

**MENTAL  
HEALTH  
INNOVATIONS**

**shout**

**85258**

here for you 24/7

# Shout Volunteers

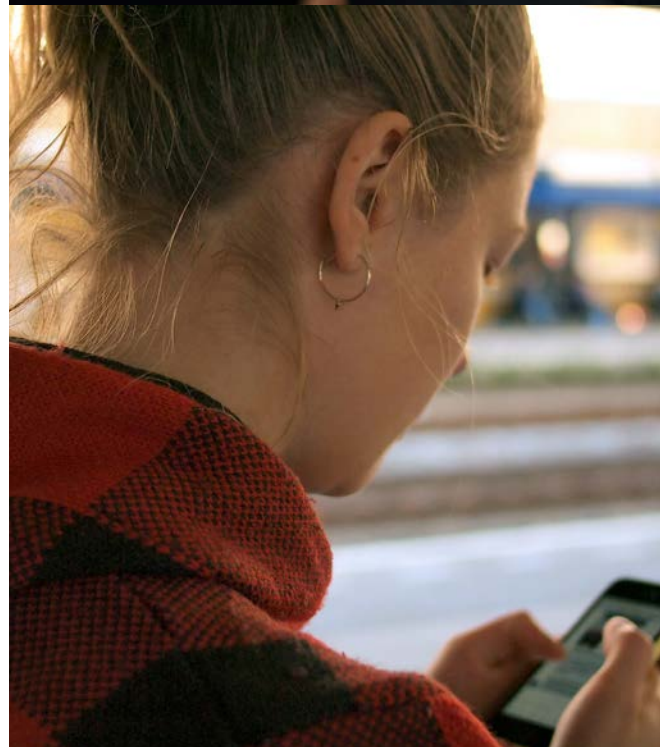
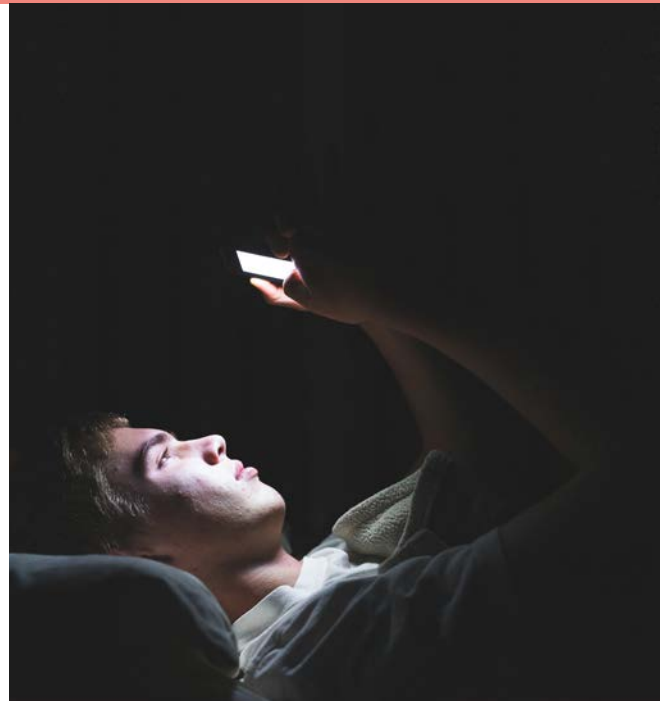
**Providing support for anyone  
struggling to cope, 24/7**



# Background

Mental Health Innovations is a charity that uses digital innovation, data-driven analysis and the experience of clinical experts to improve the mental health of the UK population through the provision of digital tools, support and resources.

Our first product is Shout 85258, the free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service that that helps people reach a calm place. Shout Volunteers are at the very heart of our service and crucial for its success. They have taken three quarters of a million conversations with people who are anxious, stressed, depressed, suicidal or overwhelmed and who need immediate support. As a digital service, Shout 85258 has become increasingly critical since Covid-19, being one of the few mental health support services able to operate as normal at this time, with volunteers taking conversations as usual from home.



