



“ We aim to bring to you the very best of Research about volunteering. ”

George Thomson, Chief Executive Volunteer Development Scotland.

Volunteer Development Scotland is the National Centre of Excellence in volunteer development and has a role in disseminating the best of research about volunteering. We're delighted to undertake this role with this important Research Study by Professor Liz Bondi and her team from the University of Edinburgh and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

76% of voluntary sector counsellors in Scotland are volunteers and 74% of agencies draw on the skills and expertise of volunteer counsellors. Volunteers make up the lions share of a force of 2,100 counsellors in voluntary sector agencies delivering 189,000 face to face counselling sessions a year. This work is often at the sharp end of society and many complex issues. We believe its right to promote the value of this contribution to society and also to assist the Research team and steering group who supported them in communicating the implications of the Research for volunteer development.

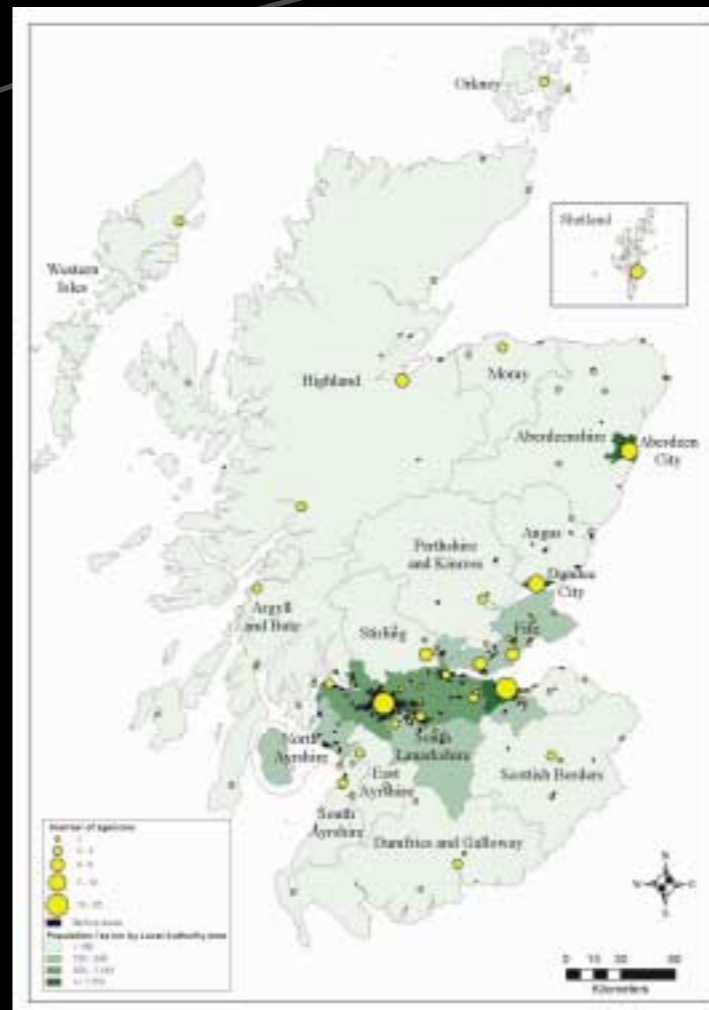
Implications for volunteer development

The findings of the research have some important implications for volunteer development.

- Over 1,500 people in Scotland do unpaid work as counsellors. Many have completed lengthy training courses. The quality and quantity of this volunteer effort merits greater attention by government and in Scottish society more generally.
- There are major gaps in the availability of counselling services, which need to be addressed urgently. As well as developing services in areas that have none, volunteer counsellors need to be recruited and trained locally.
- The majority of counsellors are white, female and over 40 years old. More needs to be done to include people from other backgrounds.



National Centre of Excellence



The research on which this report is based was conducted by four members of the Counselling and Society Research Team.

- Dr Liz Bondi, Professor of Social Geography and Team Leader
- Dr Arnar Arnason, Research Fellow in Counselling Studies
- Mr Colin Kirkwood, Senior Lecturer in Counselling Studies
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The Counselling and Society Research Team consists of researchers at the University of Edinburgh whose research examines counselling in relation to its social and cultural contexts.

The research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (R000239059) at the University of Edinburgh. The map also draws on spatial data provided with the support of the Economic and Social Research Council, and Joint Information Systems Committee, and use boundary materials copyright for which rests with the Crown and the Post Office. The researchers also wish to thanks numerous people in voluntary sector agencies throughout Scotland, whose generous assistance made this research possible, and members of the project advisory group whose comments and advice were invaluable.



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If you require a copy of the full report and its findings, please contact:



Join Us!

All details are provided in our web site www.vds.co.uk
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Volunteer Development Scotland is a partner with YoungScot and provides the volunteer information for young people on the Volunteering Channel of Young Scot. We are partners in the Workwithus.org initiative. The new database of volunteering opportunities will be accessed from the People Channel of the Work with Us portal

foreword

Volunteers are committed to helping others, and this often involves very attentive listening. Many volunteers provide some kind of practical support or assistance on the basis of their careful listening, but sometimes what people need is counselling rather than anything else. Counselling is a way of using listening skills therapeutically in order to help people address their own needs.

