

Venus Charity Annual Report 2024 to 2025

1. Our Year at a Glance



Achievements and Performance 2025

Housing Support



We provided floating support for new tenancies totalling 60 people across the year.



18 former homeless men attended Bacon Butty Club.



Over 400 individuals accessed the International Coffee Morning.



24 new tenancies were secured through the Rapid Rehousing Programme.

Athena House



We opened Athena House in partnership with Excel Housing Solutions and supported 45 women in our 12-bed domestic abuse accommodation.

Mental Health Support



We provided counselling to 117 women in Bootle.



We hosted 11 volunteer counsellors across the year.



37 women received Listening Ear light touch support from 2 volunteers.

Support Groups



Supported by Sports England, our Women's Walking Group clocked up over 105 hours of walking.

Star Centre



We provided 3941 therapy sessions for children and young people.



709 children and young people engaged with the service.



217 children, young people or their families completed planned therapeutic interventions with us.



95% of young people said they would recommend us to a friend.

Youth Justice



55 young people engaged with the Youth Justice pathway with 312 sessions attended.

Open Access



Over 700 open access sessions have been delivered over 48 weeks, 3 days per week.

Step Together



Step together has received 4646 referrals.



20 women accessed support through one-to-one support, therapy and group work.



9 mums achieved increased contact with their children and 7 children were returned or remained with their mum.



Achievements and Performance 2025

Moon In Venus



22 women took part in our Elastic Money sessions at Bootle Library.

Smallwood Trust



76 women benefitted from Smallwood Trust grants totalling £39,957.89.

Money Management



We assisted 343 people with money management and energy efficiency support.

Supporting Families Programme



We received 33 referrals with 31 families receiving whole family support.



116 individuals have been supported.

Crocky Trails



We took 11 families, including 35 children to Crocky Trails in Chester during the summer holidays.

Family Navigation Service



166 families were referred into the Family Navigation service for individual intensive support.

Afghan Resettlement Programme



We resettled 6 Afghan families into the local community.

Student Placements



We hosted 9 social work students from Edge Hill University and Liverpool John Moores University.



We welcomed 2 law students from Liverpool University.



We employed a record 14 Recruited to Train student therapists and 2 apprentice Community Health and Wellbeing Support Workers.

School Uniform Assistance



120 children received help towards purchasing school uniforms.

Christmas Celebrations



87 children and young people attended our Christmas party.



We provided toy hampers for 188 children and young people.



We distributed 98 Christmas food parcels to local families.

2. Charitable Objectives

Our Memorandum and Articles of Association states:

- Venus aims to promote such charitable purposes as the Trustees shall, in their absolute discretion, think fit, including in particular but not so as to limit the generality of the foregoing”.
- The advancement of education and the preservation and protection of health of those young women residing in the area of Sefton, particularly, but not exclusively, in matters relating to sexual health,
- The provision of facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation and leisure time occupation with the object of improving the condition of life for the said women.

During 2025, we submitted a request to the Charity Commission to amend our articles of association to reflect the changing nature of our programmes. The Charity Commission responded by requesting amendments to our proposal. We are working with Liverpool Council for Voluntary Services (LCVS) to make the necessary changes to the amended articles of association before we resubmit this request in December 2025.

Our Vision and Mission

The Venus Charity Vision is to support the communities we serve to have fulfilling lives and to be resilient.

Our vision is fulfilled through our mission: To work with women, children, young people and families in our community, recognising their choices, voices and opportunities to develop their potential.