# Introduction

It's been two years since Mental Health Innovations launched Shout 85258 publicly in the UK as the first 24/7 text support service, and since then we've gone on to train a mental health network of nearly 7,000 people as Shout Volunteers, providing robust training that people are actively using both on the platform and in their professional and personal lives.

Our volunteer community is made up of dedicated people from not just the UK, but also from across the globe in New Zealand, where a team of volunteers help us maintain a round the clock service. Shout Volunteers come from all walks of life. From air traffic controllers to students, chefs to hairdressers and prison chaplains, our volunteers have been equipped with the active listening skills they need to support people texting in with issues that include suicide, depression, anxiety, loneliness, relationships and self-harm.

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, our volunteers were able to quickly step up to the new challenges presented to them, rallying to support growing numbers of texters who were in need of immediate mental health support. As the Covid-19 crisis continues, the need for our volunteers has become even greater, particularly overnight; we're now taking double the number of daily conversations than we were pre-pandemic as other forms of support and networks have been unavailable.

Our volunteers take their skills and training beyond the Shout platform, into the wider community. 91% of volunteers agree that their volunteering experience has enabled them to apply the important skills learnt in training in their own lives, bettering their relationships with family, friends and colleagues. That's a network of nearly 7,000 people utilising active listening skills and having positive mental health conversations in their homes, workplaces and beyond. We've had volunteers go on to set up their own mental health networks, running clubs and non-profits, all as a result of the skills they've learnt through Shout.

This report contains new data from our 2021 Shout Volunteer survey as well as our first Diversity and Equality questionnaire. It outlines the unique training that the volunteers receive, how it has impacted their own lives and those around them in a positive way, and shines a spotlight on this incredible group of people who give their time so generously to others.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to everyone who has stepped up to support our texters so selflessly, during what has been an incredibly challenging time.



**Sarah Kendrick**  
**Clinical Director, Mental Health Innovations**

# Shout Volunteers at a glance



**6,910**  
trained  
volunteers



**25**  
hours of  
training  
each

**750,000**  
text  
conversations

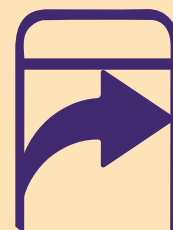


**446,400**  
volunteering  
hours



**91%**

agree volunteering  
with Shout has given  
them transferable  
skills and mental  
health knowledge  
to apply to their life  
beyond the platform



**24/7**

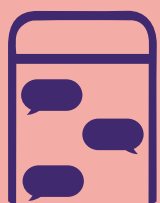


the hours Shout  
Volunteers are  
available



**84%**

agree volunteering  
with Shout helps  
them to be better at  
listening to others



**50%**

of volunteers  
joined during the  
Covid-19 pandemic

**95%**

agree that  
volunteering gives  
them a sense of  
accomplishment



# The role of our Shout Volunteers

"Thank you so much for your support tonight. You were completely non-judgemental, very empathetic and kind. I really appreciated that you took the time to explore what coping strategies would work for me. If it wasn't for our conversation I would have hurt myself further and ended up in hospital again but instead I now feel calm enough to go to bed and try the things you suggested in the morning."

Texter feedback

Shout Volunteers undergo 25 hours of rigorous training before they begin taking conversations, giving them the skills to talk to individuals who are often distressed and overwhelmed. They are trained to build a rapport with texters, listen to their issues with empathy and warmth and identify positive ways forward. This tried and tested model helps volunteers take texters from a hot moment to a calm one, no matter what the issue.

"Thanks so much to the volunteer for their help. I started the conversation feeling desperately unhappy and very scared, and left feeling like I can get better and I won't give up. The conversation was invaluable and I'm so grateful that people give up their time to help others."

Texter feedback

Once on the platform, volunteers are assigned a Clinical Supervisor who will oversee their conversations and help assess risk, while off platform they have access to a Coach and the rest of the volunteer community through digital means. Volunteers help texters manage issues such as suicide, anxiety, loneliness, depression, self-harm and bullying.

As a virtual, digital community, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, Shout Volunteers were able to continue taking shifts as normal from the comfort of their homes. The service was not disrupted and could operate as normal at a time when face to face services often couldn't be accessed, and Shout was able to scale up its support for the UK population, particularly children and young people, at a time of national need.

