

A close-up photograph of a woman lying in bed, smiling warmly at the camera. She is partially covered by a light-colored blanket with a green pattern. The scene is dimly lit, with a soft blue light source creating a calm and intimate atmosphere.

relate
the relationship people

Relationships in lockdown

Annual review 2020/21

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We're extremely grateful to so many people and organisations for the support they give Relate and our work. We simply couldn't do it without you all.

Adoption UK

Bank Workers Charity

The Brain Tumour Charity

British Association for Counselling
and Psychotherapy

Cafcass Cymru

Charity for Civil Servants

Chartered Accountants
Benevolent Association

Children In Need

Chroma

CLiKD

The Department for Work and Pensions

eharmony

Fastn

Government support package for charities
via The National Lottery Community Fund

Grocery Aid

IQ Student Accommodation

Lloyds Banking Group

Moondance Foundation

NHS – Midlands and London regions

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust

Office of the Police and Crime
Commissioner North Wales

OnePlusOne

Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund

Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity

The Seafarers' Charity

Tavistock Relationships

Tesco Community Grants

Welcome

Simon Wilson, Chair of Trustees at Relate



“ Welcome to Relate’s 2020/21 *Annual review*. At the beginning of March 2020, we were pleased to have set a clear budget for the year ahead and agreed four new strategic pillars: clients, communities, colleagues and sustainability. Then, just as work to finalise a plan of activity was underway by Relate’s Executive Leadership Team (ELT), the words ‘COVID-19’ began appearing at every turn.

I’m proud to say we quickly and successfully transformed from being a primarily face-to-face service delivery organisation to being able to support the nation’s relationships entirely online and on the phone. We were able to

replicate this innovation across the charity: by undertaking research into the impact of the pandemic on relationships, creating of-the-moment self-help content and working with national funders to offer free online support from counsellors – while also keeping our charity afloat in the toughest of times.

The key question for me now is how we move ahead and maintain the best of what the pandemic unexpectedly gave us – digital progress, comradeship across the Federation, a focus on innovation – whilst moving back to a more strategic way of working and stabilising the charity for the long-term. ”

Aidan Jones, Chief Executive at Relate



“ I can’t stress enough how grateful I am to colleagues, trustees and volunteers across the Relate Federation for achieving so much in this period of immense change and uncertainty. Not only have our staff made the huge shift from working face-to-face with clients or in an office environment to working online from their homes, many have also faced adversity in their personal lives such as bereavement, illness and parenting pressures.

In 2020/21, we still managed to deliver 142,000 sessions of counselling, Sex Therapy and Mediation despite the challenges of changing our delivery model and reaching people at a time when relationship issues were all too often being ‘swept under the carpet’ due to lockdowns and changed priorities. We created a brand new short intervention service called

relatehub, which offers 30 minute web chats with Relate counsellors, and secured funding from the government via the National Lottery Community Fund to deliver this for free to adults in England. We also received funding from the NHS to provide free web chats, phone chats and courses of counselling to their staff members via *relatehubNHS*.

Our services continued to deliver impressive outcomes – for example 77% of Adult Relationship Counselling clients said their communication had improved and 72% said their ability to manage conflict had improved.

From a financial perspective, we finished 2020/21 with a small surplus. This puts us in a good place as we look ahead to the future but there is still much work to be done. ”

Who we are and why we're here



Relate is the leading relationships charity.

Working with our partners across the Relate Federation we deliver vital relationship support services – in 2020/21 this has mainly been done via phone, email and video.

Our 1,200 highly trained practitioners provide Adult Relationship Counselling, Sex Therapy, Children and Young people's Counselling, Family Counselling, Mediation and short interventions. Our website provides a huge range of engaging self-help content. We also offer training, education, information and support.

Relate works to inform the public and policy makers about relationships and what makes them flourish. We do this through our research, influencing and communications work.



Our vision

A future where healthy relationships are actively promoted as the heart of a thriving society.



Our mission

To make expert information and support for healthy relationships available to everyone.

Our values



Be human

We respect everyone and value all relationships. We listen and support people to make positive changes in their lives.



Be connected

We're in touch with the world around us and use evidence to explain why relationships matter. We collaborate to provide great services for all our communities.



Be smart

We keep things simple and focus on what works. We put our clients first and maximise every penny for their benefit.

Case study: Melissa's story

Melissa* is 36 and works in I.T. Her webcam counselling sessions with Relate during lockdown helped her to find the confidence to leave a toxic relationship.