We are a value led organisation, and our work is delivered through our Value Framework:

- **Accessible** – An open-door policy
- **Respect** – Consideration and respect for the people we support and for each other
- **Integrity** – Our community is at the heart of what we do, and we work to our values at all times
- **Trust** – We respect confidentiality, and the trust people place in us
- **Fairness** – A fair deal for everyone

Venus works across the Borough of Sefton. Our programmes are co-designed with our service users, ensuring our work is meeting their needs. In the Financial Year 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, our programmes included:

- Family services through Early Help, structured support programmes and family triage
- Mental health services for children and young people
- Open Access Advice and Support
- Accommodation and tenancy support to homeless individuals
- Money management and financial literacy
- Emergency food and provisions such as warm clothing
- Resettlement support to asylum seekers and refugees
- Weekly support groups
- Counselling for women
- Services for women with multiple complexities
- Volunteering opportunities

3. Delivering our aims, objectives, and legal purposes

The Venus Trustees support the delivery of our charitable aims and objectives through ongoing checks and balances and scrutiny of management information, progress reports and financial statements. We hold bi-monthly board meetings and have a number of board sub-groups including a regular finance subgroup meeting. The depth and breadth for our services are demonstrated above in easy-to-understand infographics in Section

4. Summary of Year

This financial year has been one of the most challenging times for the charity sector. Many Trusts and Foundations closed their programmes, and we faced uncertainty over the continuation of commissioned services due to the change of government. Charities also needed to be mindful of the rise in Employers National Insurance contributions in April 2025, which meant a significant rise in payroll costs with limited avenues to recoup those costs within existing grants and commissions. Amid these circumstances, Venus has continued to innovate and respond to the needs of our community. Practical support has increased; we've introduced new mental health interventions, distributed emergency essentials and provided enriching wellbeing activities. Our most exciting additions this year are women's refuge - Athena House and a pilot mental health programme for supporting the best start in life for children under 5.

We began 2024 with an amazing fundraiser organised by our Trustee and former Chair, Barbara Dutton. We had a music filled evening in The Southport Market with performances by the Connected Voices Choir, a raffle sponsored by the Financial Planning Corporation, and a speech by the Lady Mayor of Sefton. This joyful event deepened our footprint in the North of our Borough, built new relationships with local people, raising over £2000 towards our summer programme for families.

Our key achievement this year was the launch of Athena House in August 2024. Athena House is a 12 roomed refuge for women with complexities who are escaping domestic abuse. We were proud to open the service in partnership with Excel Housing Solutions. This innovative project was commissioned by Sefton Council through their Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy.

As we approached our 30th anniversary in April 2025, we revisited our volunteer led befriending model which was one of our cornerstone services when we launched in 1995. We were supported by the Women's Fund for Merseyside to deliver a listening ear volunteering programme with the aim of reducing loneliness and isolation for women in our community.

Supported by the Rosa Foundation we were proud to develop an awareness raising and advocacy campaign with our Step Together clients. Venus commissioned local charity Twin Vision to create a collaborative animation which highlights the many stigmas associated with child removal and the long-lasting impact on mothers. The women involved in creating the animation were commended for their bravery in telling us their stories.

In April 2024, we began a two-year pilot advancing our Family Navigation support model by aiming to address inequalities for families with children under 5 years in their household. We will learn continuously from this pilot which is based on the principles of codesign. This work

is supported by the National Lottery Community Fund. The pilot runs alongside our new Video Interaction Guidance (iVIG) therapeutic programme for parents with babies 0-2 which launched in January 2025. To take this development forward, we welcomed Clare Kavangh into the role of Early Years Development Manager. Led by Clare, we aim to codesign a holistic family support model that uses strength-based parenting approaches blended with practical support to avert crisis in the home.

We continued to blend our money management programme with arts and wellbeing. This year we were supported by the Euro-Library Fund, in partnership with At the Library to create the project Elastic Money. Led by artists Ruth Beale and Amy Feneck of the Alternative School of Economics. The Lexicon of Debt is the resulting publication which discusses debt related language used in the local area.

Our Hub Services enjoyed expanded activities through the support of the Community Impact Fund, Warm Hubs (Sefton Council for Voluntary Service) Sport England and The Eleanor Rathbone Trust. Garnering small grants makes big impacts, this support provided emergency food parcels, developed our women's walking group, and extended open access advice provision to 5 days each week.

We are proud of our history of creating opportunities for young people, particularly concerning workforce development in the Voluntary and Community Sector. In November 2024, with support from Train 2000 (UCLAN) we hosted 2 Community Health and Wellbeing Apprentices who will be with us for 15 months, working across our services to develop their skills (and ours) in Social Prescribing.