Shout Volunteers are often the first person a texter has spoken to about how they're feeling (38% of texters tell us they've never asked for help elsewhere). They are crucial to helping support people before they hit crisis point, by being there to listen to those who have no one else to talk to.

"You were a real lifeline for me today, thank you from the bottom of my heart. This was my first time reaching out and you were amazing."

Texter feedback

Every day and through every night, Shout Volunteers use their training to support people who are struggling to cope. They listen without judgement. They give their time. And they save lives.

"My volunteer quite literally saved my life tonight - I could not be more thankful for the fact I could speak out to someone when I most needed."

Texter feedback

"Thank you for making me feel like I mattered, that I was worth listening to and worthy of help. I felt so desperate when I texted, but after talking with you I felt able to stop thinking about taking the overdose and take time to work out what I needed instead. I'm truly grateful for your care and compassion."

Texter feedback





## Meet our volunteers

"As a deaf person who relies on text and sign language, the provision of a text support service is invaluable; it allows deaf people some access for support, and further, all texters the ability to ask for support without having to verbally talk about it.

I find the whole service incredibly valuable and am proud to be a Shout Volunteer and telling people about the service. I also find it amazingly different; almost every message that comes through comes from someone in genuine need of help."

Dr Tyron, Shout Volunteer



"Sometimes when you are going through a challenging time, having someone to talk to can make a big difference. I signed up to become a volunteer because I wanted to be that person that people can talk to when they are going through a crisis in their life."

Precious, Shout Volunteer



"I became a volunteer because I wanted to make a difference. In my experience as a volunteer, being able to text is so important because sometimes people aren't ready to verbalise how they are feeling to anyone, and texting in to someone impartial who is essentially a stranger can be an amazing place to start"

Samantha, Shout Volunteer

# Building a diverse community

The Shout Volunteer community comprises people from different backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, ages and locations.

## Ethnicity

	Volunteers
Asian/ Asian British	6.5%
Black / African/ Caribbean/ Black British	2%
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	4%
Other ethnic group	1.5%
White	86%

(861 respondents)

For the first time, this year we've conducted a Diversity and Equality monitoring survey\*, which aims to help us continue to diversify our community so we can better support our texters.

Our Shout Volunteers are largely representative of the UK population in terms of ethnicity but we'd like to recruit even more volunteers from diverse communities. By showing the diversity of our volunteers in our communications we hope that as many potential texters as possible feel that if they contact Shout they'll be talking to someone who understands them. We're embarking on a number of initiatives to raise awareness of Shout among diverse communities, both as a means of support and as a volunteering opportunity. These include a new partnership with the British Asian Trust, and a campaign to reach young black men.

## Gender Identity

	Volunteers
Female	85.5%
Male	13%
Non Binary	1%
Other	0.5%

(870 respondents)

We know there is work to do to reach more men both as potential Shout Volunteers and as texters. We're forging increasing numbers of partnerships with companies such as Burnt Chef and shaving brand Harry's in order to help us do so.

\*2021 Diversity and Equality monitoring form submitted by 874 (around a third) of active Shout Volunteers.



## Age

Volunteers	
Under 18 years	N/A
18-24 years	22%
25-34 years	23%
35-44 years	15%
45-54 years	21%
55-64 years	13%
65+ years	6%

(868 respondents)

Volunteers must be aged 18 and over to sign up, and we have Shout Volunteers of all ages from 18 - 80. As a digital service, Shout naturally appeals to a younger audience who use text as a primary form of communication but our texters span all age brackets too. The training we give Shout Volunteers and the anonymous nature of the service equips them to be able to have positive intergenerational conversations, no matter what issue the texter is facing or what age they may be. Through our online training and digital platform, we're also helping develop the digital skills of our volunteers.

