

## 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

### Pledge on Psychological First Aid for All

#### British Red Cross Report

##### Overview

The British Red Cross Psychosocial and Mental Health Team (the PMHT) continues to have a longstanding and significant influence within the British Red Cross and beyond in building trauma informed, mental health and psychosocial capacities, including psychological first aid skills, across operational services as well as within and external to the wider organisation.

In November 2020, the British Red Cross signed this Open Pledge to strengthen its commitment to enhancing Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) capacities, and within this Psychological First Aid (PFA) skillsets, throughout its workforce according to role and situation.

At the core of the PMHT's offer is its psychosocial framework known as CALMER (Consider, Acknowledge, Listen, Manage, Enable, Resource). PFA sits firmly within this framework as it enables the capacity and competence of individuals both to respond to others in distress, as well as protect individual wellbeing and resilience. In all aspects of PMHT activity CALMER, and as a result of this psychological first aid, features at all levels of service delivery.

The Pledge outlines a call to action for National Societies who have signed their commitment. The PMHT has taken the following actions (which it will refer to throughout this report) on the following domains:

1. Advocating for the attention to MHPSS and PFA in humanitarian response, including the importance of PFA capacity and attention to the protection and wellbeing of staff and volunteers in relevant policy forums
2. Ensure all the workforce are trained in PFA as relevant to their situation, sector and role
3. Training of community members, in communities at risk, in psychological first aid as relevant to their situation
4. Strengthen existing or build new systems for developing PFA skills and capacities, and provide mentoring and supervision, at a local level.

The PMHT has been building its commitment to the pledge by:

##### **Offering Mental Health and Psychosocial Support to Frontline Teams (2, 4)**

The PMHT consists of a team of highly skilled psychosocial practitioners, senior practitioners and trainers. Frontline operational teams receive regular support from practitioners in the form of:

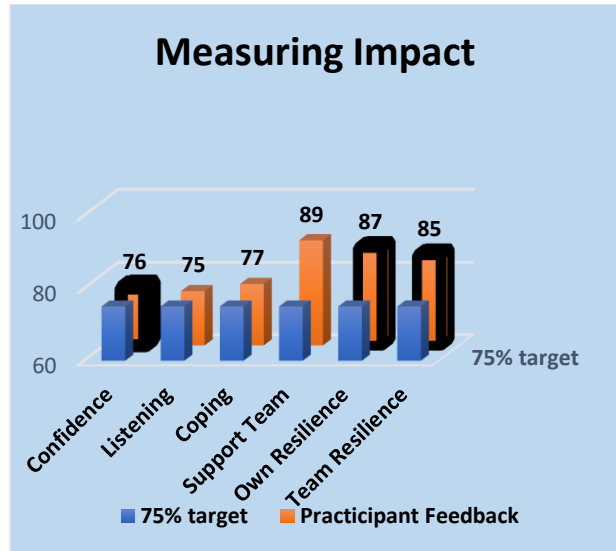
- Group and individual clinical supervision and reflective practice sessions – **mentoring and supervision provided at a local level**. These sessions are designed to support teams to strengthen thematic skills and confidence when supporting those in distress, as well as to consider individual and team resilience.

- In **2022**, the PMHT was able to provide more opportunities for frontline teams to participate in this support by increasing group work and reducing 1:1s. 1,382 groups which were attended 5,675 times and 940 one to ones. **Overall, 1,402 people used these sessions on 7,202 occasions.**

### The Impact of our Clinical Supervision/Reflective Practice Groups and One to Ones in 2022

Staff and volunteers who attend our psychosocial practitioner sessions are asked to report whether such sessions increase their: **1) confidence to support clients**; and their ability to: *2) listen to clients, 3) cope with client's distress 4) support others in their teams 5) maintain their own wellbeing and resilience and 6) support the resilience of others in their teams.*

Significant impact is defined as **75% of those completing the measures either agree or strongly agree** that the sessions increase their confidence/ abilities in these areas. This survey was completed 237 times in 2022.



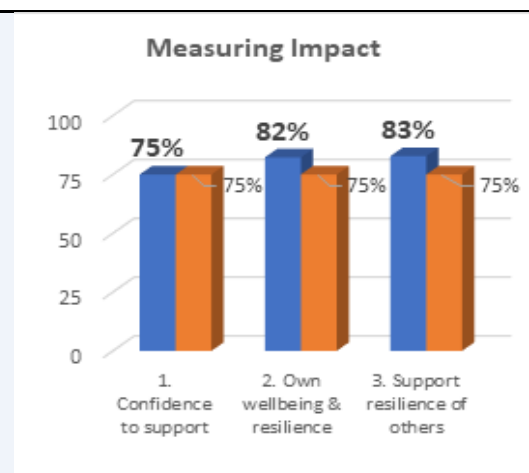
- In **2023**, the PMHT was able to provide more opportunities for frontline teams to participate in this support by increasing group work and reducing 1:1s. 1,569 groups which were attended 8,936 times and 1,179 one to ones. **Overall, 1,747 people used these sessions on 10,115 occasions.**

### The Impact of our Clinical Supervision/Reflective Practice Groups and One to Ones in 2023

Staff and volunteers who attend our psychosocial practitioner sessions are asked to report whether such sessions increase their:

1. Confidence to support clients
2. Ability to maintain their own wellbeing and resilience
3. Ability to support the resilience of others in their teams.

