

## **Annual Report**

### **for the year ended 31 December 2025**

This report summarizes the activities of CHS for the year to 31 December 2025. It includes a review of the activities of our two principal services, namely the Helpline and the Mental Health Services Centre. However, it also looks at other important aspects of our activities during the year including our financial results and our communication activities.

#### Opening Remarks

It is usual when writing these Annual Reports to get straight into the detail of the year's activities in the Helpline and Mental Health Services Centre. However, 2025 has been such an exceptional year that it makes sense to address the headlines before getting into the detail.

Firstly, as mentioned in the closing section of last year's Annual Report, CHS was nominated as the beneficiary of the 2025 Darkness into Light Walk to raise awareness of, and help to prevent suicide. This event was first established in 2009 by Pieta Ireland and came to Belgium in 2017. Today, it takes place in fifteen countries around the world covering five continents. In 2024, the Belgian event helped to raise €20,000 which was divided between the then beneficiaries, Centre de Prévention du Suicide and its Flemish counterpart, Centrum ter Preventive van Zelfdoding. For these organizations, a donation of €10,000 represented around 1% of their annual revenues. But for CHS, an equivalent amount would cover roughly half the annual cost of the Helpline.

In the event, the 2025 walk exceeded everyone's expectations and raised a massive €43,948. We are indebted to Sarah Ironside, Chair of the Belgian Darkness into Light Organizing Committee and her team of volunteers who did an amazing job in arranging this year's event. Members of the CHS family were also active supporters of the walk and I think we all learned a lot in terms of what more we could do in 2026.

Planning is already underway for the 2026 event which will take place on Saturday 9 May. The official launch on 4 March is to be hosted by Seamus Boland, the President of the European Economic and Social Committee in collaboration with European Commissioner Michael McGrath who is Honorary Patron of the Belgian event.

The second highlight of 2025 was the fact that, after over 50 years in existence, we held our first ever elections for the CHS Council. This was an important step for us both in terms of good governance but also as a way to introduce new skills and talent to help run CHS. I was delighted at the response and am pleased to welcome Louise Cogan, Laurent Dans, Emily Riley, Alexander Sparey, Therese Spillane and Lyn Trytsman-Gray as new members of the CHS Council 2025 to 2028.

Finally, contrary to expectations this time last year, the owner of the CHS building subsequently decided to withdraw the property from sale, at least for the foreseeable future. We entered into a new nine-year

lease during 2025 albeit with effect from 1 September 2024, and hope to be able to continue to enjoy our location in Avenue des Phalènes for at least the next three or four years.

### The Helpline

This has been another busy and successful year for the Helpline. We ended the year with 35 Helpline volunteers (based on those with an activated SIM) although two of these are currently taking a well-deserved leave of absence. This represents a 20% increase over last year and the largest number of volunteers for many years. We also have a further 10 volunteers in the pipeline, although nearly all of these have only just started their mandatory training programme. Whilst such a large number of volunteers is not without its challenges, certainly from a logistical and mentoring standpoint, it does demonstrate the extent to which awareness of CHS is increasing and will enable us to provide an even greater level of listening support to those in need.

In last year's report, I focused on the number of completed calls to the Helpline after excluding calls from the four most regular callers. I concluded that on this basis, the number of calls had been remarkably consistent at 3,150 in 2022, 2023 and 2024. However, on a comparable basis with previous years, 2025 has seen a significant increase in such calls of over 35% whilst total calls to the Helpline (including regular callers) increased by 24%. These remarkable increases reflect the fact that there is greater awareness of what we do driven by publicity surrounding the Darkness into Light event as well as a much stronger focus on our social media activities via Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, the latter only established at the end of last year to recognize the increasing number of younger callers to the Helpline.

