

## **On the compassionate helper: What are the emotional outcomes for volunteers providing emotional support to the distressed and despairing? May-September 2009**

### **Background**

This project is being completed as a requirement of a MSc 'Research Methods in Psychology' run by the University of Liverpool. The aim of the study is to investigate emotional outcomes, both positive and negative, for Samaritans volunteers. The rationale for this study is based on previous research with trauma counsellors and others in 'helping roles', which has highlighted that a risk may exist to one's own emotional health from hearing details of others' trauma and distress.

### **Research Aims**

The research project will explore the following;

- 1) What is the extent to which Samaritans volunteers draw satisfaction, or experience a negative impact on their own emotional energy and wellbeing, from their role listening to and supporting callers in distress and despair?
- 2) What factors are involved in different emotional outcomes amongst Samaritans volunteers, to look at:
  - Length of time volunteering for Samaritans
  - Emotional coping skills, as conceptualised by 'self-compassion' qualities.
  - Attachment style (e.g., does the attachment style in relationships impact coping at work)
  - Demographic factors including age, employment, education, and relationship status.

### **Stage 1: Study design and recruitment (May – August 2009)**

The research sample will be recruited from four Samaritan branches in the North West of England. The potential sample size across the four branches is approximately 350 volunteers, providing a cross section of the Samaritan volunteer population.

### **Stage 2: Data collection and analysis (August – September 2009)**

Questionnaires will be left in the four branches for volunteers to self-complete. Stamp addressed envelopes will be provided to all volunteers to enable the questionnaires to be completed and returned anonymously and directly to the researcher. Quantitative data will be analysed to investigate inter-relationships amongst the variables.

### **Stage 3: Report writing (September 2009)**

A full report will be produced explaining the findings by early September to be submitted for evaluation by an examination board at Liverpool University. The full report will also be submitted to Samaritans General Office. Participating branches will be sent a summary of the report.

### **Stage 4: Dissemination of research findings (September 2009 onwards)**

Findings from the research will be disseminated during 2009-2010.

### **Project staff at the University of Liverpool**

Peter Lydon, Research Student (MSc): Tel: 07949018607, or e-mail [plydon@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:plydon@liverpool.ac.uk)

Dr Stacey Conchie, Supervisor, School of Psychology: Tel: 0151 794 1480, or e-mail [s.m.conchie@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:s.m.conchie@liverpool.ac.uk)

---

### **For further information please contact either a member of the project team or;**

Dr Stephanie Stace, Evaluation Manager with Samaritans: Tel: 020 8394 8376 or e-mail:

[s.stace@samaritans.org](mailto:s.stace@samaritans.org) Website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)