

A report on the partnership work between the University of Strathclyde and the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Mental Health Improvement Team to build self-harm capacity for local training delivery within the University.



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# 1. Introduction and Background

The purpose of this report is to describe the process, share the outcomes and discuss the next steps from a programme of self-harm capacity building work between the University of Strathclyde and the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Mental Health Improvement Team.

Self-harm is a sign of serious emotional distress, and while most people who self-harm will not go on to take their own life, studies have found it is a strong risk factor for suicide. We know that self-harm is more common among young people with statistics suggesting with 1 in 6 16-24 years olds have self-harmed at some point in their lives (1) whilst 1 in 10 students have reported they had intentionally self-harmed within the last six months (2).

In November 2023 Scotland's first dedicated self-harm strategy and action plan(3) was published which aims for anyone affected by self-harm, to receive compassionate support, without fear of stigma or discrimination. The strategy highlights the need to continue to expand and deepen self-harm knowledge, provision of core training and continuous professional development for key professional groups including schools and further education.

The NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) Self-harm Forum is a trainer network, chaired by the NHSGGC Mental Health Improvement Team and is responsible for building self-harm capacity through delivery of the What's the Harm (WTH) Self-harm Awareness and Skills training course. This training course seeks to standardise understanding of and responses to self-harm when used as a coping strategy and in order to achieve this it is vital that the training reaches a wide range of staff and service providers across both statutory and voluntary sectors.

In September 2023, Disability and Wellbeing Services from the University of Strathclyde contacted the NHSGGC Mental Health Improvement Team looking to access a Training for Trainers (T4T) WTH Self-harm Awareness and Skills course. The University of Strathclyde is home to over 25,000 students from 140 countries and the Disability & Wellbeing Service offers a broad range of support to students with any disability, mental health and wellbeing related needs. The service reported an increase in the number of students disclosing self-harm and that there appeared to be a lack of awareness and understanding amongst staff and students in how to respond to and support someone who is self-harming. This opened up the dialogue to explore a training programme model that would build capacity for self-harm training delivery within the University.

**1. Samaritans (2020) Hidden Too Long- Uncovering Self-harm in Scotland**  
<https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/samaritans-in-scotland/about-samaritans-scotland/campaigning-change-scotland/reducing-self-harm/self-harm-scotland/>

**2. Mental Health Foundation (2022) Thriving Learners**  
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Thriving-Learners-Report-Executive-Summary.pdf>

**3. Scottish Government (2023) Scotland's Self-harm Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2027.** Supporting with Compassion. <https://www.gov.scot/>

## 2. Aims and Objectives

**The main aim of this project is to:**

*“Build self-harm training capacity across the University of Strathclyde”*

**The specific objectives are :**

- To deliver the pre-requisite one day WTH training course to identified University staff.
- To deliver WTH Training for Trainers Course to identified staff.
- To sign off trainers.
- To evaluate the T4T programme of work.
- To support the Disability and Wellbeing Service to implement self-harm training plans across the University.
- To share learning with Higher and Further Education colleagues to encourage uptake of the same training model to build capacity for local delivery within Universities and Colleges.

### 3. Planning and Implementation Process

- 1** 17/10/23 Planning meeting with NHSGGC Mental Health Improvement Team and the University of Strathclyde Disability and Wellbeing Service. T4T application process commenced.
- 2** 16/01/24 Pre training evaluation for 1 day WTH Training completed.
- 3** 23/01/24 WTH Self-harm awareness and skills 1 day training course delivered and evaluations completed. T4T applications approved.
- 4** 06/02/24 Day 1 WTH Training for Trainers delivered.
- 5** 13/02/24 Day 2 WTH Training for Trainers. Trainer sign off dates agreed. T4T course evaluation completed.
- 6** 05/03/24 Debrief and reflection meeting with Disability and Wellbeing Services.
- 7** May 24 3 days scheduled to sign off new trainers.
- 8** June 24 onwards University implementation planning with support from NHSGGC Mental Health Improvement Team.

## 4.Outcomes and Evaluation

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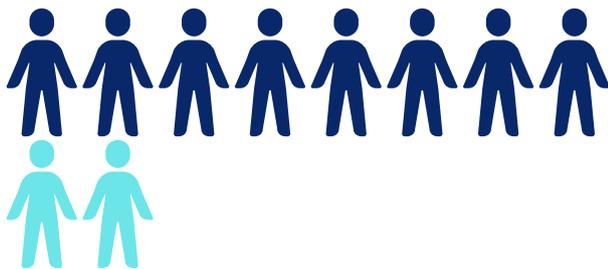
Staff completed a 1 day WTH self-harm awareness and skills training course.

