightened to be found
Told I will be sent to prison
And others die
I need to keep this secret
Hidden deep inside



SHOES RED

Standing tall
With secrets unfurled
Burden lifted
And not to blame
Found my **CIS'ters**
A tribe, a whole
Emotionally resilient
A future I can hold



Editorial Statement: We welcome letters from Survivors and from those who support them such as friends/allies/counsellors/social workers etc. While every effort will be made to keep contributions complete and unedited we reserve the right to make amendments when necessary, and will note it as 'edited'. Decisions about the inclusion & amendment of contributions are the responsibility of the Editorial Team, and are final. Contributions do not necessarily reflect the views & opinions of **CIS'ters**, members of the Trust Board, or the Editorial Team. Inclusion of any reference to an individual, book list, or organisation resource is not a recommendation.

The contents of this newsletter are for information and support purposes only.

This newsletter is not a substitute for individual therapy or professional supervision.

CIS'ters, PO Box 119, Eastleigh, Hants, SO50 9ZF

Tel: 023 80 338080

www.cisters.org.uk

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