

## UPDATE

### Feasibility Study

In our summer update we were working on re-opening the feasibility study and discussed some of the challenges, given the ongoing COVID-19 situation. The sites involved in the study have been fantastic, working with us to overcome these obstacles, and we are delighted to say that the feasibility study is now open across all 3 sites – Leeds, Sheffield and Pennine.

Our first two sites Leeds and Sheffield opened in September and Pennine joined mid November. The aim is to recruit 30 participants across the 3 sites by February. We are already over halfway there, with **18 participants recruited** so far. Thank you to all those involved in getting the feasibility study going again. This is a superb achievement.



### Publications

The team have also been busy getting papers from work package one complete. The Q-sort paper is now published in Social Science and Medicine and is available to read for free until 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021- [https://authors.elsevier.com/sd/article/S0277-9536\(20\)30746-2](https://authors.elsevier.com/sd/article/S0277-9536(20)30746-2)

The systematic review has been split into two papers. The first has been submitted for publication. This paper looks at what self-reported factors have helped people to reduce or stop their self-harm. The second paper is currently being finalised and focuses on the patient-therapist relationship – there was so much material around this subject in the review that the team agreed it merited a separate paper.





As well as helping us with the study, this working group has been a great place to share best practice and give each other mutual support during this extremely difficult year. Below is some feedback from some of the members about what this group has meant to them. The pandemic may have forced us all to work in different ways, remotely, with less contact, but the relationships we have built in this group have been invaluable.

## Experiences of Seeking Support for Self-Harm during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Over the summer we carried out a small study to see how people who self-harm have been affected by the COVID-19 restrictions and the reduction of services. We interviewed 14 people, 12 women and 2 men. The interviews highlighted a large range of factors that have affected people this last year. Isolation, loss of routine and loss of support structures have understandably made things very difficult for people. However, the interviews also brought out some interesting positive approaches people have adopted, to help themselves manage the current situation.

Cara presented the findings at our first online seminar, which you can watch again here:

<https://freshstart.leeds.ac.uk/news/experiences-of-seeking-support-for-self-harm-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

We are currently writing up these results in more detail and hope to submit a paper to an academic journal in the next few weeks.

The COVID-19 study came about as a response to the reported decline in self-harm A&E attendances at the beginning of lockdown, and the increasing number of people seeking support from third sector organisations. As mentioned in our previous newsletter, we put together a working group of third sector organisations, with the help of Marsha McAdam, and they have really helped to shape the study and drive recruitment.

*Something I have been amazed by is the networks willingness to adapt and flex to new ways of working in order to make sure that the voices of people who self-harm remain to be heard. Frequently marginalized by society at the best of times, it felt imperative that these experiences continued to be amplified. Whether it was rapidly translating support groups into online entities, creating rooms of 'virtual safety' for one-to-one support for young people, feeding into NHS policy decisions, or gathering lived-experiences perspectives on lockdown to create self-help tools, the determination to make things work for people who use self-harm has been both energizing and inspiring.*

*Throughout the pandemic months, we found ways to work together, we encouraged and even suggested ideas to each other and we have built on our strengths, even come out of our comfort zones.*

*The pandemic has emphasised and worsened isolation and its impact hasn't been fully felt. It's even more important that we work together and help each other through, at all levels. Like one of our service users said: "fighting is lonely but we don't have to do it alone".*