During 2025, total talk time was 1,500 hours, up 30% on last year and average call duration also increased by a little over 5%. In all, the trend we have seen in recent years of calls becoming more difficult has continued into 2025. Whilst this is another statistic that can be distorted by the number of regular callers (as these conversations tend to be relatively brief), it does underscore the fact that we continue to receive difficult and demanding calls from people contemplating suicide - on average over the course of the year, our volunteers continue to receive one such call every day. This presents two challenges. Firstly, to ensure that all volunteers receive regular training in how to handle these calls; secondly, and equally important, to ensure that their own mental health is safeguarded.

One of the most immediate actions we have taken to address this concern, and thanks to the financial contribution from Darkness into Light, has been to seek to recruit a third Helpline supervisor to support the excellent work done by Simon Dwyer and Chana Schneps. We were delighted to welcome Abby Jackman to this role towards the end of the year. However, this coincided with Chana taking the decision to stand down as a Helpline Supervisor, so the search continues. Chana has been fulfilling this role for more years than many of us can remember – certainly for more than 35 years – so she fully deserves to be able to take back some more time for herself. We are deeply indebted to her for her amazing contribution over the years and relieved that she will continue to be a member of the Clinical Team. CHS without Chana would never be quite the same!

Looking to 2026, one of our most immediate challenges will be to migrate our entire communications apparatus to a new platform with Destiny. This has not come a moment too soon as we have seen an increasing number of technological issues in the last quarter of 2025 with dropped Helpline calls or calls being inexplicably forwarded to one volunteer's phone despite that phone not being logged in to the system. It became increasingly clear that the Destiny platform we have been using since 2021 was showing its age. In recognition of the work we do, and following our migration to their new MyDstny

### **COMMUNITY HELP SERVICE ASBL**

Avenue des Phalènes 26  
Nachtlinderslaan 26  
1000 Brussels  
Tel: +32 (0)2 647 67 80

office@chsbelgium.org  
www.chsbelgium.org  
**IBAN:** BE83 4388 1352 9115  
**RPM:** 0408.409.887

platform, Destiny have offered CHS a substantial discount which will cut our annual communication costs by half. However, we will not compromise call quality even if costs are halved. If the new platform does not live up to expectations we may need to consider an alternative source of supply.

Given everything that has been happening behind the scenes this year, it is a tribute to all our Helpline volunteers that they have continued to support not only our community here in Belgium but an increasing number of callers from outside Belgium.

#### The Mental Health Services Centre (MHSC)

As from the beginning of the year, Vanessa Goodman stood down as a member of the Clinical Directorate and two of our psychiatrists, Sarah Przednowek and Junona Sklenskiene joined Marta Noordhoek. We now have a full complement of three members of the Clinical Directorate, all of whom are Ex Officio members of the CHS Council and Executive Committee. Given the important role that the Clinical Directorate fulfils in terms of coordinating the work of the Adults' and Children's Teams throughout the year, it's great to see the Clinical Directorate at full capacity.

As of the end of the year, we have 18 therapists, one down on 2024. During the year we said farewell to Eric Dachy and Marie-Thérèse Kastl both of whom have been long standing members of the CHS family. We wish them well in their new endeavours. We were also delighted to welcome Curllin Alexis, a clinical psychologist, to the Clinical Team.

During the year we had 841 applications for an appointment of which 512 were seen by CHS therapists in our Avenue des Phalènes offices and a further 38 seen in the private practice of a CHS therapist. These numbers are 2% lower than 2024 but are up on 2022 and 2023. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, we continue to see significant demand for psychiatric services but have limited availability; essentially only the Children's Team have any capacity at the moment. As such, the CHS office no longer takes (or records) requests to see a CHS psychiatrist in the Adults' Team.

The other factor was our decision to completely refresh the CHS website. In so doing, a number of key search parameters were lost when the website was relaunched and this had a direct impact on where CHS appeared in Google searches with a consequential impact on the number of people seeking an appointment with a CHS therapist. Following a study of the workings of "Search Engine Optimization" by John Chalmers, our Vice President, a number of key search terms and phrases were reinstated to the new website, all of which have had the desired effect!