“ When I got in touch with Relate in April 2020, I was at rock bottom. I was in the middle of a messy break-up with my ex-partner of seven years.

She was staying with me during lockdown as we were trying to make another go of things, but there were big issues around trust and our relationship was very toxic. It was affecting me to the point where I was having very dark thoughts yet I couldn't find the strength to ask her to leave. Lockdown didn't help as I had more time on my hands and there was so much going on in my head. I started drinking too much and realised something needed to change. I googled counselling and that's when I decided to give Relate a call.

Relate's face-to-face services were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic so I decided to opt for webcam counselling and had my initial assessment the same week. I also got in touch with my GP. I'd been worried they would put me straight on anti-depressants but they

encouraged me to see how the counselling went which was a big relief for me.

My counsellor, Alison, was brilliant – I felt like she understood me right from our initial assessment together and genuinely cared about my wellbeing. Talking to Alison gave me the strength to break out of the toxic loop my ex and I had been caught in for months. With Alison's support I was out of that dark place pretty quickly and was able to end the relationship and ask my ex to leave. I don't feel I would have found the strength to do this without counselling. The counselling also helped me to understand why I'd stayed for so long in an unhappy relationship.

Following the ten sessions with Alison I feel like I have come on leaps and bounds. There are still tough days but I've got hold of it now and know if I ever need to I can contact Relate again for some more sessions. I now feel so much stronger and like I know what I'm looking for in any future relationships. ”

Our year in numbers



We reached more than
5.6 million people this year

Our services*

All statistics in this column include face-to-face, phone and webcam

30,528
people attended
Adult Relationship
Counselling



2,500
people attended
Sex Therapy



4,613
children and young
people received
counselling



3,012
people attended
Family Counselling



1,762
people attended
Mediation



552
people attended
Increasing Access
to Psychological
Therapies (IAPT) Couple
Therapy for Depression



2,398,537
people used our
online self-help services



837
people used
our Message a
Counsellor email service



5,539,908
website users
includes online self-help



3,066
people used one of
our WebChat services**



* Some service statistics are likely to be higher as not all Relate Centres record sessions on our system

** Includes paid-for WebChat and free *relatehub/relatehubNHS* services

Training

Our training and education work is crucial for developing the skills needed to build and maintain healthy relationships.

This year we responded to the pandemic by upskilling our practitioners to deliver services via phone and webcam.

9,669
people used our
training and
education services



1,793
sessions of Relate's
webcam and phone
counselling training
were accessed by
our practitioners



What we do works

77% of Adult Relationship Counselling clients said their communication had improved after counselling



72% of Adult Relationship Counselling clients said managing conflict had improved after attending counselling



83% of clients would recommend Relate to others



Other ways we've helped

As well as our core services, we delivered many other important and innovative projects. Here are just a few statistics highlighting this work.

1,764
people accessed our
services for free



through our much-valued partnerships with: Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity, Bank Workers Charity, Chartered Accountants Benevolent Association, Charity for Civil Servants, Grocery Aid, The National Health Service (NHS), The Seafarers Charity, The Brain Tumour Charity

385
parents attended our
government-funded
Relationships Matter
programme



in the North East of England aimed at reducing parental conflict in workless households

2,379
people accessed our
relatehub service



which offered free WebChats to anyone affected by the pandemic

Our key achievements

Supporting parents in the North East of England

Our Relationships Matter project, funded by the Department of Work and Pensions as part of their Reducing Parental Conflict programme, continued to support families from workless households in the North East of England in 2020/21.

The project offers four new evidence-based interventions to improve communication and reduce conflict between parents. One of these interventions is called Mentalisation-based therapy (MBT) which



supports parents to better understand their partner's feelings and reactions as well as their own, leading to changes in behaviour and improving the wellbeing of the whole family.

Case study: David and Emma's story

Emma and David are in their early twenties and have three young children. They attended MBT which was delivered online and in the evenings to accommodate their childcare arrangements.



What's different after attending the programme?

Emma: "We were just snapping at each other. It was mostly me that was shouting and I didn't know how to reply back in a certain way. It's helped me to respond to David in a much better and calmer way."

It gave us the skills to realise how much we've actually drifted apart and we've learned things on the course that have helped us get closer and communicate a lot better."

David: "It sounds clichéd but if you get the right counsellor it really can change your life. It's not something that you just do once and it's done and dusted, you learn the skills and then you go away and continue to work at it."

What about the children?

David: "I would say they're a lot happier."

