

Prepared by RF Associates



FLORISH!

# Evaluation of Flourish! Programme Activities

April 2017



“Place your hand over your heart.  
Can you feel it?  
—That is called purpose.  
You’re alive for a reason.  
Don’t ever give up.”



## Foreword

Broadly speaking, healing of the individual and of society has been observed as central functions of religion. Indeed, many of the current health care systems across the world can be traced to religious institutions. Additionally, there is evidence that the religious- beliefs held by people with mental health problems influence help-seeking and compliance with treatment. Some of the reasons for the valued position of religion in help-seeking are associated with the need for religious resolution. Thus, many people perceive their problems to be spiritual rather than mental. Others look to religion as a means of understanding suffering and also, a strongly beneficial way of coping with it.

In the UK, the transfer of psychiatric care from the institution to the community has, de facto, presented community structures including faith based organisations with an additional burden of care. However, if religious organisations provide substantial but unquantified mental health services in the UK, we remain ignorant about this work. Very little is known about the nature and outcome of the encounter between sufferer and religious clergy. My own research in Ireland and the UK, highlighted the low extent to which clergy feel at ease dealing with people with mental health problems and how this easily translates into stereotypes of people with mental illness. At times, clergy feel threatened, incompetent and somewhat guilty about this inability to care for people in distress. Two obvious suggestions can be made here. Religious organisations and their ministers can either assist people with mental illness, regarding this as a profoundly entwined pastoral and spiritual concern or, as suggested by some clergy, concerned about religious identity and welfare secularism, reject this aspect of pastoralism.

The latter does not seem compatible with historical religious provision nor with basic religious precepts across all faiths. It seems sensible therefore, that this major function and role be put on a more realistic and professional footing.

Clergy are the first port of call for many people in their communities who have emotional and psychiatric problems. This demands a greater degree of training on mental health, recognition and counselling for clergy.

In the aftermath of suicide the stresses of witnessing and caring are considerable, especially when the expectations by community members are high. It is crucial then that faith organisations respond more adequately to the emotional and psychological needs of their own clergy. The Flourish Inter-Churches Suicide Prevention initiative is an excellent step towards greater acceptance of this need by faith organisations. As this report points out, however, much more needs to be done.

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# contents

Executive Summary	5
1.0 Background	8
1.1 Research Approach	9
1.2 Recruitment Challenges	12
2.0 Findings	13
2.1 Analysis of Flourish database	13
2.2 Clergy who have not engaged with Flourish	15
2.3 Clergy who have engaged with Flourish	19
2.4 Feedback on training provided to trainers	30
2.5 Self-care of clergy	39
2.6 Workshop with Programme Steering Group	41
3.0 Conclusion and recommendations	42

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## Executive Summary

*Flourish* Inter-Churches Suicide Prevention initiative formally started in 2013. *Flourish* aims to support churches to develop a focused and shared approach to addressing the needs of vulnerable people and people affected by suicide and to develop and provide appropriate training and good practice guidelines for clergy, church leaders and pastoral teams. *Flourish* is a partnership between Lighthouse Ireland and clergy from across churches in Northern Ireland. This initiative has been developed in partnership with and supported by the Public Health Agency.

- This research sought to begin to address two key questions for Flourish:
  - How can engagement with the Flourish programme be increased, and specifically how can increased uptake of the course training be ensured?
  - Is Flourish improving the confidence and competencies of clergy in supporting families and communities who have been affected by suicide?
- The research activity included: a workshop with the programme steering group, analysis of the Flourish contact database, a short online survey with seven trainers delivering the programme, an online survey with those who have participated in training (25 -33 respondents<sup>1</sup>), 19 face to face / telephone interviews with those who have not engaged with the programme and five telephone interviews with those who have attended the training.
- There were challenges in encouraging members of the clergy to engage with this project. This was attributable to practical issues such as out of date contact information, and a general lack of availability of the clergy in question.
- We questioned those who had not engaged with Flourish – a quarter of them had undertaken training with other organisations/programmes on the theme of suicide. The main barrier articulated for lack of engagement with the Flourish programme itself was 'lack of time'.

