Evaluation of Samaritans NHS/SC Helpline: Invitation to Tender

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<th>Commissioners</th>
<th>Samaritans: Dr Stephanie Aston, Senior Research &amp; Evaluation Manager</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>£15K inc. VAT</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proposals submitted</strong></td>
<td>10am, Monday 13 December 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Completion date</strong></td>
<td>31 March 2022</td>
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**Background**

Samaritans’ vision is that fewer people die by suicide. Our mission is to provide round the clock emotional support so people can talk about problems that are causing emotional distress and/or putting them at risk of suicide. Samaritans has 201 branches across the UK and Republic of Ireland, offering emotional support by phone, email, and face to face. We are run by a network of approximately 20,000 volunteers and we are contacted every seven seconds.

Samaritans are seeking experienced researchers to carry out qualitative research about NHS and Social Care (NHS/SC) staff use of Samaritans’ NHS/SC helpline.

This document provides background to the service, requirements of the research, key milestones, budget, ethical considerations and how to apply.

**NHS/SC telephone helpline**

Samaritans’ dedicated NHS/SC telephone helpline was launched in April 2020, to provide confidential support to staff in the NHS and social care sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The evaluation of the NHS/SC helpline was planned in three stages, of which stages 1 and 2 are completed.

- Stage 1: online survey of NHS/SC helpline volunteers.
- Stage 2: focus groups with NHS/SC volunteers to explore the survey findings from stage 1 in more detail and nuance.

Key findings from stages 1 and 2 included the overwhelming focus of callers on workplace issues that significantly impacted on their mental wellbeing or triggered/exacerbated other issues, especially mental health. Samaritans’ volunteers also reported that the two main challenges of delivering the line were the limited awareness of the helpline that resulted in fewer calls than anticipated, and the lack of clarity about the type of support offered.

Stage 3 will focus on gathering data and insights from callers (NHS/SC staff) who have used the helpline so that we can better understand the impact it has had on their lives, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.
Evidence gaps

In 2020, Samaritans completed the **Caller Outcomes study**, the first impact evaluation of Samaritans 116 123 telephone helpline. The study showed that Samaritans ‘active’ listening approach significantly reduced callers’ levels of distress. Based on learnings from the study, we want to explore the impact of the NHS/SC helpline on people who have used the service, and what kind of outcomes the callers’ experienced.

Research remit: guidelines and requirements

This project will be commissioned to an independent external research team or agency who have relevant expertise in conducting sensitive research with vulnerable groups.

**Aim:** To understand and provide evidence about the impact and outcomes of the NHS/SC telephone helpline on callers.

**Objectives:**
1. To gather ‘retrospective’ quantitative data on self-reported levels of distress and suicidality (primary outcomes) among callers.
2. To gather qualitative data that explores caller experiences of using the NHS/SC helpline, and the difference it makes to callers (secondary outcomes).
3. To understand how support for NHS/SC staff may be developed to improve outcomes for callers.

**Research questions:**
We are interested in the research questions listed below and will expect to develop these further with the commissioned team.

1. What is the impact on callers’ levels of distress and suicidality for those who use the NHS/SC helpline (using a retrospective measure)?
2. What are the secondary outcomes callers experience, if any, after being supported by a volunteer on the NHS&SC helpline?
3. What are callers’ experiences of the interaction with volunteers on the NHS&SC helpline?
4. What contribution does the NHS&SC helpline make to callers’ self-management of emotional distress and suicidal feelings and behaviours?
5. What impact has the NHS/SC helpline on callers’ likelihood to use Samaritans’ services in the future?

**Methodology:**
This research design has been developed and agreed internally, and will comprise of a qualitative approach, consisting of one-to-one interviews with two key groups.

- NHS and social care staff who have used the NHS/SC telephone helpline since May 2020 (n20).
- Staff and senior volunteers who developed and manage the NHS/SC helpline centrally (n3).
There are two planned methods for recruiting callers who have used the helpline; 1) via the helpline itself through the Samaritans volunteers providing support, and 2) by public promotion via social media (content already developed);

- For option 1) Samaritans will coordinate potential volunteers to be trained to recruit the callers. Those volunteers will be trained by Samaritans and the commissioned external team, using a training session already developed by Samaritans. The external team will conduct interviews with the callers and analysis the data.
- For option 2) Samaritans and the external team promote the study on social media and the external team will be responsible for recruitment, interviews and analysis.

Samaritans will identify and recruit the staff and volunteers and provide details to the external team to undertake interviews.