*"[Volunteering has] challenged me and helped me learn some key skills in terms of supporting others through a crisis and especially digitally."*

Shout Volunteer

## Sexual orientation

Volunteers	
LGB+	20%
Heterosexual	80%

(846 respondents)

The Shout service has a high percentage of LGBTQ+ volunteers: one in five identify as LGBTQ+. Since the service launched we've worked in partnership with organisations that support the LGBTQ+ community including Switchboard and Mermaids. It's a key way of ensuring we're recruiting diverse volunteers and that we are better able to support the one in three of our texters who identify as LGBTQ+.

*"It's the first time I've ever spoken to someone about my sexuality."*

Texter feedback

## Disability

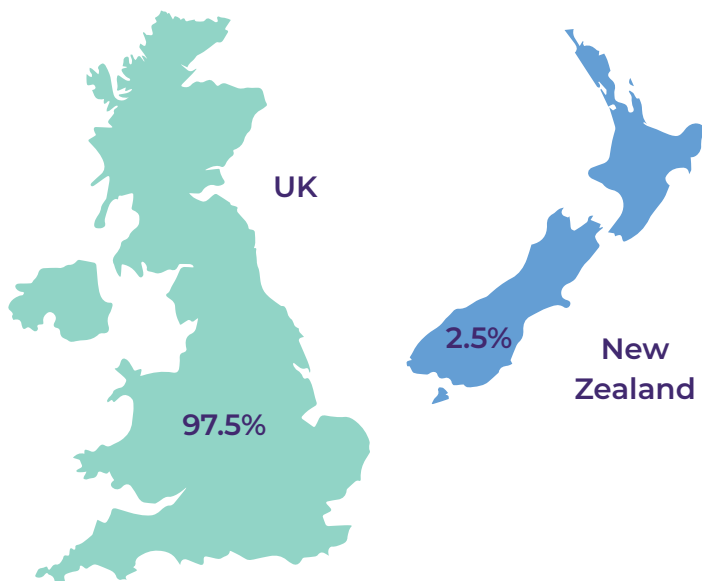
Volunteers	
Yes	16%
No	84%

(864 respondents)

The remote and digital aspect of the volunteer experience helps to make our volunteer opportunity accessible.

## Region

Our volunteers are spread across the globe, with our New Zealand Volunteers providing additional support during night time hours in the UK, when there is greatest demand for the service.

