

# Executive Summary

## Two million Shout conversations

Saving lives at scale through  
the power of technology



"The volunteer I spoke to tonight was absolutely fantastic. Calmed me down, listened to what I was saying, ensured I had the relevant resources before I left. They quite literally saved my life tonight."

Shout texter feedback

**MENTAL  
HEALTH  
INNOVATIONS**

**shout**

**85258**

here for you 24/7



## KENSINGTON PALACE

In 2017, The Royal Foundation founded Mental Health Innovations. At the time, we were certain that harnessing the power of technology would help us to increase the support available for those struggling with their mental health, break the stigma around reaching out for help, and make it possible for more people to volunteer.

In May 2019, Shout was born - the UK's first free, 24/7 mental health text support service, ensuring that people around the country had access to crucial and often life-saving support in the palm of their hands. And in just four years, the team at Shout have held two million conversations with people in need of urgent help.

This has only been made possible by an extraordinary virtual community of dedicated volunteers, providing real-time advice and guidance from home with the support of an expert clinical supervision team.

The rapid increase in demand for the Shout service over the past four years - now reaching up to 2,000 conversations every day - demonstrates the value of a text service in helping people take the vital first step in reaching out.

However, two million conversations is also a sobering milestone, and the level of demand for the service highlights the scale of the challenge facing us. More than half of Shout texters are children and young people struggling with thoughts of suicide and self-harm. Over 50% of service users say that they have no one else to talk to, and a similar proportion have never spoken about their mental health before reaching out to Shout.

It is crucial that the insights gathered through Shout conversations, which are detailed further within this report, are used to learn how we can tackle this challenge head on. By using this data, we can help to ensure that we are equipping young people with the skills they need to better understand their emotions, develop effective coping strategies, and seek support before they reach crisis point.

Catherine and I are incredibly proud of Shout and the help it has provided to so many people since its inception. The potential for the service to continue to drive positive action and move the dial on how we approach our nation's mental health is so exciting. Whilst there is still much work to be done, I hope that this report provides a positive picture about what can be achieved with a little innovation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lilly'.

HRH Prince William

The Prince of Wales

# Introduction

In this report we look back at the development of Mental Health Innovations and Shout over the past four years. In June 2023 we celebrated the amazing milestone of two million Shout conversations. Our extraordinary community of volunteers, in partnership with our expert clinical team, has enabled us to help more than 675,000 people who were struggling to cope. Since the public launch of the service in May 2019, we have scaled rapidly and now support between 1,500 and 2,000 conversations every day. Leveraging the power of digital has enabled us to build a game-changing service able to respond to the enormous challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost of living crisis and a steep decline in the nation's mental health.

Alongside our purpose-built technology, we use groundbreaking data science, machine learning and artificial intelligence to analyse Shout's text-based conversations, understand our data and use it for social impact. This report looks at the range of issues faced by our texters. Suicidal thoughts is the most common reason that people contact Shout and we have grown to play a significant role in suicide prevention in the UK. We know that some groups are more likely to experience suicidal ideation and that a text service particularly resonates with vulnerable populations. These include children and young people, people living in poverty, autistic people, expectant and new mothers, the LGBTQ+ community and the prison population.

Shout's digital platform appeals to young people, with 62% of texters aged under 25. Three-quarters of our texters are female, reflecting the rapid decline in poor mental health in girls and young women. We can see that neurodiverse people are particularly drawn to a text-based service; our texters are many times more likely to self-identify as autistic than the UK population.

Non-judgemental mental health support is critical for all of our texters and especially so for people from the LGBTQ+ community which represents more than a third of our service users. In 2023, we began offering our service to people in prison, in partnership with Serco. By the end of this year, we will be providing 24/7 support for people in three prisons and hope to be able to extend this service more widely in the future.

In addition to the Shout service, we have extended our support to a further three million people through the provision of resources on our [website](#) and provided high quality information and content through our social media channels. We have also developed digital and in-person mental health training, consultancy and tools to help employers to improve workforce wellbeing. Finally, we have supported policy makers, third sector and public sector bodies, academic institutions and the corporate sector by sharing our knowledge and data insights to improve the understanding of mental health in the UK.

We could not have achieved any of this without our incredible volunteers, dedicated team and our funders and supporters, to whom I would like to express my immense gratitude. My final thanks is to our texters who have shown extraordinary courage and strength in contacting us. It is a privilege to be able to offer our support when it is needed most.