Counselling services began to be set up in Scotland about 50 years ago, the earliest ones growing out of the work of marriage guidance. Counselling was delivered by volunteers. Over the last two decades or so counselling the provision and uptake of counselling has grown rapidly, and a considerable variety of services now exist in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Although informal directories of counselling services are available in some localities, there is no comprehensive, publicly available overview of precisely what counselling services exist, where they are, and by whom they are provided. There is therefore no evidence about the scale of volunteering in the field of counselling. The research summarised in this report aimed to find out about the extent and the character of counselling provision in the voluntary sector in Scotland.

introduction

Finding out about counselling provision in the voluntary sector in Scotland is particularly important at this time because of the impact of a number of changes, which include the following.

- *While counselling originated in the voluntary sector, it has since developed in other sectors, including primary health care, within large workplaces, and in the private sector. One consequence of this is that opportunities to do paid counselling work have increased. It is time to take stock of the contribution of volunteers.*
- *As the range and volume of counselling services has increased, counselling work has become more professionalised. This means that training and qualifications are now more formalised, and are increasingly provided by, or linked to, universities and colleges. It is important to understand how these developments are affecting the contribution made by volunteers.*

key research findings

What services are available, where are they, and how many people use them?

At the start of the twenty-first century, 204 voluntary sector agencies in Scotland offer face-to-face counselling. These agencies include 40 that offer counselling to anyone on any issue, and 164 that specialise in particular issues or in the needs of particular groups. In total, voluntary sector counselling agencies in Scotland see 37,000 clients per year, and deliver 189,000 face-to-face counselling sessions per year.

Type of service	Number of agencies	Percentage of all sessions delivered	Percentage of clients seen
Generic (anyone, any issue)	40	30%	29%
Loss and bereavement	31	6%	6%
Alcohol, drugs and/or addictions	44	32%	24%
Relationship issues	25	15%	21%
Other specialisms	64	17%	20%
Total for all agencies	204	100%	100%

Face-to-face voluntary sector counselling services are concentrated in the major cities and urban areas, with very limited provision in many parts of rural Scotland including many smaller towns.

How is voluntary sector counselling funded?

- *% of voluntary sector counselling agencies depend on funding from one than one source, and 54% report that their funding comes from at least four different sources.*
- *78% of voluntary sector counselling agencies depend on public sector sources for at least part of their funding.*
- *65% of voluntary sector counselling agencies rely to some extent on their own fund-raising efforts.*
- *24% of voluntary sector counselling agencies meet the full cost of training their counsellors without charging their trainees.*

Is voluntary sector counselling delivered by volunteers, and how high are the standards of practice?

Hours of training	Percentage of all counsellors
Over 400	31%
120 to 300	33%
60 to 110	26%

Approximately 2,100 counsellors work in voluntary sector agencies in Scotland, of whom 76% give their time and expertise without payment. Ninety per cent of voluntary sector counsellors have completed or are undertaking dedicated counselling training courses.

Ninety-one per cent of voluntary sector agencies work within the ethical frameworks for the practice of counselling developed by COSCA and BACP.

What are the social characteristics of counsellors and clients?

Type of service	Counsellors Male:female ratio	Clients Male:female ratio
Generic (anyone, any issue)	18:82	41:59
Loss and bereavement	22:78	28:72
Alcohol, drugs and/or addictions	28:72	60:40
Relationship issues	11:89	39:61
Other specialisms	11:89	19:81
Overall average	20:80	40:60

Four out of five counsellors are women. Three out of five clients are women.

Counsellors tend to be older than clients.

Age band	Percentage of all counsellors	Percentage of all clients
Under 20		6%
20-29	7%	21%
30-39	20%	28%
40-49	34%	25%
50-59	30%	13%
60 and above	9%	7%

Information about race and ethnicity is very limited. Only 20 per cent of agencies record the race or ethnicity of their clients. Approximately 2% of counsellors come from black or ethnic minority backgrounds.

Why do people volunteer as counsellors and what do they get from it?

People become volunteer counsellors for lots of different reasons. In many cases there are several different factors involved, the importance of which changes over time. Some of the most common reasons include the following.

- *To help others.*
- *To help others as they themselves have been helped.*
- *To respond to needs of which they have personal experience.*
- *To do some good for their communities.*
- *To do something completely different from paid work.*
- *To develop skills.*
- *To train for a new career.*

Here are examples from some of the 100 counsellors who took part in this study.

Rosie trained as school-teacher and as her career progressed she considered getting training for guidance work. She took an introductory counselling skills course and became very interested in counselling. She looked for opportunities to gain experience and training as a volunteer. She undertook training paid for by an organisation in return for which she was expected to volunteer for two to three hours per week for two years. In the late 1990s Rosie took up a paid post as a counsellor. In addition she continues to volunteer for three hours a week at the local agency whose support enabled her to change career.

Erica had her first child in her teens and three more by her mid-20s. When the youngest started school she wanted to start a part-time job. However, she was very lacking in confidence and so the first thing she did was an assertiveness training course. The trainer commented on how supportive she was towards other participants and suggested that she take a course on counselling skills. This she did, and in due course, Erica got involved in a local voluntary sector organisation, which paid for further training in return for her time as a volunteer counsellor.

Derek worked as an engineer and then as a manager in a large company. His wife fell ill when they were both in their 40s and became progressively more disabled. Although very busy indeed, Derek felt he wanted something different in his life and he joined the Samaritans. A few years later he had the opportunity to undertake counselling training in the rural area where he lives. He volunteers as a counsellor for a couple of hours per week. For Derek counselling is time out from all the other pressures of life. He says "it's like having an hour in the bath where you don't care what's going on in the outside world".