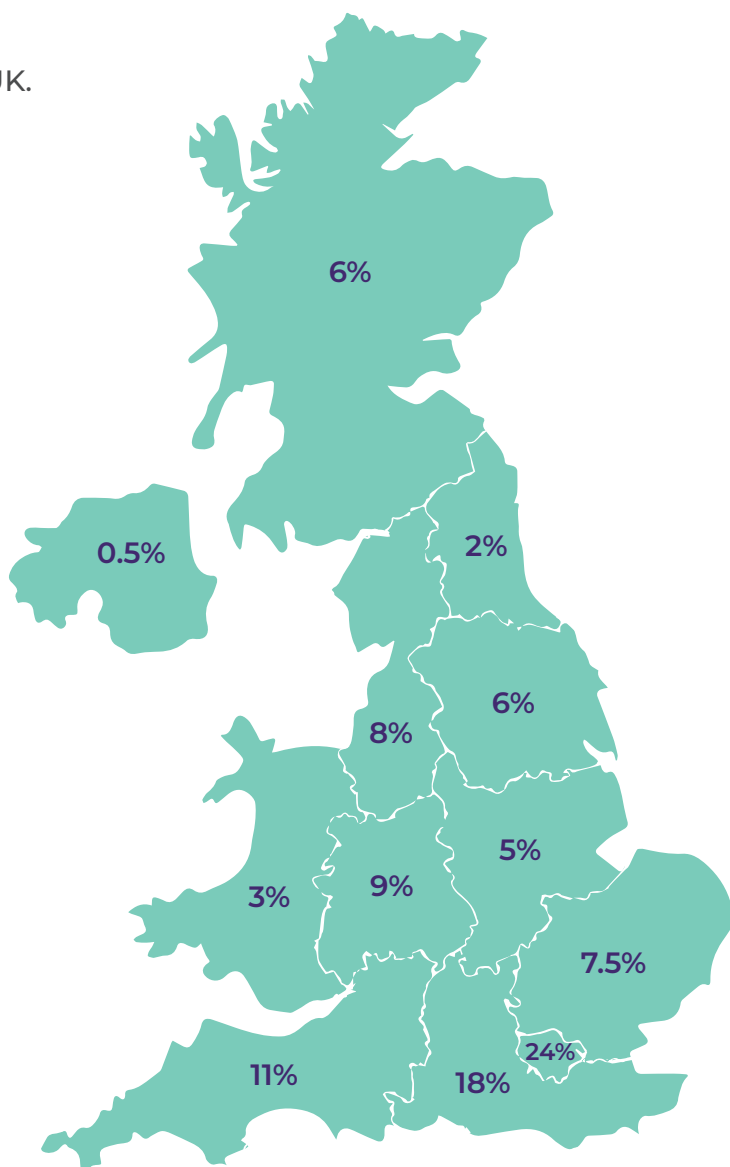


## UK volunteers

Our volunteers are located right across the UK.

Volunteers	
East of England	7.5%
East Midlands	5%
Greater London	24%
North East	2%
Northern Ireland	0.5%
North West	8%
Scotland	6%
South East	18%
South West	11%
Wales	3%
West Midlands	9%
Yorkshire and the Humber	6%

(845 respondents)



# Volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted life as we know it in the UK. We wanted to understand more about the impact on our volunteers so that we can best support them. As would be expected, volunteers reported very mixed experiences. For some, the pandemic very understandably reduced the time and commitment they were able to give to the service. There were those who were frontline workers and others who were homeschooling:

*"I have found it harder to take shifts during Covid as working/homeschooling have limited time and I have not felt emotionally as able to help out."*

Shout Volunteer

Some have felt emotionally burnt out and have needed to take a step back to do the essential job of looking after their own mental health. Others needed time away from a laptop after a day of work on screens, and some took some time out from volunteering as they felt like the issues texts were asking for support with too much mirrored their own fears and experiences.

In a wonderful show of global empathy, many of our New Zealand volunteers reported additional motivation to help those in the UK, feeling immense sympathy at the contrast between the UK experience and the relative safety and normality of their country:

*"Being in NZ the Covid pandemic is just not as impactful as in the UK - one of the reasons I wanted to volunteer now is because of the Covid situation there and how strongly it must be affecting people."*

Shout Volunteer



Some volunteers haven't felt a marked difference from the pandemic on their volunteering roles and their ability to be there to provide emotional support to others:

"I feel privileged to have been in a situation where I haven't been massively affected and I have certainly felt able to maintain boundaries about what I can and can't do."

Shout Volunteer

For a significant proportion of our volunteers, the opportunity to help others with their mental health in times of unprecedented need has been a benefit in a number of different ways. Some volunteers reported that their roles made them feel less isolated and added more purpose and structure to their lockdown lives:

"Being furloughed for nearly a year has been incredibly tough on my mental health and my self-esteem. Shout has helped make me feel useful and has given me a purpose, sort of a reason to get out of bed on certain days knowing that I can make a difference."

Shout Volunteer

"Volunteering for Shout during the pandemic has been really helpful for me. In times when I have felt really low, doing my shifts and some of the texter convos have really helped me put my own situation in perspective, especially if there has been a positive outcome to the convos. It has helped me feel more positive that I have been able to support someone, even if I have not been in the best place myself."

Shout Volunteer

Some signed up to volunteer in response to the need created by the pandemic, cutting their teeth on the platform in very difficult times, and many volunteers reported felt increased motivation to spend time on the platform and greater empathy towards those texting in for support:

"It has been amazing to join the Shout team and I have gained valuable knowledge and experience. For me volunteering during a pandemic has been an exciting, rewarding and enriching experience."

Shout Volunteer

# The benefits of being a Shout Volunteer

"[Volunteering has given] me purpose, structure, something I enjoy and am motivated to do. It's a challenge sometimes which I love, and the learning opportunities are amazing. It's safe for me to do from home too and doesn't take much physical energy. Connecting with so many lovely people has been great too."