Emma: "Yeah, definitely a lot happier, a lot calmer. They can definitely tell there's been a change between me and their dad."

How was your practitioner?

David: "It wasn't like doing a course, more like having a friend who is a third party. He taught us to learn key moments we would notice in our partner when things were starting to get to a certain level."

Emma: "I liked how much he understood what we were going through, and how much he actually narrowed it down for us. Adam was amazing...he helped me understand it more clearly. He made us understand a lot better how each other was feeling."

relatehub and relatehubNHS offer vital relationships and wellbeing support

In response to the massive and unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic, we launched *relatehub* in October 2020. The service provided free 30 minute WebChats with Relationships and Wellbeing Advisors and a range of online self-help resources to adults in England whose relationships and wellbeing had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It allowed us to reach people in an accessible way at a time when many homes became like pressure cookers for relationships: the heat

was turned right up for a sustained period of time. This was made possible with funding from the Government's £750m charities package distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund.

We also launched *relatehubNHS* which provided NHS staff members in the Midlands and London with free WebChats, phone calls and access to a course of webcam counselling sessions where appropriate. Our team were so pleased to be able to do our bit to support the public and NHS staff members when so many were struggling with issues such as social isolation, workplace stress and relationship challenges.

We received some excellent feedback for both services, some of which is shared below.

"Really pleased the service was accessible at the time I wanted it. It's hard to find a moment to access services like this when you live with a partner, so the immediacy of support was great."

