‘You said, we listened’

February 2022

The Lived Experience Panel launched 9 months ago, and this is our third quarterly newsletter.

We would like to say a huge thank you to all of the panel members for your support! Sharing your personal experiences can be difficult at times, but your knowledge and insight is invaluable and really makes a difference to the work that we do.

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.

Within 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
- 395 members
- In the last quarter (October to January), we’ve sent you four surveys, one poll, and you received one newsletter.
- 304 panel members are from England, 40 from Scotland, 25 from Wales, 17 from the Republic of Ireland, 7 from Northern Ireland, and 2 from the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.

**Alcohol, Self-harm, and Suicide Survey:**

This survey focused on capturing the views and experiences of people with experience of alcohol, self-harm, and suicide so that we could better understand the barriers to receiving help and ‘what works’ when seeking support. These results will inform the findings and recommendations of an external report for national and local decision-makers, including NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care.

- 53% of panel members who responded to the survey believed there was a relationship between how they felt, or their mood, and their alcohol intake
- Only 20% of respondents said their mental health was discussed when seeking treatment or support for their alcohol intake.
- Findings suggest that there is a real need for holistic services that look at the ‘whole person’ rather than one particular ‘problem’.

Sarah, project lead for this piece of work, shared how important your input was when informing Samaritans’ response:

‘Engagement with the Lived Experience Panel has enabled us to ensure that our recommendations to national and local decision-makers are informed by real-life experiences which gives them real weight and power, hopefully leading to improvements.’

**Samaritans Scotland Suicide Prevention Strategy:**

In October 2021, we sent a survey to panel members based in Scotland asking for input to help inform the new Suicide Prevention Strategy led by

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Remember: people can join the panel at any time. If you know someone who might be interested in joining, they can [sign up here].
Mairi, from Samaritans Scotland, highlighted the importance of engaging people with lived experience:

‘Contributing to the consultation on an ambitious new strategy for suicide prevention was an important opportunity to share our long-term vision with decision-makers about what needs to change to reduce suicide risk, improve support and ultimately save lives.

In responding, we wanted to draw on the full wealth of knowledge and insight of our listening volunteers and members of our lived experience panel so that our recommendations are just based in data and evidence, but also the real-life experiences of people who have had suicidal thoughts and feelings or been bereaved by suicide.’

We asked panel members what actions should be prioritised within the new strategy to prevent people from reaching the point of having suicidal thoughts and feelings, or acting on those thoughts and feelings. The following three actions were suggested as high priority:

1. Access to formal mental health services before crisis point (e.g. talking therapies, mental health teams)
2. Mental health well-being and support in workplaces
3. Mental well-being and emotional resilience training in education settings

We also asked panel members which services or support they would prefer to approach in times of need?

**Samaritans High-Risk Communities Survey:**

We were keen to better understand how different individual characteristics can impact on people’s experiences of seeking support for feeling suicidal or self-harm.

Alex, Project Lead on the High-Risk Communities project, noted that

‘It’s very clear from the responses that most people felt that an intersectional approach – one which acknowledges that characteristics like our gender, neurodiversity, sexuality or background are complex and interconnected – is important.’

Panel members commented that

- Different characteristics or features of their life interacted with each other to impact their well-being in complex ways.
- Those who had negative experiences seeking support felt mis-diagnosed, mistrusted, or dismissed by services.
- Joined up support between different services and professionals is important.
Research Priorities at Samaritans:

We asked you what you thought about several research and policy priorities. We’re currently reviewing the responses, alongside input from other stakeholders, which will be used to inform our new research and policy plans for the next few years.

We will provide an update about these survey findings in our next ‘You said, We listened’ newsletter.

Paid Lived Experience Opportunities at Samaritans:

We currently have a number of paid opportunities for people with lived experience to be involved with Samaritans work:

- **Online Harms Lived Experience Advisors** – Samaritans is looking for people aged 18+ who live in the UK and have lived experience of self-harm or suicidal thoughts to join our Online Harms Lived Experience Advisory Groups.

- **Online Harms 18-25 Advisory Group** - We are also looking for young people aged 18 to 25 with lived experience of supporting others online with self-harm or suicidal thoughts to take part.

- **Online Workshop: Feedback on NICE Guidelines** – Samaritans has been invited to give feedback on the new guidelines, we would like our response to be informed by people with lived experience.

Research Opportunities:

- **DELVE Study** – Samaritans have partnered with the University of Bristol to conduct research exploring how people engage with self-harm and suicide content online. This research will help us to understand the pros and cons of viewing and posting online content about self-harm and suicide.

Remember: keep an eye on your inbox or visit ‘Lived Experience at Samaritans’ to find out more.

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.

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