<sup>1</sup> The base is variable as not everyone answered all the questions

- Of those who had taken part in the training, the majority (16 of 27) found the training 'very helpful', 10 of 27 considered it 'quite helpful'. The majority had heard about it through word of mouth or via email. On the whole clergy commented that they found the Flourish training helpful in terms of providing resources to use in responding to suicide but also that it is helpful as it provides a safe space to talk about the difficulties related to suicide.
- We also surveyed the trainers who had undertaken the 'Training 4 Trainers' (T4T) course. In their view the barriers to clergy engagement include: fear; lack of time; and stigma. Interestingly clergy who were not engaged did not talk about fear or social stigma. All of those surveyed indicated the training was 'excellent' or 'good'.
- A short working session with the programme steering group completed and discussed a short SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) of the initiative. It highlighted the following elements:
  - Strengths: Connections / relationships / the network; shared vision / shared experience; cross community work / mix of clergy; funding; resources / material provided
  - Weaknesses: Funding; inter-churches approach (churches need to take ownership of the programme)
  - Opportunities: Marketing and communication ideas – spreading the word and breaking the stigma; looking for other funding opportunities; self-care as part of the module to be expanded; partnering with other people / groups – cross-sector opportunities
  - Threats: Funding; Not being able to progress and develop; and not getting leverage through church hierarchy

## In sum:

- This research underlines the lack of engagement with the Flourish programme amongst many of the clergy we engaged with, despite claimed widespread basic recall / awareness of the initiative amongst them. The research process itself has been effective in creating some more thorough engagement with the programme as we have contacted many clergy who have not engaged with it.
- There is a need to ensure more promotion of the programme and that any marketing is well targeted and properly resourced. Much of the current work is supported by 'word of mouth' promotion of the initiative, but a more comprehensive approach is required if the programme is to gain more traction. This would be aided by ensuring an up to date database of clergy and associates is developed and maintained, thereby ensuring the greatest reach of information about the initiative (41% of the contact details on the database that we were given were incorrect/out of date). This is not to say that the 'word of mouth' approach is not effective, rather it seems to be fundamental in encouraging engagement – and the more advocates that Flourish can create the better. Indeed one model of marketing might be to create and resource a specific group of advocates within the individual church networks;

- Over the course of the research, it became apparent that support work in the area of suicide is complex and is increasingly requiring clergy to go beyond supporting individuals and families in the wake of someone taking their own life. Many indicated that there also needs to be a focus on training for those dealing with individuals and families in relation to suicidal thoughts/attempts, as well as awareness training on the identifiable risk behaviours of those likely to take their own life;
- There is also an apparent need for a specific focus on the development of self-care and coping skills of those clergy engaging with individuals and families in such emotive and distressing contexts. It is important to build the resilience of these individuals to ensure self-care is the cornerstone of both outreach in the wake of suicide and in its prevention. The Flourish project team need to take a strategic decision as to whether there is an opportunity to deliver a different programme / offer to address this issue more or consider ways to work with partner agencies / the church itself to better support this.
- While Flourish training is currently completely funded, the sustainability of this funding in the long to medium term was raised as a potentially limiting issue given that it comes from one source. The sessions with the project group illuminated the need to diversify the source of funding to ensure the future growth in outreach and uptake of this initiative;
- It is also very clear that whilst this programme has some buy in from a range of denominations in Northern Ireland through the work of involved individuals, it is clear that there is not wholesale buy-in from any of the church institutions. To ensure that more clergy access training and support this needs to change, the key denominations need to be more formally engage with and market this activity.



## 1.0 Background

Flourish was developed in 2013 by the Lighthouse Ireland, Churches' Community Work Alliance NI, and clergy from across the Christian churches in Northern Ireland. The overall aim of the initiative is to support churches in addressing the needs of people affected by suicide. Since then, the initiative has actively tried to document what it has done and achieved, and has been keen to improve and enhance delivery.

RF Associates were appointed by Flourish and the Public Health Agency, to undertake focused research in response to the following key questions:

1. How can engagement with the Flourish programme be increased and specifically how can we ensure increased uptake of the course training?
2. Is Flourish improving the confidence and competencies of clergy in supporting families and communities who have been affected by suicide?

## 1.1 Research Approach

Our research involved tailored approaches to seek to begin to address the questions above.

In relation to the question 'How can engagement with the Flourish programme be increased and specifically how can we ensure increased uptake of the course training?' we agreed to identify the groups that are difficult to engage with, and to undertake research, with the aim of gaining an understanding of the barriers to engagement. We wanted to:

- Provide a broad assessment of the number of clergy, from the range of different denominations, geographical locations, etc.; who have been sent material on the programme, in a range of different ways;
- Assess and highlight the numbers of individuals who have engaged with Flourish through attending events, training, and requesting materials;
- Identify the denominations and geographical locations that have been difficult to engage with;

We also hosted a focus group discussion with the programme steering group, as well as meeting with those who developed/deliver the training programme to understand the wider programme background.