The Star Centre continues to be the essential hub in Sefton for mental health support for children and young people. Of note this year, was Liverpool One Foundation's support for additional Incredible Years training and extending the impact of the course with additional home coaching support. We were commissioned Sefton Council for Voluntary Service to create a new designated pathway for Care Leavers, removing barriers to accessing mental health support as they settle into independent homes.

We've continued in our quest to find a new home. This year we commissioned Studio Morrison and Architype to help us think out of the box in relation to space and how we use it. We developed beautiful plans for our dream home - a stunning place for the community to find joy and sanctuary along with an improved workplace environment for our dedicated staff and volunteers. In March we were approached by Sefton Council with the offer of an asset transfer of a building with limited capital works. We look forward to embedding the plans and strategy offered by the Studio Morrison and Architype commission in this amazing opportunity.

Sue Potts, CEO Venus Charity

5. Practical Support when its needed most

Supporting Families Programme

In 2024 we entered the final year of the commissioned service Supporting Families (originally known as Troubled Families). Venus has been commissioned by Sefton Council as part of this Early Help for Families initiative since 2012. Over the past 12 years we have supported hundreds of families who have been stepped down from a Social Care Order or have needed assistance to avert social care involvement. This year we supported 32 families with holistic support led by the voice of the child/children in the household. 120 individuals were supported through this programme of which 46 were adults, and 74 were children and young people under 18 years. We were delighted to hear in March 2025 that we were awarded a yearlong extension to this contract.

Family Navigation

In 2023, we were supported by the P H Holt Foundation to continue our Family Triage service. When this funding ended, we shared our learning with the National Lottery Community Fund who awarded us two years funding through the Awards for All programme to advance the triage model into a Family Navigation model focussing on the best start in life. Through this project, families can self-refer to Venus, ask for support via our website, enquire at Open Access, or via a worker connected to the family. Families receive up to 6 weeks intensive support which can be practical, emotional/mental health, advocacy, money management, referral to specialist services or befriending. We received 166 referrals to this service in 2024/2025, and 102 individuals received support.

Step Together

Step Together is a programme which supports mothers whose child has been removed from their care or at risk of child removal. It's a vital service and we've been grateful to the National Lottery Fund for their support over the past 8 years for this unique programme. This year we received 46 referrals of which 20 women completed a full support plan. This resulted in 9 women having increased contact with their children and remarkably, 7 children were returned to their mother's care.

Early Years and Best Start in Life

At the beginning of 2025, we invested in the recruitment of an Early Years Development Manager with the aim of bridging the gap between the therapeutic work delivered with parents at Star Centre and the practical support provided by our family support programmes. This new role was tasked with introducing a service for babies/young children aged 0-2 called Video Interaction Guidance (iVIG). iVIG is a strength based therapeutic intervention which works alongside parents to understand how to attune with their child. Alongside iVIG, we will take the same integrated approach with the Incredible Years intervention for children between 5 and 10 years, using a home coaching service supported by the Masonic Foundation. The aim of this new approach programme is to avert crisis situations in the home so that therapeutic programmes can have their best effect.

Student Placements

This year we have welcomed 9 social work students from Edge Hill University and Liverpool John Moores University. Supporting Open Access were 2 law students from the University of Liverpool. We also welcomed 2 Community Health and Wellbeing Apprentices, both young people of 18 years of age. We're happy to be supporting young people in a career pathways in the Voluntary Sector.

Money Management and Financial Literacy

Debt continues to be a significant household issue in our community. We take referrals to our Money Management Programme from all our services. Residents can also self-refer to this programme. In 2024/2025 we supported 343 people to maximise their income and to manage debt. This work was supported by The Financial Planning Corporation (FPC), United Utilities Trust and Liverpool City Region's Multiply Programme.

Since 2022, we've worked in partnership with arts organisations through our Moon In Venus project to help us to think differently about our relationship with debt. The Moon in Venus programme continued this year by taking up residency in Bootle Library with the School of Alternative Economics, Sefton Library Service, and Arts Council England Portfolio Organisation – At the Library. This work was supported by the Euro-Library Fund.