10

Staff completed the WTH Training for Trainers course. The breakdown of staff is listed in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.**

Staff Group	1 day WTH	T4T
Disability and Wellbeing Services	9	5
Security	2	2
Accommodation Services	3	0
Strathclyde Sport	1	1
Student Financial Support Services	1	1
Organisational and Staff Development Unit	1	1



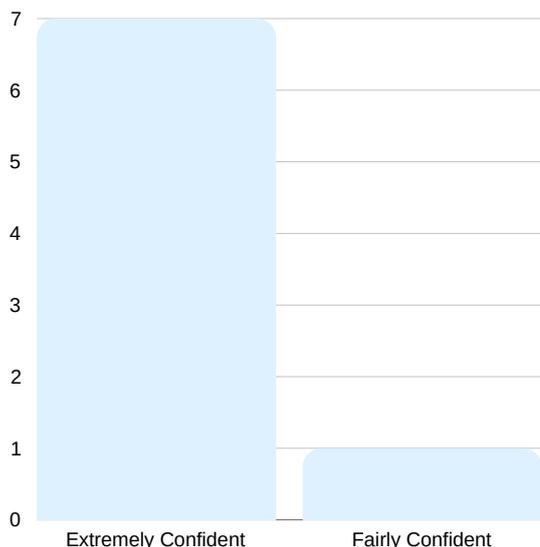
8 participants completed a T4T evaluation.



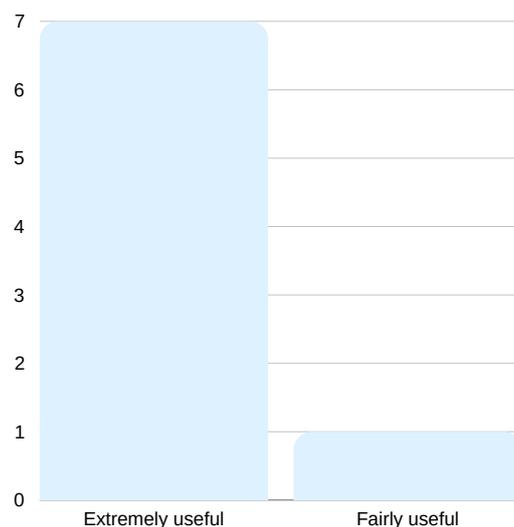
All 8 participants said they plan to go on to be an active trainer.

## 4. Outcomes and Evaluation

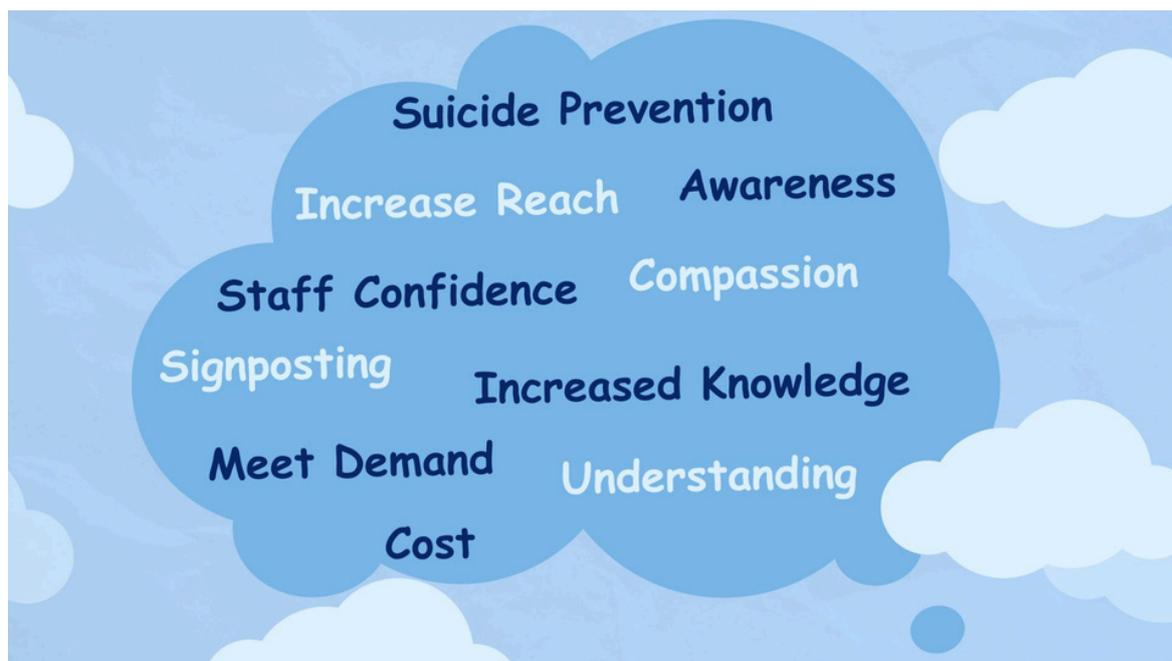
How **confident** do you feel to deliver the WTH Self-harm awareness and skills 1 day training course?



How **useful** has the course been in increasing your confidence to train others in the WTH Self-harm awareness and skills 1 day training course?



What is the **added value** of the Training for Trainers course to you and your organisation?



## 4. Outcomes and Evaluation

From an organisational perspective, what would **success** look like to you after completing the T4T course?