At the start of the evaluation our aim was to conduct 20 interviews with clergy who have not engaged with Flourish to date (10 face-to-face and 10 phone interviews). To facilitate this, Flourish sent out 51 letters to clergy (who were chosen at random from each denomination, across the different regions) informing clergy of the research, and also offering the opportunity to opt-out from being contacted. In total we interviewed 19 clergy, who were chosen proportionally from across the denominations and in their respective regions. We completed nine face-to-face interviews and 10 telephone interviews, as can be seen in Table 1 below. We made contact with one clergy from each denomination in every HSC Trust area. Overall we were able to speak with four to five clergy from each of the four main denominations.

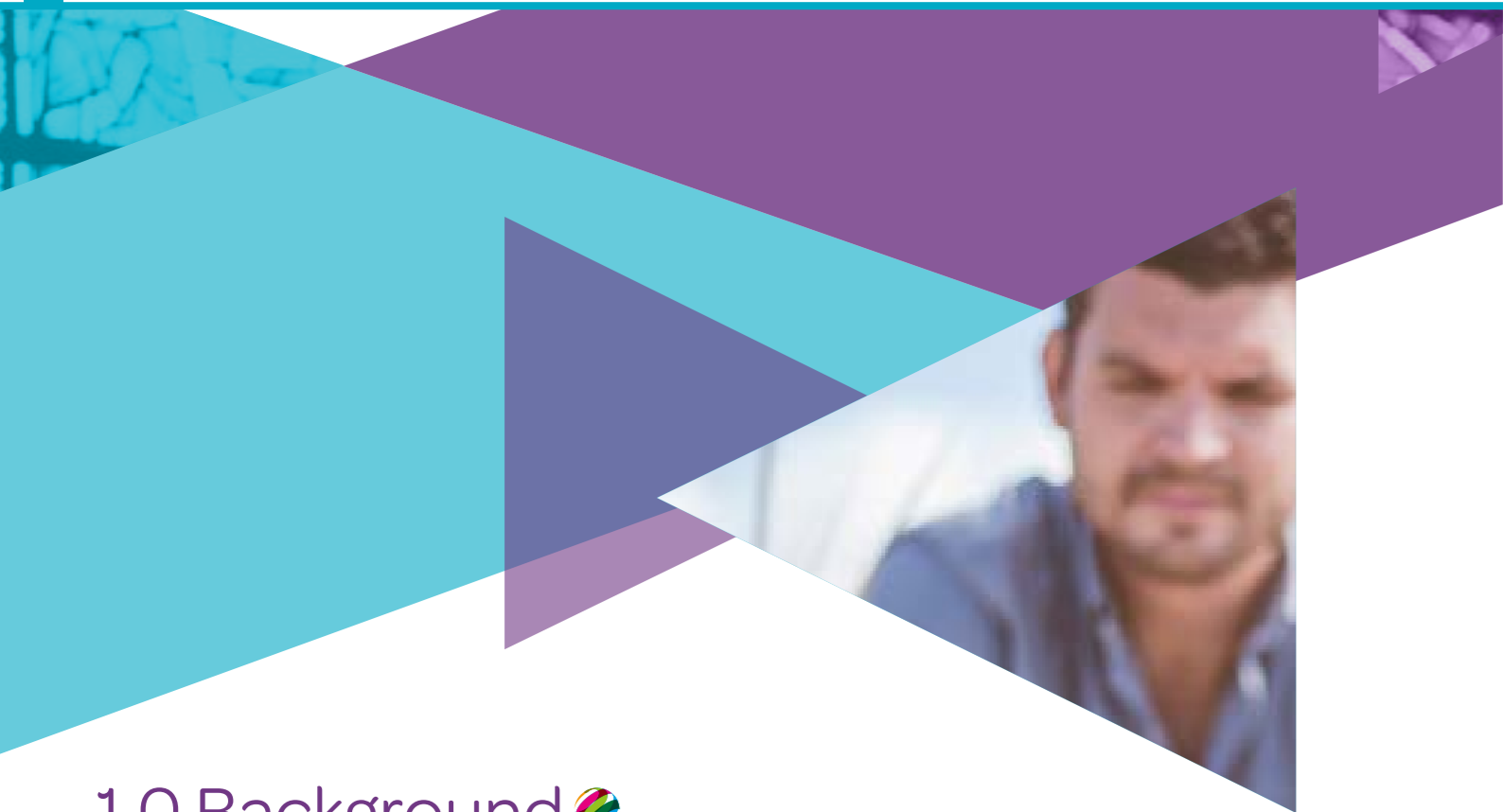




Table 1: Interviews with non-engaging clergy

Trust Area	Denomination	No. of clergy interviewed	Type of an interview
Belfast	Presbyterian	1	1
	Methodist	1	1
	Church of Ireland	2	2
	Catholic	0	0
Northern	Presbyterian	1	1
	Methodist	1	1
	Church of Ireland	1	1
	Catholic	1	1
South Eastern	Presbyterian	1	1
	Methodist	1	1
	Church of Ireland	1	1
	Catholic	1	1
Southern	Presbyterian	1	1
	Methodist	1	1
	Church of Ireland	1	1
	Catholic	1	1
Western	Presbyterian	1	1
	Methodist	1	1
	Church of Ireland	1	1
	Catholic	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>19</b>	