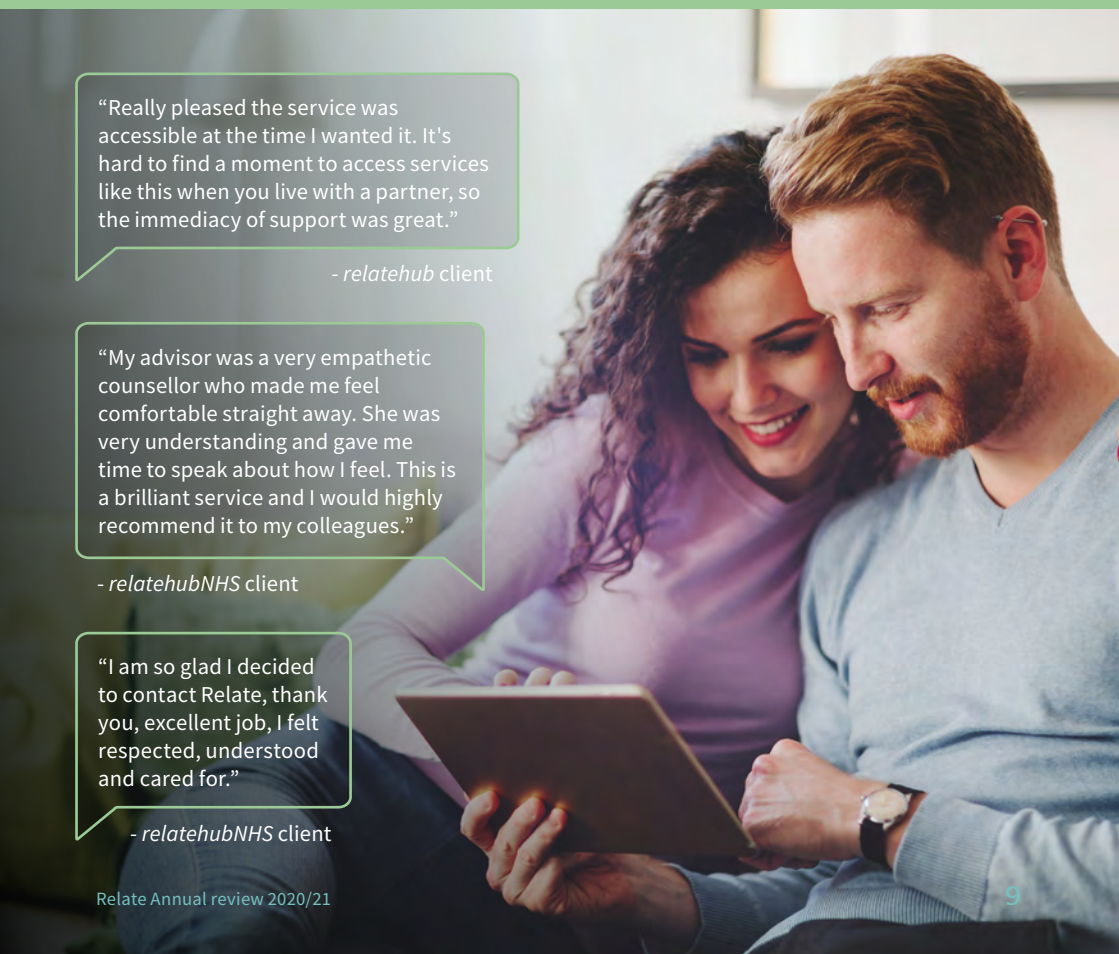
- *relatehub* client

"My advisor was a very empathetic counsellor who made me feel comfortable straight away. She was very understanding and gave me time to speak about how I feel. This is a brilliant service and I would highly recommend it to my colleagues."

- *relatehubNHS* client

"I am so glad I decided to contact Relate, thank you, excellent job, I felt respected, understood and cared for."

- *relatehubNHS* client



Equality, diversity and inclusion

So much happened in 2020/21 that shone a light on the systemic racism, inequality and injustices that exist all around us and the need for us all to prioritise equality, diversity and inclusion in our everyday lives and work, and actively challenge discrimination.

It's something all organisations need to take responsibility for and treat extremely seriously if we're to see real change.

Relate is no exception – we were already aware that we had a long way to go in

improving how we reach out and become more inclusive but now we challenged ourselves to improve further and at speed.

This year we laid the groundwork for change: we created a Federation-wide policy, looked at our data to better understand the profile of our workforce and volunteers, and began a research project to look at how Relate is perceived across different communities.

These were important stepping stones on our journey to creating a more inclusive Relate.



Online self-help content and media commentary

When the pandemic hit, our response included creating a dedicated COVID-19 advice and information space on relate.org.uk offering tips on topics such as staying connected during lockdown, supporting children and young people and coping with bereavement. As of 31 March 2021 this section had received 312,988 visitors. The self-help content also included tips on maintaining your relationship with your partner and spotting emotional abuse.

We were incredibly busy with reactive media requests in the early days of the pandemic; we also conducted polling in April which found that one in eight UK adults living with their partner were having lockdown relationship doubts and that a quarter of parents living with children were finding their children's behaviour had become an issue since staying at home.



In June we teamed up with eharmony to launch a new '*Relationships in lockdown*' report which found more than half (59%) of new couples felt more committed to their partner in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, creating a wave of 'turbo relationships'. Our reactive and proactive media work resulted in just under 3,500 pieces of media coverage.

Local Centres' work to support relationships through the pandemic

Various federated Relate Centres were successful in their funding applications to support people through the pandemic. A great example was Relate Chesterfield and North Derbyshire, who received funds from the National Lottery, Charities Aid Foundation and other local organisations such as the Duke of Devonshire Trust which funded a mix of free counselling and core costs which, alongside their individual and couples' Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies contract, meant they were able to see the majority of their clients free of charge.

Another example was Relate Nottinghamshire who were awarded National Lottery funding to provide free 30 minute counselling sessions to people during the pandemic.

The National Lottery Community Fund also provided money to Relate North and South West Sussex to provide free counselling for people affected by COVID-19. This was pertinent as Crawley and the surrounding areas were hit by unemployment and job losses, as many people living there rely on Gatwick Airport and related retail and hospitality industries for jobs.

Charity shops re-open

Relate's charity shops, which were closed due to lockdown from March 2020, opened their doors again in July. This included the shop in Hythe, Kent, which underwent a significant refurbishment.

We're pleased to say that in 2021 the shops are doing really well.

Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families

An important Ministry of Defence-commissioned report was released in the summer of 2020. *Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families* is a report of a review led by Relate Ambassador, Andrew Selous MP, Relate President, Professor Janet Walker OBE, and Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Worcester, Dr Gabriela Misca.

It highlighted how family stability is essential to the ability of serving personnel to do their duty effectively, yet the contribution and sacrifice their families make are not always understood or valued. It showed the impacts of repeated relocations on children's education and partners' employment, long periods of family separation while serving personnel are on deployment, disruptions in healthcare and the many challenges UK Armed Forces families cope with every day. These can include social isolation, loneliness and mental health issues.



Our Federation's work to support the relationships of Armed Forces personnel is highlighted in-depth in chapter nine of the report. Both Relate Cambridge's work with RAF Wittering and Relate National's contract with the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity and the RAF Benevolent Fund for the Building Stronger Families programme which provide free support including counselling and self-help to beneficiaries were used as case studies of "additional and vital support provided by third sector organisations".

