

F i r s t S t e p s E D

ANNUAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS 24/25

The all-ages National Eating Disorders Charity. Passionate about bringing hope, opportunities, and choices to the lives of all who are affected by eating difficulties and disorders.



About us

First Steps ED has been at the forefront of improving the lives of people of all ages, genders and backgrounds impacted by eating disorders since 2004 and has built a reputation as the leading evidence-based Eating Disorder charity in the UK.

Our team of seasoned professionals adopts a person-centred, quality-assured, research-based approach to their work (when working with service users). We are dedicated to collaboration and serving as an integrated partner in health and education settings, advocating for seamless care, timely access, comprehensive services, and effective care coordination.

We have a collaborative and progressive culture and a value-led team of staff, volunteers and placement students who help curate our stakeholder-led co-production eating disorders. Our foundations are built on engaged leadership, data-driven improvement, empanelment, and team-based care; focus on our service users underpins our culture and behaviours and many of them become befrienders, volunteers, and future employees. These values are central to our mission, guiding us to provide the necessary care and support to those seeking our assistance. We aim to offer a real chance at recovery so that individuals are not defined by their illness.



Demonstrating our impact

The past year has been marked by significant achievements and milestones. Our referral numbers are higher than ever, which suggests that our hard work and dedication have not gone unnoticed, showcasing our commitment to bringing about positive change for individuals impacted by eating disorders.

Our efforts have enabled us to extend our services to two new locations throughout the UK, reaching out to diverse communities and offering vital resources and support to those in need, with a rise in referrals from boys and men.

Looking ahead to the upcoming year, we are guided by a new strategy and have grown further across the UK. Our commitment to making a real impact remains unwavering, and we are enthusiastic about expanding on the solid groundwork we have laid. Together, we can work towards a brighter and more inclusive future for individuals affected by eating disorders.

2063

referrals from funded areas

657

referrals from unfunded areas

32%

increase in referrals

20%

of referrals are male

Demographics of Our service users

First Steps ED ensures secure data capture and information gathering by using a range of digital forms. These are tailored to evaluate outcomes and impacts, as well as to gauge the service user's feedback on the support provided.

NHS Adults, CAMHS eating disorders services, GPs, school professionals, and parents/carers can make referrals to First Steps ED, with support delivered face-to-face in local community settings, in schools and online via video clinic. Individuals can also self-refer to our services.

2720

referrals received into
our all-ages service
pathway

976

children and young
people referrals

1339

adult referrals

405

referrals for
parent/carer support



Direct and non-direct referrals
April 2024 to March 2025

Understanding the demographics of our referral data helps us address the needs of different groups effectively and ensures inclusivity in planning and development.

When analysing such data, it's also crucial to explore the underlying factors that contribute to these figures and work towards creating a more balanced and equitable society for everyone.