The external commissioned team will be provided with background documents, to provide further details on the background and methods including:

- Reports from stages 1 and 2 of the wider NHS/SC evaluation.
- Samaritans volunteer training session on how to recruit callers into the study.
- Tested measures on distress and suicidality that can be used within the qualitative interviews.
- Samaritans Research Ethics application, outlining what has been approved and ethical considerations that need to be adhered to. (See ethical considerations section below).

**Lived Experience**

Samaritans promotes the inclusion of people with lived experience in all our commissioned research. Samaritans has a Lived Experience Panel which the commissioned agency will be able to engage with and recruit Lived Experiences Advisers to take part in the evaluation.

Applicants should outline how they intend to involve people with relevant lived experience throughout the project, over and above as research participants, ideally at all stages from research design through to analysis and interpretation.

**Ethical considerations**

The commissioned external research team or agency must consider and adhere to Samaritans Research Ethics Policy.

The study methodology has been approved Samaritans Research Ethics Board. The commissioned agency will be required to review the ethics application and adhere to the agreed approach and clear inclusion/exclusion criteria to minimise the risk to these callers as part of this process. Ethical issues will therefore need full consideration throughout the evaluation.

**Budget**

The budget for this work is set at a maximum of £15K, the fee includes VAT (if you are VAT registered) and all expenses. Criteria for payments will be agreed via contracts.
Deliverables
The table below outlines the deliverables expected from the research. Alternative outputs can be proposed by the commissioned external research team or agency.

The commissioned team will be required to:

- Conduct volunteer training alongside Samaritans
- Lead recruitment of callers via social media
- Conduct interviews and thematic analysis
- Deliver the agreed outputs (detailed in table below)

| Purpose | To produce outputs that address the key questions and provides evidence of impact of NHS/SC telephone helpline. These should also suggest areas that would benefit from further investigation, research, or training. |
| Composition | An interim report from initial data. A final full report that includes an executive summary and appendices. A PowerPoint presentation summarising the key findings. |
| Sign off and dissemination | The outputs will be endorsed and signed off by Samaritans. |
| Dissemination | Findings will be disseminated within Samaritans without any limitations. The commissioned external team may want to write publications or present the findings more widely. This can only be done in agreement with Samaritans. |

Timeline
The completion date for this project is 31st March 2022. The timescales outlined below are a broad guide for applicants, who will be expected to produce a more detailed plan.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 2021</td>
<td>Tender process</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2021</td>
<td>Commissioning process</td>
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<tr>
<td>January-March 2022</td>
<td>Planning, caller recruitment, data collection and analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 March 2022</td>
<td>Reporting and final deliverables</td>
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Contract
The successful applicant(s) will be required to enter into a contract with Samaritans, within Samaritans’ standard terms and conditions. This will include conditions such as:

1. Completion of the services within the timeframe specified.
2. Reduction of payment or non-payment for work not completed.
3. The work cannot be sub-contract to a third party without the prior written consent of Samaritans.
4. Agreed input from Samaritans during reviewing and editing stages.
5. Terms related to intellectual property.
Once the contract is agreed and signed, the successful applicant(s) and Samaritans will be required to adhere to all terms and conditions.

How to apply
Bids are welcome from individuals, agencies, and multidisciplinary collaborations. To be considered for this work, please submit a document outlining:

- Background of you/your organisation.
- Previous experience and examples of similar research/evaluation work. Include anything specifically relevant to this project, especially work with NHS and social care staff, and/or vulnerable groups with complex needs.
- Previous experience and examples of ability to deliver the set methodology.
- Previous experience and examples of including people with lived experience in research/evaluation work.
- Ethical considerations and practices.
- Proposed timelines, considering the milestones outlined above.
- Breakdown of costs.
- Two references.

All criteria listed above are weighted equally and must be addressed in the proposal submitted. While the proposals should be comprehensive, they should also be concise, and ideally no more than 10 pages. A brief summary of each member of the research team’s relevant experience should be included as part of the proposal.

All applications must be submitted in writing by **10am on Monday 13 December 2021**. Samaritans may contact the applicant to clarify aspects of the submission. Samaritans reserves the right to invite shortlisted applicants to an interview to discuss their proposal in detail, however the decision may be taken based on the written submission. The successful candidate/organisation will be notified no later than **Friday 17 December 2021**.

Please send your proposal to Dr Stephanie Aston, Senior Research & Evaluation Manager on s.aston@samaritans.org

Further information

For any further information please contact Dr Stephanie Aston, Senior Research & Evaluation Manager on s.aston@samaritans.org or 020 8394 8376.