Our team of Affiliated Professionals increased to 5 during the year and now includes a special educational needs counsellor to join the existing team of a dietitian, a family mediator, a mindfulness and meditation teacher, and a career and orientation coach. Their diverse skills are a perfect complement to the work of our MHSC.

Following adoption of revised Internal Rules for the Clinical team last year, we recently undertook a similar review of the Internal Rules for the Affiliated Professionals. These will be adopted during 2026. Finally, on behalf of the entire Clinical Team, a huge thank you to our team of office volunteers who ensure that our phone lines are open for callers to the MHSC.

## Financial Results

This was a great year for CHS. As previously mentioned, receiving €43,948 from the Darkness into Light event was a real game changer for us. But we also received two incredible donations from the BSB – €2,030 from their St Patrick’s Day Breakfast and a further €7,000 from their Annual Ball. We also received €1,679 from St Anthony’s Church in Kraainem and €1,220 from the Irish Theatre Group. The whole CHS Family is indebted to all of these donors, to our numerous smaller donors and to all those making donations to Darkness into Light, for their support of what we do.

A brief summary of our financial results is shown in the table below:

|                          | Total CHS    |              | MHSC            |               | Helpline      |                |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
|                          | 2025         | 2024         | 2025            | 2024          | 2025          | 2024           |
|                          | €            | €            | €               | €             | €             | €              |
| <b>Receipts</b>          | 180,333      | 141,273      | 116,843         | 110,827       | 63,490        | 30,446         |
| <b>Expenditure</b>       | (178,498)    | (132,543)    | (132,963)       | (93,006)      | (45,535)      | (39,537)       |
| <b>Surplus (Deficit)</b> | <b>1,834</b> | <b>8,730</b> | <b>(16,120)</b> | <b>17,821</b> | <b>17,955</b> | <b>(9,091)</b> |

We end the year with an overall surplus of €1,834. The Helpline surplus of €17,955 will be transferred to a separate bank account so as to keep these funds separate from CHS’ other cash balances. This is an important principle since the Helpline is essentially a charitable activity and it would be inappropriate for these surpluses to be perceived to be financing the rest of CHS, notably our Mental Health Services Centre. That being said, it is worth mentioning that a significant proportion of our accumulated surpluses have been generated by the MHSC, not by the Helpline. Since 2018, the MHSC has generated a cumulative net surplus of over €80,000.

Our income for 2025 is positive across the board. The Helpline reflects the Darkness into Light contribution of €43,948 as well as the other donations referred to elsewhere in this report. Helpline revenues in 2024 reflected a contribution of €16,000 from the King Baudouin Foundation which was not required this year. MHSC revenues also reflected the impact of indexation following a five-year index holiday as it was felt that our charges had been out of line with the market place.

On the face of it, our expenditure seems to have increased considerably since last year. However, our annual expenditure for each of 2023, 2024 and 2025 have all been distorted by rent negotiations. Our total expenses in 2023 of €150,506 reflected a provision for a back dated rent increase which we were challenging. Our challenge was successful and resulted in 2024 with the release of a provision of €14,000. This explains much of the reduction of expenses from 2023 to 2024. Unfortunately, this coincided with the owner of our building deciding to put it up for sale and the end of our nine-year rental contract. The new rent that came into force with effect from 1 September 2024 increased by €14,500 a year. In addition, just before year-end, we received the final charges statement from the landlord. This was much greater than 2024 and resulted in an additional expense of €6,443.

In terms of liquidity, we finish the year with cash and short-term investments of just over €195,000 although this includes our rental guarantee of roughly €10,000. However, we have not needed to draw down any monies this year from our King Baudouin Foundation Friends of CHS fund which now stands at €26,000, an increase of around €6,000 since last year. In summary, our finances are in good shape and, at least for the time being, we don’t have the threat of removal costs hanging over our heads.