Our continued partnership with the Smallwood Trust enabled us to provide £39, 957.00 of small grants directly to women in need. Smallwood grants make a huge difference to women's lives. We are able to purchase goods, pay off arrears, and alleviate debt. A lot can be learned from this innovative programme if we are to support people out of the poverty trap.

6. Mental Health Services for Women, Children and Young People

Our mental health services encompass a free to access women's counselling service, located at the Venus Centre and the Star Centre, providing a range of therapeutic interventions for children and young people. The women's counselling service is supported by volunteer student placements from a range of local colleges and universities. This year we hosted 11 student counsellors who provided 117 counselling sessions.

The Star Centre provides a range of services for children and young people including Person Centred Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Eye Movement, Desensitization and Re-processing (EMDR) and Systemic Family Practice. We hold a crisis drop in each Thursday where young people can drop in without appointment and a very popular creative drop in for young people on our waiting lists. This year 68 young people accessed our crisis drop in and 106 young people attended the creative drop in.

During Financial Year 2024-2025, 709 young people engaged with Star Centre services. 590 young people accessed 2 or more therapeutic sessions, there were individual 3941 attended sessions (including arranged appointments, groups, and drop-ins). 217 young people completed planned therapeutic interventions, which is a high number of 'completes' compared to many other services. 55% of young people completed paired outcome measures showed measurable improvement after completing therapy.

Our Parenting pathway offers strength-based parenting programmes such as iVIG, Incredible Years, Riding the Rapids for parents whose child has an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis (ASD), and Cathy Cresswell Training to support the parenting of anxious children. We were supported by the Liverpool One Foundation to provide additional Incredible Years Training along with home coaching to support parents to put their learning into practice.

We have an outreach programme funded by Merseyside Police's Stonehaven Fund for young people involved in crime or at risk of criminal activity, with a focus on what is termed County Lines. We recognise that these young people are fearful of being recognised and they may not be willing to come to the Star Centre. Therefore, we offer therapy at a place of choice where a young person feels safe.

Feedback from our young people includes:

It helped me go into school easier and helped with worry techniques

*I have liked being able to talk to Claire, and it has helped me understand myself more.
Getting my feelings out of my head has helped too, even if for only an hour.*

*My worries and concerns were validated and it's nice to feel heard and work with someone
who shares real care and interest.*

Learning more, coping mechanisms, stop myself from going to a meltdown.

*Interesting, the sessions helped at home with mum in that we talked about the running away
and social care. We didn't just push it down and not talk about it. The sessions have helped
me to improve my relationship with mum and make it even better.*

Increased Access to Talking Therapies (IAPT) / Recruit to Train

We are a member of Sefton's IAPT partnership which aims to develop the children and young people's mental health workforce through traineeships in various modalities. We recruit students annually through this scheme, their work increases the depth and breadth of our offer at Star Centre. In 2024/2025 we supported 14 RTT studentships and retained 3 students from our 2023 intake.

Star Centre Developments

In January 2025 we created a new post – Autism Spectrum Disorder Development Manager to address a sharp rise in the number of children and young people being referred to our service with an ASD. This new post is tasked with developing our ASD services using an organisation-wide approach including staff training, the development of appropriate spaces and resources, and the resourcing new services based on best practice and local need.

We entered into our second year of hosting Additional Roles (ARRs) on behalf of South Sefton Primary Care Network. We host two Children and Young People's Wellbeing Practitioners who offer a low level anxiety and worry management service to children and young people with a South Sefton GP.

7. Support for Homeless People

In May 2024, in partnership with Excel Housing Solutions we secured a two-year commission from Sefton Council to deliver a trauma informed refuge service for women with multiple complexities who are escaping domestic abuse. The service responds to a gap in provision in line with DLUHC's statutory guidance for the delivery of support to victims of Domestic Abuse in safe accommodation. Women who have, for example, experienced street homelessness, substance abuse, or poor mental health are often excluded from traditional refuge systems. Athena House directly responds to this gap, offering tailored, trauma-informed support to women considered to be high risk. Venus offers one to one support within Athena House along with an onsite therapist. The refuge opened in August 2024, offering a beautiful living environment, with 12 ensuite rooms which are consistently fully occupied. By the end of March 2025, we had welcomed 45 women into Athena House and successfully rehoused 6 former Athena residents into safe, secure homes with tenancies.

