



What are the benefits and challenges of volunteering for domestic violence and abuse (DVA) organisations for those with lived experience?

About the Project

1 in 3 women will experience some form of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in their life (WHO, 2024). This violence can be physical, psychological, sexual, financial and social coercive control. The consequences of DVA can be varied including mental ill health, physical injury, lost employment opportunities, and loss of social and family contacts (United Nations, 2024).

DVA against women and their children often occurs in situations where they cannot change their environment or escape without external, specialised support. To deal with these complexities, specialised DVA organisations like Nottingham & Nottinghamshire's Juno have been set up and are shaped significantly by lived experience. This essential knowledge is used to inform essential services such as harm reduction, advocacy, and working to create more safety for women in the future. Lived experience is often present at the core of DVA organisation's values, guiding their aims and practice.

There are many documented benefits of volunteering (e.g. supporting recovery, developing skills and self-efficacy, building meaningful connections, and bringing about sustainable change: Bowe et al., 2022; Wakefield et al., 2024). However, less is known about volunteering for trauma-based organisations. Evidence shows that providers of trauma services can experience secondary traumatisation (Bridger et al., 2020), especially if the volunteer shares experiences with the individuals they are working with.

This PhD project aims to bridge this gap in knowledge by investigating who can benefit from lived experience volunteering in DVA organisations, where secondary traumatisation is more likely to occur, and what interventions can be developed to support the volunteers and the organisations.

This project has been co-created and is supported by researchers from Nottingham Trent University (NTU), the University of Nottingham (UoN) and partners at Juno Women's Aid. The successful candidate for this project will be enrolled at Nottingham Trent University.



Project Aims

This proposed project will investigate the benefits and challenges among those with lived experience of volunteering and acting as peer-supporters for a DVA organisation. Informed by trauma theories of secondary traumatisation and social psychology theories of volunteering and collective action, this PhD has the following three aims:

1. Examine who the volunteering is beneficial for and when and how it is best to become a lived experience volunteer for DVA organisations.
2. Investigate the challenges and potential harms that lived experienced volunteering can bring for the volunteers (in different roles) and DVA organisations
3. Identify training needs and successful strategies that can be developed to support the lived experience volunteers and the organisations.

Supervisory Team

1. Lead Academic Supervisor: [Dr Blerina Kellezi \(NTU\)](#)
2. Academic Co-Supervisor: [Dr Laura Blackie \(UoN\)](#)
3. Community Supervisor: [Sonia Burns, \(Juno Women's Aid\)](#)

Key Details

Host University:	Nottingham Trent University
School / department:	School of Social Sciences
Start date:	01 April 2025
Financial offer:	Tuition fees covered in full (worth approx. £15k across full PhD programme). Monthly stipend based on £19,237 per annum, pro rata, tax free.



Key Details

Working hours	Full-time (minimum 37.5 hrs per week)
Working Style:	Primarily in-person at host university. Flexible working supported. Working pattern to be agreed between successful candidate and lead supervisor.

Competencies

Co(I)laboratory Core Competencies			
Category		Competency	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Comprehension and evaluation		Strong understanding of the project and its subject matter.	A / I
		Analytical, researcher mindset with keen attention to detail.	A / I
		Communicate complex concepts with clarity and precision.	A / I
		Able to identify connections, patterns, gaps, and irregularities in information/data.	I
		Able to interpret data/information confidently with logic and empathy to derive meaning.	I
Social and emotional		Demonstrable experience of responding effectively changing contexts, information and demands.	A
		Ability to persevere in the face of challenges/failures and to remain constructive in developing solutions.	A
		Demonstrable passion for learning with clear drive and curiosity to undertake this specific research project.	A / I
		Willingness to immerse oneself in the research subject matter and make a contribute to new knowledge through a PhD.	A / I
		Strong desire to make a positive community impact through the research.	A / I
		Willingness to think deeply about complex concepts and engage with academic ideas and theory.	A / I



Competencies

Co(I)laboratory Core Competencies			
Category		Competency	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Preparedness and potential for success		Experience of working, collaborating and communicating effectively with different stakeholders.	A
		High level of self-motivation and ability to work with minimal guidance.	A / I
		Strong organisational and time-management skills with the ability to balance and prioritise multiple tasks.	A / I
		Ability to identify potential challenges and complexities and thoughtfully consider possible solutions.	A / I
		Able to identify the technical, personal, or professional skills required for a task and take action to develop these.	A / I
Community Context		Genuine desire to undertake community-engaged research over more traditional approaches to research.	A
		Understand the impact of and need for the inclusion of diverse experiences and points of view in research.	A / I
		Appreciation/understanding of the importance of community insight and experience in the generation of new knowledge.	A / I
		Awareness/understanding of the broader societal context related to the subject matter of the project.	A / I

Project Specific Competencies			
Essential	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)	Desirable	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Personal, professional, academic, or similar background in a relevant area (i.e., working sector support organisations, psychology and psychiatry, etc.)	A / I	Experience of working with DVA/trauma organisations.	A / I
Strong understanding of or experience working/volunteering with DVA organisations.	A / I	Experience of conducting in depth interviews.	A / I



Competencies

Project Specific Competencies			
Essential	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)	Desirable	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Ability to engage in sensitive topics with empathy and compassion.	A / I	Knowledge of ethnographic research and trauma informed approaches.	

References for Further Reading

- Bridger, K. M., Binder, J. F., & Kellezi, B. (2020). Secondary traumatic stress in foster carers: Risk factors and implications for intervention. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29, 482-492. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32431483/>
- Boezeman E. J., Ellemers N. (2007). Volunteering for charity: Pride, respect, and the commitment of volunteers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92, 771-785. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17484556/>
- Bowe, M., Wakefield, J. R., Kellezi, B., Stevenson, C., McNamara, N., Jones, B. A., ... & Heym, N. (2022). The mental health benefits of community helping during crisis: Coordinated helping, community identification and sense of unity during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 32(3), 521-535. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34230792/>
- Slattery, S. M., & Goodman, L. A. (2009). Secondary traumatic stress among DVA advocates: Workplace risk and protective factors. *Violence against women*, 15(11), 1358-1379. https://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2016-01-13/1358.full_.pdf
- Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). " Posttraumatic growth: conceptual foundations and empirical evidence". *Psychological inquiry*, 15(1), 1-18. <https://ptgi.charlotte.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2013/01/PTG-New-Considertrns-2004.pdf>
- Thoits, P. A., & Hewitt, L. N. (2001). Volunteer work and well-being. *Journal of health and social behavior*, 115-131. <http://old-eclass.uop.gr/modules/document/file.php/OMA284/%CE%9E%CE%B5%CE%BD%CF%8C%CE%B3%CE%BB%CF%89%CF%83%CF%83%CE%B7%20%CE%92%CE%B9%CE%B2%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%BF%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%86%CE%AF%CE%B1/%CE%95%CE%B8%CE%B5%CE%BB%CE%BF%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%BC%CE%BF%CC%81%CF%82%20%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B9%20%CE%A0%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BF%CC%81%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%84%CE%B1%20%CE%96%CF%89%CE%B7%CC%81%CF%82.pdf>
- Wakefield, J. R., Bowe, M., Kellezi, B., Harkin, L. J., Baker, C. W., & Shala, A. (2024). "I knew I needed to live what I realised was faith in me": Enacting and transcending religious identity through food aid volunteering. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 54(1), 265-281. https://pure.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/104053367/Euro_J_Social_Psych_-2023-Wakefield-_I_knew_I_needed_to_live_what_I_realised_was_faith_in_me_Enacting_and.pdf