### **COMMUNITY HELP SERVICE ASBL**

Avenue des Phalènes 26  
Nachtlinderslaan 26  
1000 Brussels  
Tel: +32 (0)2 647 67 80

office@chsbelgium.org  
www.chsbelgium.org  
IBAN: BE83 4388 1352 9115  
RPM: 0408.409.887

## Other matters

### Communications and Social Media

During the year we entered into a full-scale upgrade of the CHS website. Our old website lacked energy and was not easily viewed from a mobile phone. The new website has a fresh new and vibrant look and is much easier to navigate around. As previously mentioned, some issues with the Search Engine Optimization algorithm caused our position in Google searches to deteriorate, but these were quickly resolved. We are indebted to John Chalmers for leading this initiative with the support of an external consultancy, ZN Consulting, who have also provided us with the necessary training to update our website in house.

Our social media activity also increased as have the number of followers on Facebook, Instagram and, more recently, LinkedIn. As of early January 2026, we already have 471 followers on LinkedIn, 243 followers on Instagram and 895 followers on Facebook. These numbers are comparatively modest but with the 2026 Darkness into Light event coming up in May 2026, I am confident that we will see great progress this time next year.

In parallel with the foregoing, we launched a dedicated schools' Outreach project at the end of 2025 led by Council Member Louise Cogan with support from two of our Helpline volunteers. The project team has identified a unique opportunity for IB students to engage in the mental health debate and accept the challenge of creating mental health-related reels and posts that can be used on our CHS social media platforms. As part of the International Baccalaureate programme, students are required to dedicate time to the CAS programme – Creativity, Activity and Service – and the CHS challenge fits perfectly within this framework. We are in active discussions with St Johns International, the International School of Brussels (ISB) and the British School of Brussels (BSB) all of whom appear interested in signing up. This is a project that, once established in the IB CAS curriculum of these schools, will deliver benefits for the longer term both in the number of social media followers we have but also generating reels and posts that will resonate with a younger audience.

We are grateful to John and Louise and her Outreach team as well as the publicity team of Beverley Warner-Keltjens (CHS Office Administrator), Caroline Johnson (CHS Publicity Co-ordinator), Owen Prevost and Ingrid Owens for all their efforts on our behalf.

### Conclusion

2025 has been an excellent year for CHS. Our finances are on a firm footing and our newly energised social media activities, coupled with Darkness into Light, have considerably increased awareness of the important services that we provide. Looking to 2026, we must use the lessons learned in 2025 to maximise the impact of this year's Darkness into Light Walk.

However, we also need to manage the expectations of our external stakeholders. A 30% increase this year in calls taken by our Helpline volunteers is incredible, but there has also been a corresponding increase in calls that cannot be taken because the line is busy. We will be focusing on this as a priority in 2026.

#### **COMMUNITY HELP SERVICE ASBL**

Avenue des Phalènes 26  
Nachtlinderslaan 26  
1000 Brussels  
**Tel:** +32 (0)2 647 67 80

office@chsbelgium.org  
www.chsbelgium.org  
**IBAN:** BE83 4388 1352 9115  
**RPM:** 0408.409.887

A similar situation applies to our Mental Health Services Centre where 26% of applicants to see a CHS therapist have to be referred out to non-CHS professionals. We are actively seeking to recruit two psychiatrists, one for each Team, as well as another Clinical Psychologist. I hope these positions can be filled before much longer.

Another priority for 2026 will be to take another look at our communication strategy and, in particular, to refocus on our fundraising activities. With the notable exception of Darkness into Light, in recent years we have seen a steady decline in both the number and amount of donations which are essential to our long-term survival. It would be unreasonable to assume that our privileged position as a beneficiary of the Darkness into Light Walk is something that will continue into perpetuity. As such, we need to plan, now, for the day when we can no longer expect to rely on this source of support.

But for now, the future is bright. The Helpline and MHSC provide an essential service to the broader English-speaking community in Belgium, they do so with dedication, empathy and professionalism and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

My thanks, as always, to the entire CHS family – Helpline volunteers, office volunteers, members of the Clinical Team and Affiliated Professionals as well as the CHS Council, without whom there would be no CHS.

Jeremy Jennings  
President – February 2026