Shout Volunteer



## Personal development

The Shout training course is 25 hours long and teaches communication, active listening, problem solving and crisis management skills that are valued by both employers and learning institutions. Shout Volunteers have reported benefits to their relationships with family and friends, and also in their working lives.

- **84%** agree volunteering with Shout helps them to see things better **from other people's perspectives.**
- **84%** agree volunteering with Shout has **increased their sense of empathy.**
- **34%** agree volunteering with Shout has **improved their technology skills.**
- **84%** agree volunteering with Shout helps them to **be better at listening to others.**



"I think the Shout training should be given to everyone in general, it's amazing and I think everyone could use a bit of empathy training. I feel grateful to have the opportunity - I use it when I'm on the platform, and in everyday life."

Shout Volunteer

"I have definitely become a better person, less judgemental and more able to stop, listen and take on another's perspective, in their shoes, not mine - which can be uncomfortable but far more rewarding."

Shout Volunteer

## Vocational development

Shout Volunteers immerse themselves in the rapidly growing field of digital health and so develop skills and experience that is recognised by universities and colleges and that's relevant to many professions. Volunteering hours are done in shifts, so it's easy to fit around studies or work. Volunteers are also supported by a dedicated Coach and benefit from accessing ongoing professional development.



"I am a student mental health nurse and I feel that volunteering increased my confidence in supporting people who are struggling with their mental health. I've increased my ability to risk assess and also how to help someone 'calm down'."

Shout Volunteer

"I would not have secured my current job had it not been for my experiences at Shout."

Shout Volunteer

"I have gone on to retrain and study therapy."

Shout Volunteer

## Supporting people who are struggling to cope

Texters often reach out to us when there is no one else to talk to and our volunteers have the privilege of helping those who need 'in the moment' support in challenging times. Volunteers help diffuse situations for people who are often greatly distressed, including de-escalating risk for those with suicidal ideation.

The benefits of volunteering and giving something back on an individual's own wellbeing are widely reported, in fact **74%** agree volunteering with Shout gives them a **greater sense of wellbeing**.

While conversations can naturally be challenging, volunteers are supported throughout and feel equipped to deal with any issues a texter may present with. Ongoing learning and development materials also empower them to broaden their knowledge of mental health.

Common themes highlighted how the training and ongoing development volunteers receive has given them the skills to apply their knowledge to situations in their personal lives, becoming better listeners and feeling more connected to those around them.

Many have made new friends along the way, building connections with other volunteers who they can confide in and exchange ideas and tips, while others have had the confidence to change careers and pursue further qualifications in the mental health sector.

"Shout changes you as a person, it makes you really feel that you are of value, and even when a shift is difficult and maybe you feel dissatisfied or unfulfilled with your convos, you STILL know that you helped, and that is life changing."

Shout Volunteer

## Being part of a pioneering global community

Our UK and New Zealand volunteers are part of a pioneering digital community. They connect via a digital hub, providing opportunities to develop friendships and discover new connections with people both in New Zealand and in the UK.

"I love volunteering for Shout. The volunteering itself is so rewarding but I also feel part of a team and the community is so inspiring and kind too."

