

Predicting and Improving Satisfaction with a Rewarding Activity: Volunteering for Samaritans August 2008-January 2010

Background

The project is funded by the University of Plymouth's Vice Chancellor's Community Research Awards 2008 and will be carried out between August 2008 and January 2010. This longitudinal study will follow new Samaritan volunteers in the south west of England as they embark on their first twelve months volunteering with Samaritans through their initial training, mentored duties, and un-mentored duties until they have been a Samaritan volunteer for a year or they drop-out. The findings from this research may aid the future training of Samaritan volunteers to give them more realistic expectations, or help the selection process choose those who will be most committed to the organisation.

Research Aims

The overall aim of the current research is to explore the following:

- 1) Discrepancies between expectations and experiences of new volunteers between 6-18 months
- 2) What motivates people to volunteer for Samaritans?
- 3) Do people's expectations of volunteering differ from their actual experiences once they have started volunteering? And if so, how?
- 4) Does volunteering increase well-being among volunteers?

Stage 1: Sample design and recruitment [August-October 2008]

Branches in the south west of England will be contacted to be informed of the project and to invite them to participate. The research team will attend initial training courses in all branches who agree to participate to fully inform new volunteers of the research and invite them to participate.

Stage 2: Data collection and analysis [September 2008 – October 2009]

- 1) Preliminary interviews with 5 Samaritan volunteers who have been volunteering for at least one year. Qualitative data will provide insights into the motivations and experiences of current volunteers, and help to determine important issues to address in the longitudinal questionnaires.
- 2) September 2008 - October 2009: Self-completion questionnaires to be distributed to participating branches across the south west of England during the SIT1 training sessions for new volunteers.
- 3) Follow-up questionnaires to be sent to participants' preferred contact address at waves throughout the twelve months of data collection. The data for each wave will be analysed separately and then compared across all time points.

Stage 3: Report writing [January 2009 – January 2010]

The final report presenting findings from all stages of the research will be completed by January 2010.

Stage 4: Dissemination of research findings [January 2010 – October 2010]

Research findings will be disseminated at the Vice Chancellor's Research and Innovation conference as well as through a press release and peer-reviewed publication. Findings will also be disseminated at Samaritans events and in Samaritans internal communications and publications.

Project team: University of Plymouth, School of Psychology, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8A/

Dr Sabine Pahl, Lecturer in Psychology: Tel: 01752 584847 or e-mail: sabine.pahl@plymouth.ac.uk

Dr Mathew White, Lecturer in Psychology: Tel: 01752 584866 or e-mail: mathew.white@plymouth.ac.uk

Lauren Carroll, Research Assistant: E-mail: lauren.carroll@plymouth.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 Website: www.samaritans.org