Providing free counselling to adoptive parents

Through Relate's partnership with Chroma – an organisation providing arts therapies to adopted children – adoptive parents were offered up to six sessions of counselling to talk through any issues the parent or parents were experiencing. Participants in the pilot helped address any problems they'd had relating to adoption including communication, managing conflict and difficulties with parenting.

The feedback from the parents who accessed this service was positive with clients saying they felt more confident about their lives and better able to cope with any difficulties they may face in the future.



The sessions took place via webcam which meant they were able to continue when lockdown began. Initially run for six months, the partnership was extended to twelve months.

Relate launches first-ever Relationships Week

In July 2020 we launched our first Relationships Week, bringing together voices from across the UK to highlight the importance of healthy relationships in our lives. We were just emerging from the first lockdown at the time and the theme of the Week was 'relationships un-locked'. We encouraged people to talk more openly about relationships and to celebrate those who had supported them through lockdown in our #RelationshipRocks social media campaign.

Our Relationships Un-locked polling of 2,000 UK adults revealed a mixed picture of a range of relationships as lockdown eased, and we hosted blogs throughout the Week from several individuals and stakeholder organisations. An online course on effective communication for everyday life was made available for free.



We had long held an ambition to launch a national awareness week for relationships and are proud to have launched this in the midst of a global pandemic.

Families Un-locked

In August 2020 Relate and the University of Worcester launched an independent longitudinal study – Families-Unlocked – to look at the impact of the pandemic on relationships and family life.

The study is led by Dr Gabriela Misca, an expert in child and family psychology at the University of Worcester, and Relate's President, Professor Janet Walker, is Research Advisor.

The UK study began in August 2020 and in the first phase of the research over 1,000 people participated. The purpose of the study is to understand how individuals and families are coping and adapting to the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and the 'new normal', and to enable organisations to provide appropriate support for families as they navigate these challenges.

Choose2Change expands in Wales

Relate Cymru secured additional funding to continue providing our Choose2Change domestic abuse perpetrator programme across North Wales and to expand it to cover the whole of Wales. Although we stopped running our face-to-face services, we were very conscious that the clients still needed our support.

We also saw an increase in self-referrals as a result of the lockdowns making the service, which works with male domestic abuse perpetrators to help them understand and change their behaviour and reduce the risk of reoffending, more important than ever. We maintained regular telephone contact with the men going through the programme and also began delivering group work online in June 2020, taking into account each individual's situation and potential risk triggers.

Lloyds Banking Group *M-word* campaign

Our work with Lloyds Banking Group on their *M-word* campaign, which encourages people to talk about money, continued in 2020/21.

A highlight was launching a brand new series of *The Relationship Podcast* from Relate. Each of the six episodes covered a different life stage that often leads to tricky conversations about money such as buying your first home and retirement. Our experienced counsellors Simone Bose and Peter Saddington walked listeners through the issues that can come up and how to tackle them by opening up and talking with loved ones.

Find out more at relate.org.uk/mword

Approach to domestic abuse

Unfortunately domestic abuse remains all too prevalent in our society and there was a reported increase in cases during lockdowns.

During 2021 we have implemented an enhanced approach to identifying and proactively responding to all forms of domestic abuse which has included further practitioner training and a strengthened assessment process.

All couples seeking counselling are now seen individually as well as jointly prior to the offer of any ongoing support. This enables our practitioners to more effectively understand the clients' issues and resource them in the safest way possible.

Connected Relationships

Relate's three year Connected Relationships initiative aims to transform our digital capabilities and reach more people by putting users at the heart of our work. Funded by just under £500,000 from The National Lottery's Digital Fund, the grant and support that comes with it is enabling us to better understand the communities we exist to serve and create targeted, innovative ways to help them.

This year we looked at what becoming a 'digital organisation' really means to Relate (it's not just about offering our services online!); we commissioned research about how the public, clients and staff perceive and experience our brand; we redesigned the forms we use to get feedback from counselling clients; and we installed a chatbot on our website to ensure people can always find relevant support from us. We're really looking forward to the final year of the initiative when we plan to launch a series of experimental new solutions based on what we've learnt so far.



Looking ahead

Aidan Jones, Chief Executive at Relate



“ It’s hard to convey quite how profound the effects of the last year have been on the people Relate exists to support, our staff and the charity itself.