## 5. Discussion

The University of Strathclyde is the first Higher Education establishment to have participated in this self-harm capacity building approach, a model which has focused on education (schools) across the 6 Health and Social Care Partnerships in Greater Glasgow and Clyde. The model worked well within the University; commitment from the Disability and Wellbeing service, careful planning, clear communication channels between partners and transparency on expectations were key to its success. Evaluations did highlight some suggestions to help improve the T4T, however this was more on accessibility and course content/flow rather than the approach.

There is an overwhelming appetite from participants to translate the learning into action but the consensus is that a planned and collective approach with strategic buy in is needed for successful implementation.

During training delivery the staff opened up about their experiences of dealing with self-harm both personally and professionally and discussed some of the trends and challenges they are facing. These included:

## 5. Discussion

### Prevalence

- Anecdotally, feedback from staff across various departments of the University suggests that the number of students self-harming has increased, prompting the request for the self-harm training to equip staff with the knowledge and skills to respond. Accommodation services have also reported an increase in the number of students who are disclosing self-harm on their application form when applying for accommodation.

### Communication

- Awareness of the different supports available to signpost students to varied across the staff. For example not all staff knew about the Mental Health Hub at NHS 24 with one staff member saying to a colleague “how do you know about that and we don’t”. Staff highlighted the need for improved communication channels across the University to ensure that all staff and departments have access to the same information, protocols and support services that students can be signposted to. Suggestions included an “information hub” which could be a central point of reference for staff to access and share information.

### Peers

- Staff reported an increase in the number of students expressing concerns about friends and room-mates (sharing university accommodation) who are self-harming. They are looking for advice and guidance on how they can best support their peers whilst on the flip side staff are mindful of the impact this can have on those providing the care and that support must be in place for them.

### Responsibility of all

- University life doesn’t start at 9am and end at 5pm Monday to Friday. Library and study spaces are available 24/7, whilst Campus security at student accommodation are on duty 24/7 to offer support. Security are often the first point of contact when responding to student welfare situations including self-harming incidents. It is not expected that all staff are experts in self-harm, however there is a consensus that the University needs to have clearer policies and protocols in place when responding to incidents of self-harm both during the day and out of hours.

## 6. Next Steps

The new trainers will be linked to the NHSGGC Self-Harm forum which will provide peer support and access to up to date information alongside sharing of resources. Due to demands on staff time, it is suggested that one trainer from the University acts as a representative and connects with the forum. This could be rotated on an annual basis.

The trainers will be officially signed off in May-June 2024 and thereafter the University will continue their discussions on how best to utilise their new “training resource”. The NHSGGC **Mental Health Improvement, Self-harm and Suicide Prevention** training pathway is a useful guide that could support some of these conversations; it helps target resources to ensure that staff are equipped with the self-harm knowledge and skills relevant to their role and responsibilities. Early discussions have also suggested training to include both staff and students.

The NHSGGC Mental Health Improvement Team and the University will arrange follow up meetings during the course of 2024 to discuss progress, any barriers and support needs in relation to implementation of training.

Whilst training is only one part of a much wider programme of work to make self-harm “everyone’s business”, the capacity building model lays a solid foundation for the University to take forward a “whole organisation approach to self-harm awareness and training”. Self-harm should not stand alone but dovetail with wider mental health and wellbeing work, including the suicide prevention work currently being progressed at the University. However such an approach requires strategic buy in alongside partnership working between senior management, staff, students and the wider University community.

## 7. Final thoughts from the University of Strathclyde

We are grateful to be working in Collaboration with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to make this training available at the University. By having 10 internal trainers it greatly increases our potential to be able to roll this out across our community. In keeping with the report we are committed to integrating 'What's the Harm' training into our whole University approach to wellbeing, and mental health.

### Next Steps

- We will design a course feedback form specific to our setting and will share findings with NHS to help guide future collaboration in higher education settings.
- We will explore ways of making the online 1-hour awareness session available and can use case studies specific to our setting in all courses we deliver.
- We recognise the governance required to make this project sustainable and will have an open dialogue with colleagues and NHS GGC about our approach to rolling this out.
- We recognise the challenges trainers may experience and are committed to encouraging peer support and to help them to access the existing Training Forum.

## 8. Quotes from Participants

The 1 day training was very informative and I feel it has armed me with some strategies to better support and advise students I'm working with who disclose they are self-harming.

The information given about the cycle of self-injury will be particularly helpful to refer to when working with someone currently self-harming to consider where they are in the cycle.'

'The video of the person talking about their personal experience of self-harm was extremely powerful and gave me a better understanding of why people may self-harm.

I really enjoyed the training and found it very insightful. The focus on practical discussions brought it to life and made it an engaging session. The training was really informative and it definitely changed the way I see self-harm.

The two trainers created an environment where people felt comfortable participating in discussions and the discussion around personal self-harming behaviour made me think about self-harming in a much wider sense than I had previously. I'd recommend it for any staff members within the university who have contact with students.'