35.9%

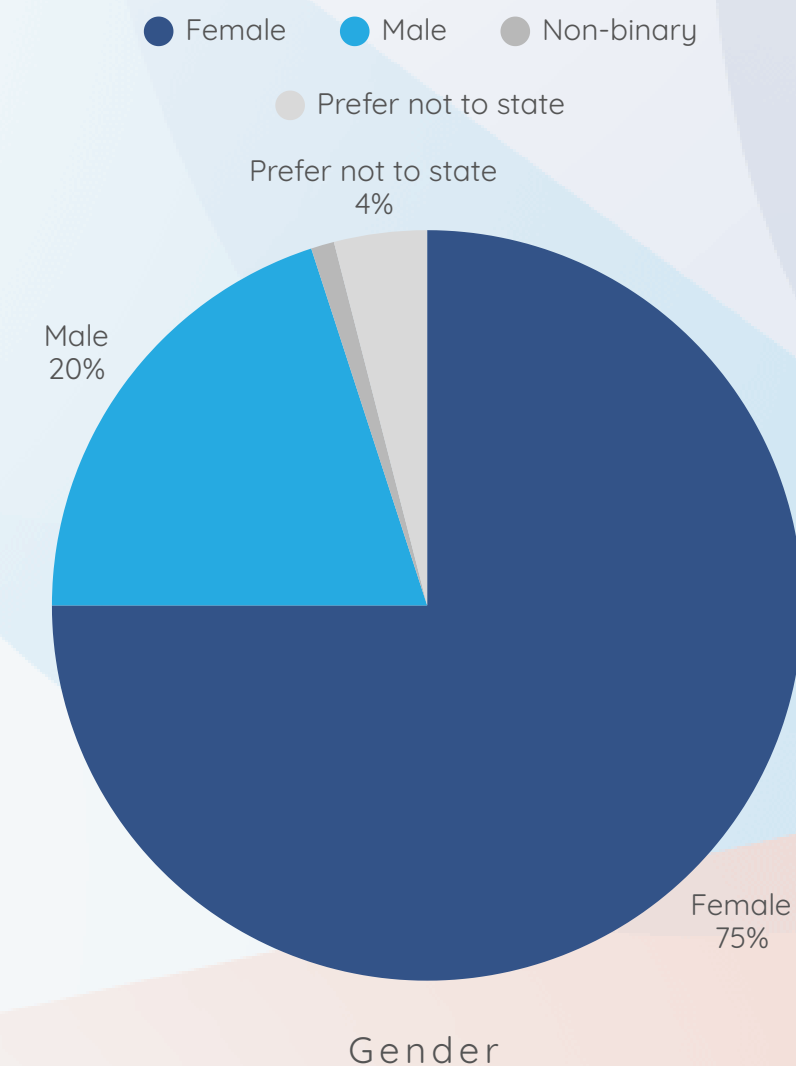
of service users were
neurodivergent

32%

of service users were
from marginalised ethnic
communities

20%

of service users were
male



Outcome Measures

In 2025, we strengthened how we measure the impact of our services, using validated tools to evidence change for those we support. These outcome measures demonstrate the positive difference First Steps ED makes in reducing ARFID traits, improving eating disorder symptoms, and helping individuals move closer to recovery goals.

NIAS

32% on average reduction of arfid traits during one-to-one support.

EDE-A

Average pre score 3.29 and average post score 2.65, 19% reduction (national after goal is below 2.8)

EDE-Q

Average pre score 3.16 and average post score 2.69, 15% reduction.



O u r i m p a c t o n

The NHS

Over 70% of our service users stated in their feedback that First Steps ED reduced their reliance on NHS services.

This means we have approximately reduced national hospital admissions by 7% and national waiting lists by 16% according to the latest estimates from the NHS.

Feedback from service users:

"It is really hard to find services that are properly adjusted for neurodiverse people, and therefore, I would still be struggling."

"I would have got worse at home and then needed an NHS ED service"



Our Services

We aim to empower you to be in control of your recovery through one-to-one professional and group support. Our services are available for ages 5 and above.



One to One Support

One-to-one support at First Steps ED is one of our core services, which recognises the unique experiences of all clients, with or without a formal diagnosis.

The aim is to provide a safe, non-judgemental, and understanding space to give our clients the time and freedom to talk.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy helps to support individuals with a particular life obstacle that they want to overcome. Psychotherapy at First Steps ED can be accessed by individuals aged 16 and above, who struggle with disordered eating and eating disorders.

Our Specialist Support Officers and Psychotherapists are highly trained, skilled, and knowledgeable about the treatment of eating disorders





T h e E v o l u t i o n o f

Our ARFID Pathway

Over the past year, we have continued to evolve our ARFID (Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) pathway to ensure it reflects the growing needs of our service users.

A key milestone in this evolution has been the introduction of dedicated nutrition support into every individual one-to-one support plan. This integration ensures that all service users accessing ARFID support receive holistic care, combining therapeutic approaches with practical nutritional guidance.

703

individuals supported
with ARFID

26%

of all service users

We partnered with Mealtimes Matter CIC to extend our ARFID support in Staffordshire. Through the How to Feed a Dragon programme and Skills for Carers workshops, we are helping parents and carers build confidence, compassion, and practical tools to support loved ones with sensory sensitivities around food.