This global crisis has impacted us all in ways we don’t necessarily understand yet: so much has changed societally, personally and professionally. Relationships of all kinds were challenged in ways most of us have never experienced, but how we dealt with that will define many aspects of life for years to come.

Processing all this is huge but, as we do, the notion of helping each other to feel ‘held’ remains at the forefront of my mind. This has been a guiding principle for me throughout the pandemic, based on our practitioners’ expertise about supporting people in difficult situations: listening, empathising and allowing space to share feelings. I know I’ve needed that during the last year and so have colleagues, friends and family all around me. Relate’s values of being human and connected have rarely been more important.

As we move forward, Relate’s job continues to be holding and strengthening the nation’s relationships as we’ve done over

the last 80 years. Now, though, we must look at how recent changes have opened up opportunities for developing different approaches – there are both new challenges to and new possibilities for how we do our job in this changed landscape. Our digital transformation initiative, Connected Relationships, is key to understanding this and shaping our longer-term response.

Our four strategic pillars created back in early 2020 will help to define the parameters of this work: what will we achieve for clients, communities, colleagues and sustainability in the coming years? We’ll continue to strive to offer excellence and innovation across our services; we’ll extend our reach into more diverse communities; we’ll live our values and be the best employer we can be; and we’ll build on our improved financial position to shore up the charity for the next 80 years. And throughout all of that we’ll never forget to focus on the importance of feeling held when things get tough.

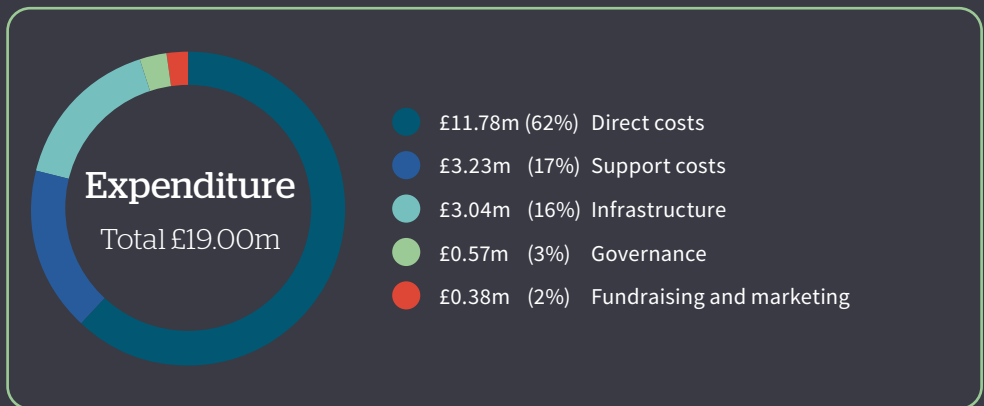
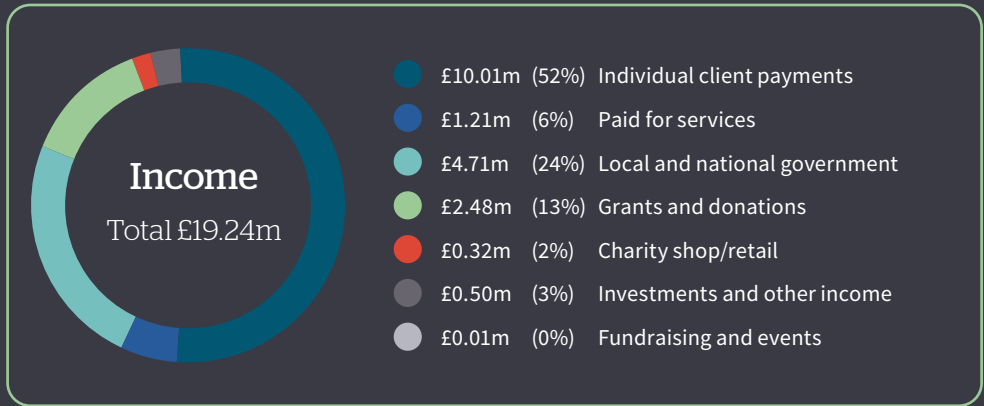
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Our finances

These figures cover the whole of the Relate Federation.

They are compiled from both audited and unaudited management data for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

In some cases estimates of income and expenditure have been used.



relate
the relationship people

Relationships are the beating heart of our lives. When they aren't healthy, we suffer.

Relate is the leading relationships charity. Now, more than ever, we need your help to reach everyone who needs us.

To donate to Relate visit relate.org.uk/donate

relate.org.uk