Victoria Hornby OBE  
CEO, Mental Health Innovations

## About Shout

Shout is a free text messaging support service, available 24/7 to anyone in the UK who is struggling to cope. Every single minute, someone reaches out to Shout for support and has a conversation that could save their life. Our trained volunteers and clinicians are there around the clock to support texters whenever they need us, listening without judgement, helping them to a calmer state so that they can discuss and develop a personal safety plan with signposting to further support where needed. Where a texter is deemed to be at imminent risk of suicide, Shout works with the emergency services to intervene.

In our first four years, Shout has scaled to take two million conversations with 675,000 children, young people and adults who have needed immediate mental health support. 85% of texters found their conversation helpful and 68% felt calmer afterwards.

We have teams in the UK and New Zealand working around the clock, offering support to the UK public when most other mental health services are not available. Anyone can text SHOUT to 85258 to receive support, at any time of day or night.

## At the cutting edge of digital innovation

Shout uses anonymised, aggregated data from our thousands of conversations, to generate unique insights into the mental health of the UK population. We use these insights to enhance our services and report on trends to inform the broader mental health sector.

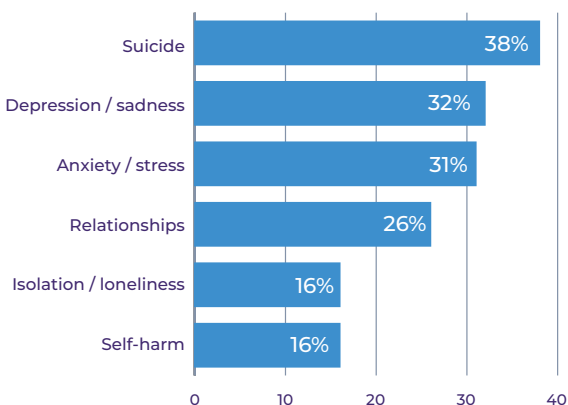
Shout's text-based conversations can be analysed using computational methods. We use groundbreaking data science, machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI), to apply the most advanced techniques to understanding our data and using it for social impact.

In particular, we believe that Mental Health Innovations has a unique opportunity to be a leader in leveraging the powerful, fast-moving advancements in generative AI to enhance the Shout service. To do this we have developed a generative AI role-play simulator available for trainee volunteers. Almost all trainees that have used this simulator report that it has helped them practise the skills they learned in training, resulting in them feeling more confident.

## Shout and suicide prevention

The issue most frequently arising in Shout conversations is suicide and 38% of Shout users are experiencing suicidal ideation. The service is instrumental in preventing tragedies that might have otherwise occurred in moments of desperation. Many of our texters tell us that, without our support in their moment of crisis, they would have taken their own lives.

Most common issues (% of all conversations)



*"The volunteer I spoke to tonight was absolutely fantastic. Calmed me down, listened to what I was saying, ensured I had the relevant resources before I left. They quite literally saved my life tonight."*

### Shout texter feedback

Shout Volunteers are trained to assess risk and de-escalate texters experiencing suicidal thoughts or urges. They engage warmly with texters, validate their experience, de-escalate their situation and support them to make a safety plan. When de-escalation is not possible and a texter is deemed to be at imminent risk of suicide, Shout works with the emergency services to keep the texter safe. From two million conversations, Shout has actioned 27,775 emergency interventions.



*"Shout and their volunteers are at the forefront of digital innovation in suicide prevention and are making a huge difference. I saw the importance of their work as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and this report highlights once again the incredible impact they have."*

Rt. Hon. Sajid Javid MP, former Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

## Case study - Google OneBox

40% of Shout's texters find us on Google and in June 2021, we partnered with them to signpost from the OneBox for search terms relating to suicide. Now, around 2% of our daily conversations are with people signposted to us after potentially harmful searches, showing the efficacy of these types of intervention to divert users from their course of action.

## Supporting government strategy

We are committed to using our clinical expertise and data insights to support others across the sector and beyond. This has included working with the government as a member of the Department of Health & Social Care's (DHSC) National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group (NSPSAG). We were encouraged by the 2023 National Suicide Prevention Strategy which recognises the vital role that data plays in suicide prevention, the importance of early intervention, the value of crisis text lines and the focus on some of the most vulnerable groups in society; who are strongly represented in the users of Shout.

## Who uses Shout?

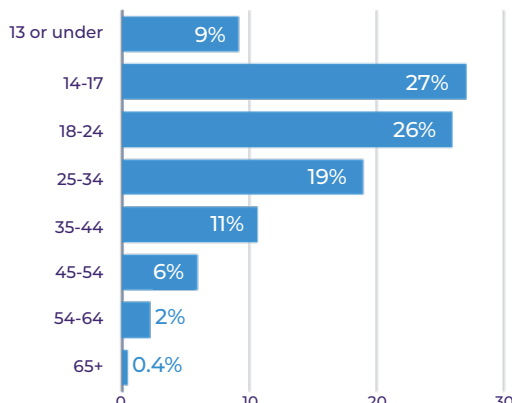
Shout reaches people who haven't found support anywhere else.

