

Meet Self Space, The world's first on-demand mental health service on the High Street

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Jodie Cariss and Chance Marshall, co-founders of Self Space about their recent investment, bringing therapy to the high street and the critical importance of caring about the mission, team and clients.

Temps de lecture : minute

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What was the catalyst for launching Self Space?

[Chance] Both Jodie and I have backgrounds in mental health and were seeing that, despite what many were saying, the stigma wasn't changing. We knew we had to do something to change the landscape and thought there was no better way to do that than by bringing therapy to the highstreet in a comfortable and safe environment.

[Jodie] I've been a clinician for 20 years or so and I was increasingly being invited into businesses and being told to talk about mental health, but without mentioning feelings. I couldn't just sit back and now a huge part of the Self Space mission is to encourage businesses to put mental health on the agenda with a proactive, preventative approach.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

[Jodie] Self Space is the world's first on-demand mental health service on the high street. We provide straightforward access to flexible therapy, offering a good conversation with a qualified person seven days a week - there's no waitlist and we can usually see people on the same day as their booking. Self Space is here to help anyone and everyone. No-one is exempt from being affected by mental health. You don't need to be at your wits end to have therapy - everyone can benefit from it.

We're the only provider who still gives access to both in person and virtual mental health therapy with a bespoke match-making service that finds the right therapist for you. At Self Space, we advise going with your gut when choosing the right practitioner, focussing on the therapist rather than their title.

Self Space has seen exponential growth in recent years, delivering over 60000 sessions with the success of our hybrid in-person and online therapy model, community workshops and retreats. We also run a thriving B2B platform, seeing the team work with over 70 leading businesses such as Google, Netflix, Huel and Oatly supporting their staff with talking therapy and expert-led mental health workshops.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

[Jodie] Since launching in 2019, Self Space has grown from a team of five therapists to building the most diverse team of 100 qualified therapists and counsellors across the country, spanning different modalities, backgrounds, languages and specialisms.

Our fourth and largest site was launched this September in the heart of London's Soho, making a further 17,000 sessions available to people each year. We now have sites in Borough, Manchester, Shoreditch and Soho.

Tell us about the working culture at Self Space

[Jodie] As we are all so passionate about what we do and want all our clinical work to be outstanding, we work very hard in the Self space camp. This means that the business part of Self Space can sometimes be very busy. We have a startup mentality so there is a requirement to roll up your sleeves and get to it, as well as sometimes working outside of your role.

We really care about each other and the entire team cares about our mission and the clients. This can be felt by everyone. The team has a sense of pride over what is being delivered and I think that feels warm at the heart of things. We start every meeting with a check in asking 'how are you?' and then 'how are you really?' and we make space to listen to what's happening for each other.

How are you funded?

[Chance] We're delighted to have just secured £2.25M in seed funding from purpose-driven VC, *Redrice Ventures*. I'm not going to lie, raising funds is tough! I'm sure any founder will tell you the same. But we are ecstatic with the outcome and the impact we can have in 2024 and beyond.

The funding will be used to open two new sites next year, making a further 34,000 sessions available to people in 2024. We'll also be growing our brilliant team hiring 75 new therapists, psychotherapists and counsellors.

Additionally, the investment will unlock future growth opportunities to bring our one of a kind corporate service to more people. From one-to-one therapy sessions, staff training and psychoeducation workshops, the funding means we can reach more businesses committed to supporting their team's mental health in a meaningful way - not because it makes sense from a profitability and productivity perspective, but because they want to substantially impact on a human level.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

[Jodie] Our biggest challenge so far has been financial instability such as the recession and the cost of living crisis. We're working to find ways to make therapy more affordable in the coming years. One way we plan to do this is by working with universities in training a new generation of modern therapists, giving them the chance to earn their qualifications with us via placement sessions. This will allow us to bring low-cost counselling to people across London and the UK.

How does Self Space answer an unmet need?

[Jodie] Many might not even know they can benefit from therapy, and we're here to change this. We want people to be able to go see a therapist on their lunch break without hiding where they're going. It should be as easy and accessible as getting a flat white.

What's in store for the future?

[Chance] We want Self Space to be a cultural institution. A service, a place, woven into the fabric of communities and placed on busy high streets across the country. A home for people wanting to look after their mental health. Somewhere people can go for mental maintenance, 365

days a year.

In five years time, we aim to be the number one mental health provider to businesses of all sizes across the UK and beyond, establishing our 'Mental Health Champions' programme as the benchmark for mental health in the workplace. Additionally, we'd like to continue to provide solid mental health support for our B2C audience, shaping a culture around mental maintenance and showing up in the majority of people's wellness routines.

We've also got a number of brand partnerships in the works that will create even more ways for people to engage with mental health support - we can't tell you much now but watch this space!

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

[Chance] If you have something you want to change, don't give up on trying to do it.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

[Jodie] I try as much as I can to practise what we preach in our book, *How To Grow Through What You Go Through*. We talk a lot about mental maintenance, everyday practices which promote better mental health and mean when we hit choppy waters, which we all will, we have a bit more buoyancy. I don't always succeed but I try to do the following:

- Walk the dog and ensuring I'm present with what's happening around me

- Drink enough water (and kefir, I swear by it)
- Get enough sleep
- Tell my kids I love them everyday
- Say what's on my mind, even if it's difficult
- Exercise, yoga and bit of something sweaty
- Do something nice once a week for myself - meet a friend, have a date night on my own with yummy food, anything that feels special
- Also I treat myself to a coffee in the cafe everyday- feels like a simple pleasure

Jodie Cariss and Chance Marshall are the co-founders of Self Space.

Article by Jodie Cariss & Chance Marshall