



## **POST INCIDENT SUPPORT FOR MOUNTAIN RESCUE VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF IN SCOTLAND**

### **RIVERS CENTRE FOR TRAUMATIC STRESS – GENERAL INFORMATION**

#### What is the Rivers Centre?

The Rivers Centre for Traumatic Stress was founded in 1997 and is one of the UK's leading NHS providers of adult traumatic stress services. The Centre specialises in the assessment and treatment of trauma-related problems, and offers a range of services from individual therapeutic interventions to advice and consultancy at an organisational level.

The Centre is staffed by a multidisciplinary team of psychologists, psychological therapists and a psychiatrist, all of whom work together to offer a comprehensive range of services and evidence-based treatments. All therapists are registered with and abide by the ethical guidelines of their respective professional bodies.

#### What does the Rivers Centre do?

Our aim is to provide individually tailored care for the whole range of adult trauma reactions, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and other anxiety disorders. We are committed to evidence-based treatments and all our therapists are trained in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR), the recommended treatments for PTSD.

Alongside our core NHS clinical work the Rivers Centre team has extensive experience of working with emergency service staff whose work role involves regular or repeated exposure to potentially traumatic experiences. We have worked with fire and rescue staff since 1998 providing a rapid assessment and treatment service for staff who sustain a psychological injury in the course of their work. We are passionate about this work and are pleased to be able to offer a similar service to mountain rescue volunteers and staff in Scotland.

We have conducted research and developed training and materials aimed at promoting the wellbeing of staff working in emergency responder roles. For more information on this, please refer to our project, Lifelines Scotland <https://www.lifelines.scot/>

#### Why might you need the Rivers Centre?

Research and experience tell us that psychological injury is an occupational hazard for members of the emergency service community. The Rivers Centre developed the Post Incident Support Process (PISP) to help people in high risk roles stay well as they encounter potentially traumatic stressors. The aims of the scheme are to assist in the early identification and rapid assessment of any emerging difficulties and to offer treatment, where necessary for anyone who is experiencing problems.

#### What is the Post Incident Support Process (PISP)?

The Post Incident Support Process relates to the support arrangements that have been put in place by Scottish Mountain Rescue in partnership with the Rivers Centre to keep you well following exposure to potentially traumatic events in your volunteering role. So, if there has been a particularly challenging incident, perhaps involving a fatality or serious injury, the Team Leader will have overall responsibility for ensuring that the PISP process is initiated, and everyone involved in the incident (including people who weren't able to respond to the call-out) will be sent, three weeks later, a questionnaire to fill out. This is a way for you to reflect on how you're feeling about the incident and is also the way you can access confidential support if you need it.

#### What kinds of incidents trigger PISP?

We know that psychological injury is not inevitable and that many of you will cope well most of the time. However, Post-Incident Support should be considered for any incident that could be considered a critical or potentially traumatic event (PTE). A PTE might involve either a direct threat (eg major incidents / emergencies, hazardous environments, assault/injury to self and/or colleagues,

accidents involving self and/or colleagues) or indirect threats such as exposure to the suffering of others, especially the vulnerable (eg young or old). It might involve deaths by suicide; performing or witnessing CPR; dealing with anxious/upset/angry families/friends/bystanders; or perhaps very high media interest. A complex and extended incident, particularly if there are multiple fatalities, should generally trigger PISP.

### How does the scheme work?

Mountain rescue volunteers and staff may have contact with the Rivers Centre in any of three ways:

1. A Team Leader or other designated individual may contact the Rivers Centre for advice in cases where there has been an incident that may be deemed as “critical / potentially traumatic”.
2. When an incident is declared “critical” and PISP is initiated, the Team Leader will have overall responsibility for ensuring that a list of everyone involved (including people who weren’t able to respond to the call-out) is collated and that 3 weeks after the incident everyone is sent the PISP questionnaire. We wait 3 weeks because it is not unusual to feel stressed or distressed in the days after a traumatic incident and this is a good time to see whether reactions are settling down. The Rivers Centre will then be provided with the overall details of the incident and how many forms have been sent out. Either individual team members complete the questionnaire and return it directly to the Rivers Centre by email to **loth.externalrivers@nhs.scot** or in one of the Freepost envelopes you’ll have in the base (or as agreed with your team). The questionnaire has a space for you to ask us to contact you. We may also get in touch if your answers suggest you might benefit from some advice or support.
3. If an incident has not been identified as “critical / potentially traumatic” by your team, you can self-refer to the Rivers Centre. To do this, you can download a questionnaire from the Lifelines website or SMR team members web area (<https://www.scottishmountainrescue.org/scottish-mountain-rescue-wellbeing-information/> ) and complete it or you can contact the SMR Wellbeing Officer or call us directly at the Rivers Centre.

### What happens next?

Once we receive your questionnaire at The Rivers Centre we will be in touch quickly. We are committed to contacting you within 10 working days of receiving your completed questionnaire. We will make contact by telephone initially to arrange a time to find out more about how things are and how we can help.

We can meet with you either face to face or via telehealth consultations. The Rivers Centre is based in Edinburgh, however, when visiting us in Edinburgh isn’t possible or convenient for you then we can provide support via a telephone consultation or by secure NHS video-call.

Your first call / appointment will take about an hour and is an opportunity for us to assess how you’re doing and, if required, make a plan for treatment. We may ask you to fill in some more questionnaires to help us with this. If we agree that it would be helpful for you to have further appointments we will try, where possible, for these to be with the same clinician you met with initially.

### What will be discussed?

Our aim is to enhance resilience and to identify any signs of stress or distress as early as possible so that we can help you resolve these. We know that most of you most of the time cope well with the challenges of your role and so we will be working together to understand what has protected you in the past, the nature of your injury and how we can help you recover. We will be explaining how trauma reactions develop and helping you deal with your symptoms.

### What about confidentiality?

What’s discussed will be kept confidential unless we’re concerned about your safety or the safety of others. As an NHS service, we will ask your consent to write to your GP to let them know you have been seen at the Rivers Centre. Information about you and any contact we have is stored on secure NHS databases\*.

We will collate anonymised data on things like the number of forms we receive back over the year and for which kinds of incidents so can plan how best to support SMR volunteers in the future. It’s really helpful if you can complete and return the questionnaire even if everything is fine and you’re doing well.

Will I need to take time out from volunteering with Mountain Rescue?

No, you won't necessarily need to stand-down from your team or take time off your work to engage with the Rivers Centre. There are lots of folks we see that remain in their responding role while they have treatment.

Is that my volunteering time over?

People often worry that if they have a psychological injury and need to engage with the Rivers Centre for treatment that their volunteering time as an emergency responder will be over. This is not the case. Two thirds of the emergency service staff we see for treatment are still in their responding role while they see us and last year 91 % of the remaining third who were off sick at the start of treatment made a full recovery and were able to return to their role.

Who do I contact if I have any other questions?

**Mountain Rescue** - SMR Wellbeing Officer, Stephen J Penny [wellbeingofficer@scottishmountainrescue.org](mailto:wellbeingofficer@scottishmountainrescue.org)

or Eliz Macintosh [Wellbeing-EAM@scottishmountainrescue.org](mailto:Wellbeing-EAM@scottishmountainrescue.org)

**Rivers** –Paula Easton or Gill Moreton are the people to contact at the Rivers Centre – 0131 451 7407 [loth.externalrivers@nhs.scot](mailto:loth.externalrivers@nhs.scot)

You can find out more information about the Rivers Centre and the service we provide at <https://services.nhslothian.scot/riverscentre/>

Gill Moreton and Paula Easton

August 2024

\* Information is stored on secure NHS databases and you can read more here on how NHS Lothian will handle your personal information and uphold your rights here:

<https://www.nhslothian.scot/yourrights/data-protection-privacy/data-protection-notice/>