48% of our texters say they prefer to text rather than talk about private things and 34% are too embarrassed to talk on the phone. 48% of our texters want to talk to someone who they don't know and 55% don't have anyone else to talk to.

We reach a broad range of vulnerable audiences who value our service, including those in poverty, people who are autistic and the LGBTQ+ community.

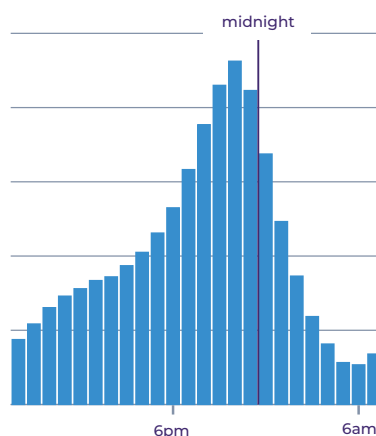
The majority (62%) of Shout's texters are under 25-years-old and find it natural to seek support via digital means.

Age (% of Texters)



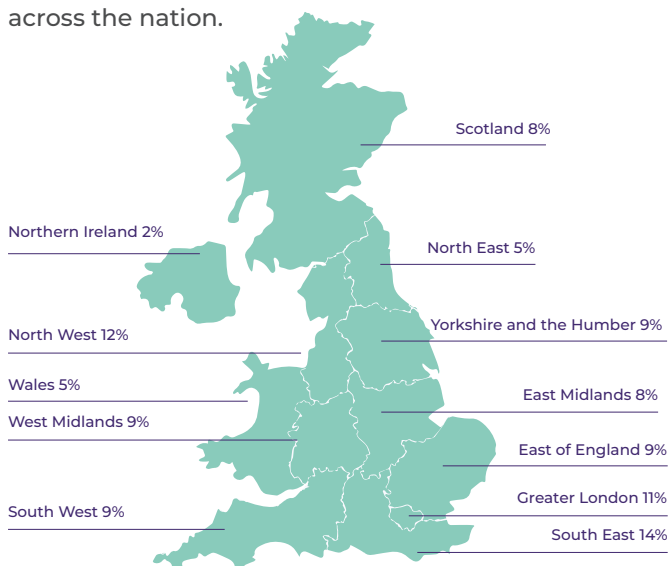
75% of Shout texters identify as female, which reflects patterns of need and help seeking that we see in society. More than a third (38%) of our texters identify as LGBTQ+. Shout texters are predominately white, but there is growing representation of other ethnicities in our texter base.

Conversations (average % hourly)



Our busiest hours are 10pm to midnight, when other services are closed.

Shout is used by people across the length and breadth of the UK with reach into communities across the nation.



## Supporting Vulnerable Audiences

### Children and young people:

*"Many of the young texters that make contact do not feel able to have a physical conversation about how they are feeling. Having this text service provides them with a safe space to be heard, however major or minor their issue."* **Shout Volunteer**

### Case study - Caitlyn

Caitlyn started struggling with her mental health in her early teens and texted Shout while she was at school. She found it hard to talk about how she was feeling, so the idea of text messaging was appealing. Caitlyn created a safety plan with her Shout Volunteer and managed to get through her crisis safely.

*"I just want people to know that it's 100% okay to ask for help. Shout is a very helpful service, full of very kind people. You are never alone."*

### Those in poverty:

The cost of living crisis is also a mental health issue. Our data shows that people from more deprived areas in the UK are more likely to contact Shout than those living in the least deprived areas.

### Autistic texters:

*"I am autistic and often find it easier to type how I'm feeling and you really supported me and listened to me through a very difficult distressing moment to make me feel more in control and like someone listened to me."* **Shout texter feedback**

### Middle-aged men:

*"You've helped me more in the last hour than anyone else has in 32 years. I'm genuinely in tears, there's an option other than death. Thank you."* **Male Shout texter**

### Students:

*"I sometimes feel I don't have anybody to talk to about my emotions because I don't want to worry friends and family... So to speak to somebody I don't know helps."*

**Shout student texter feedback**

## Case study - Emily

Emily had recently been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and was feeling isolated when she contacted Shout for help. Living in busy student halls where she could be overheard having a conversation, the silent and discreet nature of Shout appealed. As a 24/7 service, Shout was there for Emily when her care teams were unavailable.

*"The volunteer listened to all my worries about my illness and how much I was struggling with my diagnosis. They didn't tell me what to do or how to feel, instead empowering me to make my own decisions about my care and what I needed at that time."*

Thanks to the support she received, Emily has gone on to become a Shout Volunteer, having been inspired by the volunteer who helped her when she needed it the most.