As part of Sefton Supported Housing Consortium we manage 19 units of supported accommodation in the south of the Borough. We support a caseload of 30 people in 'floating support', in homes not managed by Venus. Through the Rough Sleepers Initiative, we support vulnerable clients to be rapidly rehomed. This year we had 333 referrals to our housing services and successfully rapidly rehoused 16 people.

We were recommissioned by Sefton Council to support 6 Afghan families to settle into new homes in Sefton. Our support includes identifying suitable properties, dressing the homes and networking families to essential services such as registering with GPs and schools.

8. Emergency Support

Our crisis interventions have supported families to remain resilient through a cost-of-living crisis that continues to exacerbate social, housing and emotional vulnerabilities. Crisis interventions this year have been supported through individual donations, The Community Impact Fund, Warm Hubs, Sefton Council for Voluntary Service and Living Well Sefton.

Open Access continues to be extremely busy, and we've welcomed our two Community Health and Wellbeing Apprentices who give frontline support. We've provided over 700 open access appointments. Any member of the community can approach us for support between 10 am and 3 pm Monday to Thursday. This year we've seen a rise in request for support associated with the housing crisis. We've helped over 100 people access Property Pool Plus, the housing portal for social landlords in Merseyside.

Our busiest Open Access session is our Friday morning session for refugee and asylum seekers. Despite limited funding, we ensure this session runs weekly as it supports some of the most vulnerable members of our community. In this financial year we provided 577 individual advice sessions.

Our popular Bacon Butty Club provides a warm breakfast and an even warmer welcome for isolated men navigating homelessness or recovery. We are grateful to the Albert Gubay Trust for supporting this work which involved 123 attendances. Much more than a hearty breakfast, we hold information sessions, health checks, and help the men get online to bid for properties and manage their benefits.

The scale of our emergency support is demonstrated below:

- 1,820 food parcels distributed to households facing food insecurity.
- 219 foodbank vouchers issued for emergency access to food.
- 352 open-access financial wellbeing sessions
- 120 school uniforms
- 98 Christmas Food Parcels
- 188 Christmas Toy Hampers
- 59 utility vouchers
- 305 food vouchers

9. Groups and Activities

Across the week we invite the community to take in wellbeing activities designed to bring people together, have fun and reduce social isolation. Each Tuesday we host the women's coffee morning attended by up to 20 local women each week. We encourage the group to suggest activities including meditation, cooking together, using the minibus to go out to local venues and to share skills and knowledge. Each Wednesday we host a peer support group for our Step Together Mums; this group is a self-led support network. On Thursday is our ever-popular Makers Group, attended regularly by up to 10 women and led by our wonderful volunteer Jane. Friday is very busy at the centre, we have our men's Bacon Butty Club and the International Coffee morning. We host a weekly Family Drop In at the Marie Clarke centre, with fun and activities for parents with children under 5.

Our family programme this year included a wild summer day out at the Crocky Trail, fun at Gulliver's World and our amazing Christmas party complete with Santa and a Grotto.

Financial Review

Despite the state of flux in the Charity Sector we've had another successful financial, achieving a balanced budget and the fortification of our reserves. We were thankful to the Integrated Care Board (NHS) for their continued uplift and Winter Surge Funds which brought stability to the offer at Star Centre. We were thankful to the Steve Morgan Foundation for their core funding of £50,000 which helped with salary costs for the core team. We continued with our pathway for IAPT Trainees, increasing the offer and helping us to retain trainees to develop new strands of work and income streams. We've continued to bolster our programme through restricted funds from Trusts and Foundations. All of this funding assists us to respond to the needs of the community.

Venus Board of Trustees