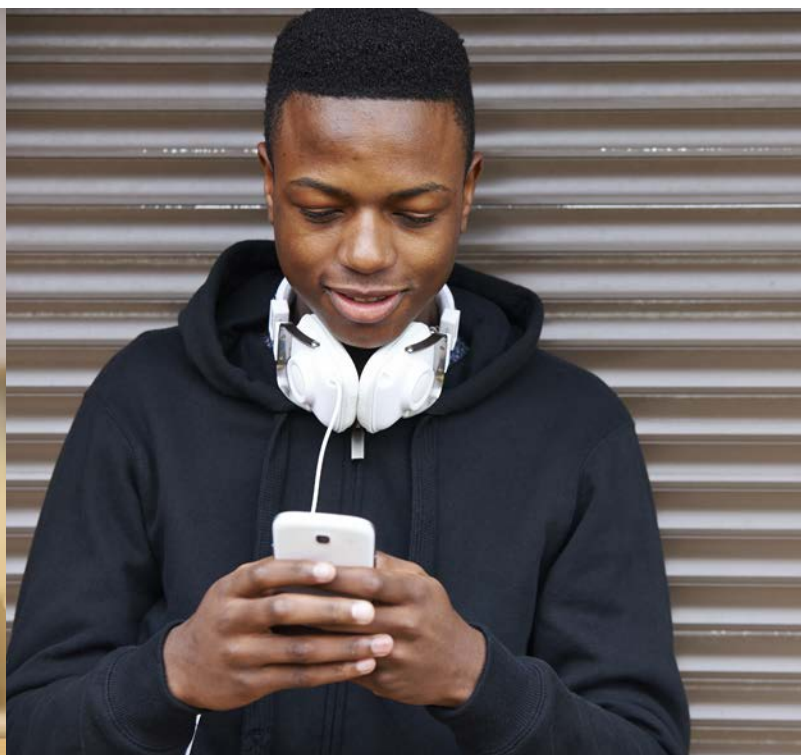
Shout Volunteer

"Being on the platform really does make you feel like part of a fab team as everyone is so supportive which I have found lovely! It's just such a lovely spirit to all be there together wanting to make a difference, so thank you Shout for giving me this opportunity! I love it."

Shout Volunteer

"I love watching fellow volunteers being supportive and empowering one another."

Shout Volunteer





## Supporting friends, family and colleagues

A wonderful benefit that our volunteers report is that they can take their Shout training outside of their volunteering roles and use the skills, knowledge and experience gained to help themselves and others in their everyday lives. Shout Volunteers gain skills, particularly around facilitating positive conversations, that can help enrich their relationships with friends, family and work colleagues.

In fact, 91% agree volunteering with Shout has given them transferable skills and mental health knowledge to apply to their life beyond the platform and 86% agree volunteering with Shout has helped them feel more comfortable handling difficult situations.

*"I used to know someone who was suicidal and back then didn't know how to support them or what the right thing to say was. Shout has built my knowledge and confidence with handling challenging situations and equipped me with valuable skills to apply in life both on and off the platform."*

Shout Volunteer

*"It has definitely made me more confident in handling difficult situations and conversations! And furthered my empathy, you truly never know what is going on for those around you. It has helped to make me feel like I am making a difference."*

Shout Volunteer



# Getting involved

## Becoming a night time Shout Volunteer

Are you a night-owl who could volunteer from 10pm? We are looking for more volunteers in the UK who can have conversations with texters seeking support in the late evening and into the small hours of the morning.

If you'd like to find out more, visit [giveusashout.org/volunteer](https://giveusashout.org/volunteer).

## Volunteering from New Zealand

Are you based in New Zealand and able to volunteer during your daytime?

If you'd like to help UK texters at the times when they're in real need of support, gain personal and vocational development and join a global community of passionate volunteers, visit [giveusashout.org/newzealand](https://giveusashout.org/newzealand) to find out more.

## Supporting employees with their mental health

In a recent texter feedback survey, we found that **more than half (52%) of those who were currently employed wouldn't feel able to talk to their employer about their mental health.** As workplaces adapt to new ways of working in a post-pandemic world, this provides the opportunity for a much needed shift in how we think about supporting our colleagues, making space for open conversations and training on mental wellbeing at work.

Our five-stage conversation model has equipped volunteers with skills for life, focused around active listening, empathy, understanding and providing non-judgemental support. The outcome is always on the overwhelming impact of a positive conversation. We want to take this impact beyond our platform, by giving workplaces a solid foundation on which to build wellbeing at work and focusing on the life changing importance of positive conversations. Placing good conversations at the heart of workplace wellbeing, we've partnered with Hive Learning, to build **Mental Health Works**, an incredible new learning programme for enterprises - all about learning the art of a good conversation and empowering employers to foster a culture of positive mental wellbeing. Find out more [here](#).



📷 [GiveUsAShoutInsta](#) 🐦 [GiveUsAShout](#) 📘 [GiveUsAShoutUK](#)  
#Shout85258 | [giveusashout.org](#)

# MENTAL HEALTH INNOVATIONS

[mentalhealthinnovations.org](#)

[in](#) Follow us on [LinkedIn](#)