### Girls and women:

*"I had a conversation with a middle-aged woman struggling with suicidal thoughts who couldn't see a way forward and believed their children would be better off without them. We explored ways together to try and make things a bit more manageable and to take small, manageable steps and self-care to boost their self-worth."* **Shout Volunteer**

### LGBTQ+ community:

*"Thank you so much for all your help. I just thought about coming out, and I'm going to build up the courage to tell my mum about how I'm struggling with my sexuality and how I find it difficult."* **Shout texter**

### The prison population:

*"Thank you - you was a great help for me today and now I know I have somewhere to go when im feeling low and suicidal, you are a kind person with a big heart."* **Feedback from a texter in prison**

### Online support:

We extend our reach by providing support to people via our social media accounts and website, which has been visited by three million people.

## Our partners

At Shout, partnerships are central to our mission to improve access to transformative digital mental health support. We work in partnership with government, third sector and public sector bodies, academic institutions and the corporate sector to inform the conversation, increase reach and to improve mental health across the UK.

**Commissioned partners:** We work collaboratively with more than 75 public, private and third sector organisations including the NHS, Premier League, EDF Energy and Network Rail, to provide a bespoke service for their audiences, who can access Shout via a custom keyword. Partners can also receive advice and consultation on marketing their keyword service and engaging new groups, along with anonymised data insights and tailored clinical analysis to help them gain a valuable understanding of the mental health needs of their audience.

## Case study - Hampshire, Southampton and Isle of Wight NHS Trust

Our partnership helps residents access local mental health services for ongoing support. We ask texters using the keyword 'HANTS' who are not at imminent risk if they would like information about further support in their area. We then signpost texters directly to the NHS 111 mental health service, and a member of the local mental health triage team follows up with them.

**Sonya Mclean, Senior Programme Manager, Mental Health Crisis Care at the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board:**

*"This innovation aligns with the urgent and emergency mental health care support offer across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, supporting people to get access to mental health response 24/7 including those who may need urgent community response. This has increased our digital interface with our citizens to ensure we break down the barriers to health inequalities and equal access."*

**Corporate partners:** Businesses play a vital role in supporting us to reach more people, raise awareness, amplify our messages and create a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of people across the UK. Our team is here to work with you to engage employees, generate shared value partnerships and demonstrate results and impact.

## Case study - Premier League

We collaborated with the Premier League as part of its Inside Matters campaign to promote mental health and wellbeing among the football community. We published the **Inside Matters Handbook**, a digital guide offering tips and advice for managing the mental and physical symptoms of anxiety which included comment from Premier League players and club staff as well as advice from Shout clinicians.

As part of the collaboration, Premier League fans were given access to 24/7 mental health support by texting 'TEAMTALK' to 85258.

In addition, Shout released a new report '**Anxiety in the UK**' that gives insight into anxiety and coping skills, from 300,000 anonymised conversations.

**Our training offer:** We provide a range of unique digital and in-person mental health training, consultancy and tools to help employers and organisations improve workforce wellbeing and facilitate positive conversations at work.

*"We are delighted with the high level of training Mental Health Innovations have provided to our initial cohort of employees."* **Sam Graham, Technical Manager, Social Programmes, Cadent**

**Support for the charity sector:** We partner with a wide range of charities to enable them to offer the Shout service to their audiences, extending our reach into vulnerable communities. We have partnered with 41 charities, including Place2Be, Best Beginnings, The Mix and Winston's Wish, to give their audiences free 24/7 mental health support by offering them a bespoke support service at no cost, at a benefit of £2.3m to the sector.

*"...you made me feel so much better... you just helped save a life"* **Feedback from Place2Be texter aged 13 or under**

## Our Shout Volunteers

Our volunteers are at the heart of everything we do, giving up their time to respond to people going through their darkest moments and making an immeasurable difference to lives in crisis. It's a demanding but highly rewarding role which delivers a real sense of pride, satisfaction and purpose from taking conversations that help people get through difficult times and that save lives.

## Case study - Ben, Shout Volunteer

Ben tragically lost his younger brother to suicide in 2018 and reached out to Shout while he was struggling with his thoughts and feelings at university. Ben has gone on to become a mental health campaigner and advocate, has worked with Shout on a number of awareness campaigns and also volunteers for Shout.


*"I'd do anything to go back and change things, but I can't. What I can do is help someone else choose to stay, and in turn change another family's story. That's why I trained, that's why I volunteer, because I know what it's like to lose someone, and I know that I don't want anyone to ever feel like they're alone."*

To find out more about our volunteering offer, [click here](#).



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