Befriending Service

Befriending is our award-winning weekly support programme. We match a service user with one of our highly trained befrienders who volunteers to provide ongoing support to the service user

95

individuals supported
through Befriending

3469

befriending sessions
delivered

It is offered in a range of formats, including email up to twice a week and video/telephone calls once a week. Befriending provides flexibility and a level of anonymity, providing a sense of control in recovery

Eating Disorders in Student Services (EDISS)

Lincoln University has commissioned our Eating Disorder in Student Services (EDISS) pathway to deliver peer support for students at Lincoln University presenting with mild-to-moderate disordered eating habits.

51

referrals from Lincoln
University

The contract also provided further funding for weekly psychoeducation workshops designed specifically for students in the academic setting.



Guided self-help groups and psycho-education workshops

We always have a variety of topics in our support groups and we aim to provide psycho-education whilst making the groups fun and stress-free.

Service users have access to a variety of age-appropriate workshops tailored to their needs, which are all delivered virtually by our trained Specialist Support Officers and volunteers. These workshops are co-created with service users.

Longer term attendees are encouraged to co-lead activities which builds their confidence and often leads to develop further interest in volunteering for First Steps ED.

S c h o o l B o d y I m a g e W o r k s h o p

Our sought-after school workshop helps pupils evaluate their relationships and explore topics contributing to poor body image.

Our sessions are tailored to the age of the pupils and delivered in a sensitive yet thought-provoking way by a member of our CYP specialist team.

B o y s a n d M e n W o r k s h o p

Our new Boys and Men Workshop provides a safe space to explore body image, mental health, and eating disorders in males, challenging societal norms and pressures.

Topics include the impact of social media, masculinity expectations, and the role of body image in a man's identity, as well as gym culture, orthorexia, perfectionism, and binge eating.

51

School workshops
delivered

1752

pupils attended
school workshops

16

boys attended our
Boys and Men pilot
workshop

Skills for Carers

Parents and caregivers can utilise our services while their loved ones engage with First Steps ED's one-on-one support, as well as during their time as NHS inpatients or outpatients.

We have also created a new workshop specifically designed for parents and caregivers who are supporting individuals exhibiting binge eating or emotional eating behaviours.

405

parent and carers
supported



Private Practice

Recovery doesn't look one way, so at First Steps ED, we believe that therapy shouldn't either.

Our Private provides counselling and psychotherapy to those looking for support with their relationship with food, their bodies, and themselves from the age of 16 and above. Our service users work with a qualified therapist who has significant training and years of experience working with eating disorders and disordered eating.

We provide evidence-based interventions and benchmark ourselves against leading eating disorder organisations worldwide whilst remaining person-centred to allow service users to work on individual goals. We aim to provide the space our service users need to process their unique challenges, maintain hope when things are difficult, and work together to provide the tools to manage recovery going forward.

Welcome Shikha Chopra

865

Private Therapy
Sessions Delivered



Research Projects

M i a M o r g a n , P h D S t u d e n t i n P s y c h o l o g y
U n i v e r s i t y o f D e r b y

The PhD project aims to develop the first nature connectedness intervention specifically for people with disordered eating (DE), in collaboration with people with lived experience of DE and other key experts working in the area.

G e o r g e M y c o c k , P h D S t u d e n t U n i v e r s i t y o f W o r c e s t e r

The PhD looks to explore why cis-men in the UK who are experiencing appearance concerns (i.e. disordered eating, body image issues, eating disorders, etc) oriented towards muscularity are not accessing treatment. To investigate this key question, the planned programme of research

U n a F o y e , R e s e a r c h F e l l o w K i n g s C o l l e g e L o n d o n

The study aimed to understand why people with eating disorders are at risk of suicide, and to do this, interviews took place with individuals with lived experience of eating disorders as well as clinicians working in the field. This study has recently been published.

20

research projects
supported between
April 24 and March 25