Welcome to our fifth quarterly newsletter.

We would like to say a huge thank you, to all of you, for being part of Samaritans Lived Experience panel and for your continued support.

The aim of the panel is to create the space for people with personal experience of suicide, self-harm, or Samaritans’ service-use to have their voices heard, and most importantly, influence the work that we do.

In this newsletter, we share some of the key findings from panel surveys over the last 3 months, and show how your contribution has helped shape Samaritans’ work.

Key facts about the panel

- The panel launched in May 2021
- We currently have 445 members
- In the last quarter (May to July), we have sent you 3 surveys and 1 newsletter
- We have received 129 responses to surveys in the past 3 months!

Remember: people can join the panel at any time. If you know someone who might be interested in joining, they can sign up here.

Sharing your story externally survey:

We wanted to improve our processes in working with people who share their lived experience as case studies, and remove barriers or perceived barriers to sharing.

The majority of you who told us that you'd shared your story with a charity (including Samaritans) felt supported to do so. Panel members ranked the support measures Samaritans have in place. The most important were:

- Not sharing data with third parties
- Elements of anonymity
- Informed consent

Many people emphasised the importance of stories and the power they have to encourage help-seeking behaviour:

“I compare their experiences to my own. I contacted Samaritans a number of times at a bad phase in my life and I think awareness via stories that it wasn’t only for suicidal people helped me to do that.”

Overall, we received some great feedback on how to strengthen the explanation of what support is in place and where we can increase and improve the support we provide when people share their stories.
Post-Christmas campaign survey:

We included the panel in our post-Christmas campaign survey to understand how our campaign was viewed from a lived experience perspective, what thoughts and feelings were associated with the campaign, and how the panel would like to be utilized moving forward to shape the campaign.

Panel members told us that:

- On the whole, the videos, animations and storytelling in our campaign were positive and uplifting
- The content wasn’t conveying urgency, so we will be looking to dial up the urgency of the content whilst keeping it positive – and we will work with the panel to support this
- Suicide prevention is at the heart of reasons to donate, and the main motivation to give is knowing that their donation is making a difference
- The panel on the whole were very receptive to being more involved in the campaign - we will plan in reviews with the panel at the end of key stages to inform the campaign

Online safety resources survey:

We are currently developing an online safety resource to help young people stay safe when going online to seek support for suicidal thoughts and self-harm, or to support someone else with these experiences.

We wanted to know how confident panel members felt about knowing what to do when coming across suicide or self-harm content online, and the actions they would take.

Panel members told us that:

- Short videos, animations and social media posts are the preferred methods for learning about suicide or self-harm content online, allowing us to narrow the focus for the next stages of the project
- The key content an online safety resource should cover is ‘tips for posting about suicide and self-harm safely’. We will be further testing this with the project’s Lived Experience Advisory Group
- Lived experience videos can have the adverse effect of causing people to compare their own experience of ‘recovery’. We will take these points to the project’s steering group to explore how we can mitigate these unintended consequences

Wellbeing measures survey:

We wanted to understand a bit more about what panel members think would be helpful, if and when people get upset or distressed when engaging in activities related to their lived experience.

We asked the panel what they would want to happen if they became upset in different types of activities, such as focus groups or online surveys. Panel members said a range of things could be helpful, such as:

- Feeling comfortable to take a break, pause or leave
- Being offered immediate support
• Being offered a debrief or follow up
• Being signposted to sources of support
• Feeling comfortable to express why they felt upset

We also asked panel members about the type of person or skills they felt were needed to support someone who got upset whilst sharing their lived experience.

• Most people (62%) felt that it is always necessary to have someone available that is trained in talking about suicide and self-harm
• However, there was a sense that the people and skills needed to offer support will largely vary depending on the activity, topic and individual needs
• Personal attributes and skills such as active listening, being non-judgmental, showing compassion and understanding are vital

Service development survey:

We wanted to gather insights and advice on the different types of services Samaritans provide, ideas on areas for improvement and new services.

• The majority of respondents had good experiences with the helpline
• Positive experiences of the helpline service related to being able to have immediate human interactions, non-judgemental, anonymity, callers felt listened to, calmer and empathised with
• Negative experiences of the helpline related to experiencing advice or opinions from volunteers

• Panel members that had used the email service had a positive experience, allowing people to write rather than talk, giving space and time to compose thoughts, and providing a record of the conversation
• Panel members that had used the online chat service, letter, in-branch services, self-help app, and website had positive experiences, and found them straightforward, easy to navigate, useful and clear, and felt supported without feeling they had a time limit

Panel members identified a range of ways that Samaritans could improve or develop services:

• Improving volunteer awareness on trauma and neurodiversity
• Understanding needs of long-term callers
• Having more volunteers at peak times
• Improving accessibility and reach
• Speeding up response times
• Having more local community groups
• Signposting to more specialist support
• Developing services with peer-support offerings

The recommendations from this survey will inform new projects being conducted to improve and develop services for everyone accessing Samaritans.

New suicide prevention plan for England

In May, we invited members of Samaritans Lived Experience Panel to apply to take part in virtual focus groups to discuss the new National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England.

You said, we listened
August 2022
This work was conducted as part of the Suicide Prevention Consortium, which is led by Samaritans, and aims to improve suicide prevention in England. Members of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance (NSPA) Lived Experience Network, people in touch with the Support After Suicide Partnership (SASP), or the addiction support charity With You were also invited to take part.

Participants felt the top priorities to prevent suicide were:

- Education and awareness raising to reduce stigma and make it easier for people to open up about suicidal feelings and to seek support
- Improving access and quality of care, and consistency of services
- Better crisis support services
- Personalisation of care and support for individuals experiencing suicidal feelings
- Cross-government action to prevent suicide
- Targeted support for, and awareness-raising amongst, higher-risk groups

Participants also shared their priorities for the impact of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy in 10 years’ time. You can read the full report here. This insight was shared directly with Government and informed Samaritans’ response.

With the consultation having closed, the Government will now be working on putting together a new 10-year suicide prevention plan based on the feedback it received. Samaritans will be at the forefront of ensuring that it is as impactful as possible in achieving our vision of fewer people dying by suicide.

Thank you again being part of the Lived Experience Panel. We appreciate you taking the time to share your insights and experiences with us. We will continue to send surveys or polls every fortnight and a newsletter every quarter to show how your input is supporting Samaritans’ work.

Remember: keep an eye on our ‘Lived Experience at Samaritans’ webpage to find out about further opportunities.

In the meantime, if you would like to get in touch or have any feedback, please contact us at myexperience@samaritans.org.