Significant impact is defined as 75% of those completing the measures either agree or strongly agree that the sessions increase their confidence/ abilities in these areas. This survey was completed 401 times in 2023.



Further mentoring and supervision is provided when the PMHT engages in critical incident responses, either directly alongside frontline responders, or through joint consultation, where practitioners co-deliver support alongside caseworkers with those experiencing acute distress or mental illness.

In 2022, the team responded to:

- 11 critical incidents supporting 106 people.
- 13 joint casework sessions supporting 36 people.

In 2023, the team responded to:

- 4 critical incidents; and deployed 2 delegates in support of the ICRC's and IFRC's frontline humanitarian services, including the promotion and protection of staff and volunteers' health and wellbeing.
- 35 joint casework sessions supporting 137 people.

### **Training and Peer Support (1, 2, 4)**

There are multiple ways in which psychological first aid and other MHPSS capacities are threaded across the BRC workforce and external partners:

- It has been well-researched that social support is one of the best ways to reduce stress and build resilience within teams. In this spirit, **the PMHT has been training and supporting a growing number of peer supporters; 18 new peer supporters** were recruited and trained in 2022 and **19** in 2023. Peer supporters play a decisive role in providing a first response to colleagues who are struggling or have experienced a difficult event through defusing, empathetic listening and agreeing what is mutually beneficial for individuals and teams.
- Another central activity is the delivery of a range of **workshops**, which are semi-structured and provide teams the space to learn new PFA and other MHPSS skills and also share good practice. Workshops cover a number of themes, such as: Understanding Trauma, Mental Health Awareness, Suicide Awareness, Grief and Loss, as well as Trauma Informed Approaches.

In 2022, **209 workshops were delivered, which trained 1,915 people** and in 2023, **212 workshops were delivered, which trained 2,526 people**. In all domains, the workshops demonstrated significant skills development.

### **Guidance and Additional Resources (1, 2, 3, 4)**

The PMHT firmly believes that everyone should have the appropriate level of mental health and psychosocial skills to support those who are struggling. Within the British Red Cross, we have developed **22 procedures and guidance** to inform good practice across the organisation and have also signed the Movement's Pledge to provide psychosocial and mental health capabilities as appropriate to individual roles.

Since 2020, the PMHT has been bolstering the development of PFA skills and capacities for all BRC workforce. Through this, the PMHT increased psychosocial support training through the general

workforce (staff and volunteer) induction. ‘Supporting Yourself and Others’, the core CALMER skills course, became mandatory for all frontline operational teams. Psychosocial support training was also increased in mandatory e-learning inductions for all BRC staff and volunteers.

The PMHT also work with Red Cross Training, the British Red Cross’ commercial training department who deliver a range of courses to various industries, sectors and workplaces. In 2022, 683 delegates attended 72 Mental Health at Work training which includes PFA. In 2023, 421 delegates completed 80 courses. To date in 2024, 625 delegates have completed 168 Mental Health at Work courses. When people complete these courses they become “British Red Cross Mental Health Champions”.  
<https://www.redcrossfirstaidtraining.co.uk/courses/mental-health-at-work/>

With regard to training community members in PFA skills, the PMHT has been working more closely with the British Red Cross’s Community Education Team to develop a range of training and resources for communities at risk – such as materials on supporting young people to talk about difficult feelings, outreach booklets to help those struggling with loneliness and isolation, as well as training on wellbeing and resilience.

### **Advocacy and Influencing**

The British Red Cross is active nationally and internationally in advocating for the attention to MHPSS and PFA in humanitarian responses, for example by co-chairing the Priority Action Area One Working Group of the Moment Roadmap and co-chairing the IFRC’s MHPSS Research Network and in contributing to research and policy about the importance of MHPSS in humanitarian responses. We also advocate for the importance of PFA capacity nationally and internationally, and call attention to the protection and wellbeing of staff and volunteers in relevant policy forums across the UK (including raising awareness of the importance of trauma informed approaches).

The British Red Cross has held a contract with the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office for almost 20 years, providing their Rapid Deployment Teams with trained volunteers who provide PFA and other types of MHPSS support to British Nationals caught up in crises internationally. The team of volunteers who provide this service are the Psychosocial Support Team and in 2023, they were deployed for four months in response to a range of conflicts, wildfires and evacuations. Additionally, the British Red Cross has provided input to consultations and the evolution of guidance on MHPSS in humanitarian crises.

### **Challenges**

Whilst the British Red Cross, and specifically the Psychosocial and Mental Health Team have taken multiple actions to strengthen PFA and other MHPSS capacities and skillsets – we see the fulfillment of this Pledge as an ongoing process.

Challenges have included the lack of capacity at times, for the British Red Cross and others, to sufficiently embed MHPSS across all sectors. The lack of financial resources has also restricted our impact. However, to address these, the British Red Cross secures contracts which boost the income for these activities, in addition to other forms of fundraising.

## **Conclusion**

The Psychosocial and Mental Health Team, as well as the wider British Red Cross, will continue to strengthen its commitment to threading PFA and wider MPHSS capacities both within its own workforce as well as wider communities and like-minded organisations.

The PMHT has a strong, continuing track record of achieving results and making an impact. Through the cultivation of a highly skilled and expanding team of professionals and partners, the PMHT's capacity and scope is positioned to reach further, to provide psychosocial and mental health resources where these are most needed.