

TOWARDS A MENTALLY FLOURISHING SCOTLAND  
Discussion Paper: Response from Samaritans in Scotland

**Samaritans In Scotland and Local and National Partnerships**

Samaritans in Scotland has been a key partner with national and local agencies in the work to reduce suicides in Scotland through Choose Life, and our experience is that we have been able to promote our range of services effectively through the local and national partnerships which Choose Life has spawned. This has resulted – along with other work our volunteers have been doing – in an increase in the number of calls to Scottish branches and in the number of potential volunteer enquiries since 2003.

For this reason we support any activity which:

- maintains this partnership approach at local and national level
- ensures that mental health promotion, mental illness prevention and appropriate support for those who need it involves non-statutory agencies as full partners with appropriate resources to enable full participation
- encourages statutory services, particularly health services, to work with non-statutory voluntary providers, who tend to be more responsive and therefore more innovative and closer to service users.
- Mainstreams emotional health awareness, promotion and prevention

We also have 20 branches across Scotland who provide our emotional support services to those in crisis or despair, as well as our health promotion outreach services in schools, workplaces and the local community. Therefore we support the move to focus on local action and partnerships, and would promote the need to resource these local activities appropriately.

However, we believe there is still an important national role to provide co-ordination and support, such as the excellent support provided by NIST for Choose Life activity.

There is also an on-going need to reach the whole population with national awareness raising, research and information, as we know that many of our callers respond to national campaigns and make use of our national helpline number.

**Shared Objectives**

Promotion of Mental Wellbeing

Mainstreaming Mental Health Improvement

Encouraging people to be aware of their own emotional well-being and to find ways of coping with stressful life events is fundamental to achieving a mentally well society, and we support activity in schools, workplaces, and other community settings to achieve this.

#### Priorities:

- Activity aimed at the general population should be maintained even though the impact is difficult or impossible to measure. Media campaigns at local level, information dissemination via local public information and service points. Developing relationships with local media partners should be part of any local strategy
- Targeted activity for schools, workplaces and other community settings should continue to be supported, working through existing networks such as health promoting schools co-ordinators and healthy working lives co-ordinators. Importantly, local voluntary organisations such as Samaritans should be included in provision and be resourced appropriately to make this contribution
- Ensure that training provided locally by non-statutory agencies like Samaritans is promoted alongside other training such as ASIST and MHFA.
- Local co-ordination is important with a named and dedicated member of staff to ensure that the mainstreaming of these issues actually happens and that networks are maintained and supported for share information and practice
- The current Choose Life model at local level has provided useful support and co-ordination to the diverse range of organisations involved

#### Prevention: Mental Illness, Self Harm and Suicide Support Services

Targeting those already identified as being at risk, or living in circumstances which might put them at risk of mental illness, distress and despair is an important strand of any local work, and Samaritans is already working in most areas to target this group of people.

#### Priorities:

- Encouraging health services at local level to work with Samaritans and other non-statutory service providers to reach and support those at risk – e.g. more effort at A&E intake and with GP's to embrace more informal support services such as our emotional support service
- Support for existing crisis support services, and recognition of the innovation within such services – such as the development of texting within Samaritans. Resources for existing, tried and tested services are very difficult to secure, and the trend for short-term project funding often drives local agencies to repackage core services to fit funding priorities and this is unhelpful and time consuming.
- Support for small-scale local developments. Samaritans branches offer excellent value in terms of the funding required to deliver services to the local population. Funding for local branches also brings the benefit of tapping into national support services to every local area.
- Flexible funding to allow a range of non-statutory services to make a contribution

- Local co-ordination to ensure that new services are not created if there is already a service in place.
- Involvement of non-statutory groups and organisations in planning and decision-making.

In our experience, in those areas where the local Choose Life group has been well supported and co-ordinated, we have been able to link with other services, raise the profile of our service and spread awareness of these other services amongst our own volunteers.

### National Functions and Supports

At national level, Samaritans has worked effectively as part of a national network of service providers.

Priorities:

- Maintain a focus on national communication campaigns and working with the media. However, we need to build on the joint work we have started through Choose Life and make more use of existing campaigns. More resources are required for these major national campaigns
- Review of self-harm training to establish a recognised good practice approach for agencies developing and delivering this training
- Creating an influential forum on mental health and suicide prevention and reduction which would bring together the key partners with the expertise and capacity to inform decision-makers
- Supporting SIREN to ensure that we build on the work done already to link research and practice in Scotland
- Maintaining electronic resource databases to assist with co-ordination and sharing of good practice
- Ensure that mental health, suicide prevention and reduction do not lose their prominence within the huge and diverse health agenda.

### **Information about Samaritans in Scotland**

Samaritans has been providing support to people in distress and despair for over 50 years and our vision is to see a society where fewer people die by suicide, where people can talk about their feelings and where people can acknowledge and respect the feelings of others.

We have over 900 volunteers across 20 branches, and we deal with around 160,000 contacts a year in Scotland, including telephone calls, e-mails, letters and face to face interview.

Further information is on our web site: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

**Contact Details:** Frances Simpson, Scottish Development Manager.

[f.simpson@samaritans.org](mailto:f.simpson@samaritans.org)