To address the second area of focus 'Is Flourish improving the confidence and competencies of clergy in supporting families and communities who have been affected by suicide?' we prepared two short online surveys, which were in place for five weeks.

- The first survey included 28 questions, was circulated amongst all clergy who have taken part in Flourish training courses and sought to assess their views on the course, its usefulness, and to get ideas for further support and improvements.
- The second survey included 24 questions and was shared amongst clergy who have completed the 'Training 4 Trainers' programme. It sought to find out their views on the programme and how it could be improved. The detailed questionnaires were agreed with Flourish in advance.
- We also undertook five telephone interviews with clergy who have been through at least one Flourish training course to fully highlight their views on how the course has been helpful; what were the key strengths or weaknesses; and gather any further ideas for development. Flourish sent out 10 letters to clergy who had attended, (these were randomly chosen proportionally across the regions and denominations), again to let them know about the research and offer the opportunity to opt out.
- Ideally we would have undertaken evaluation activity with families / individuals who have been affected by suicide and supported by the clergy involved in the programme, as well as a group of people supported by clergy not involved by the programme but this was not considered possible / appropriate at this stage.

Table 2: Interviews with clergy that have engaged with the training.

Denomination	HSC Trust	No. of clergy interviewed
Methodist	Belfast	2
Presbyterian	Northern	1
Catholic	South Eastern	1
Church of Ireland	Western	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>5</b>



## 2.0 Findings

### 2.1 Analysis of Flourish Database

On the database that we received from Flourish there is in total 1,381 clergy. Of the 1,381, 207 (15%) have attended at least one event/ training activity, and 123 (9%) have attended the Theological training, (see Table 3 below for more detail).

Overall, the Presbyterian denomination is the largest denomination represented on the database however proportionally it is the Methodist denomination that have undertaken most training, while representation by the Church of Ireland denomination is the lowest (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Total number of clergy across denominations on database / Number of Theological training attendees

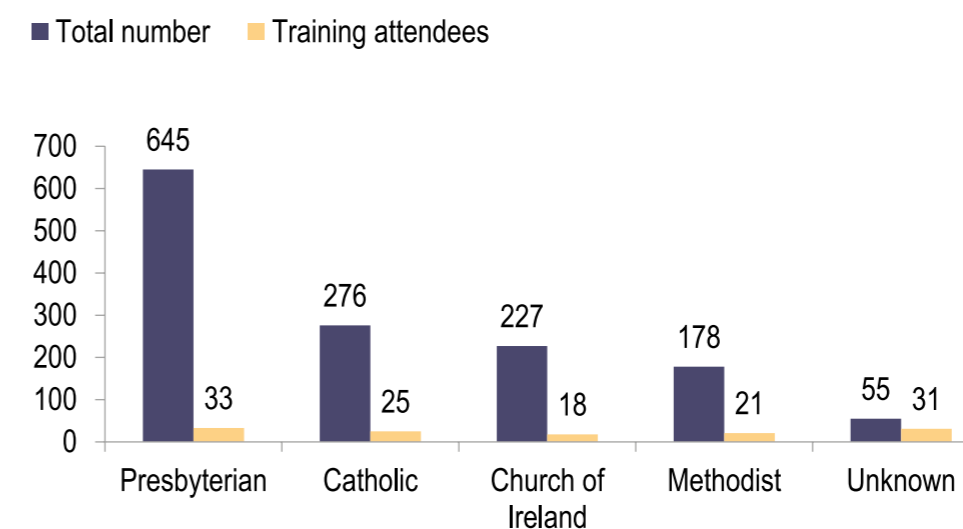


Table 3 on the next page comprises of the data analysis of all the clergy on the Flourish database, based on HSC Trusts and denominations by attendees.

The Belfast area in general has the highest percentage of attendance out of all five Trust areas at 19%. The Northern Trust has the highest number of clergy but it has the lowest training attendance percentage, only 5%. The Western Trust area has almost the same number of clergy on the Flourish database as the Belfast area, and the percentage of the attendance to the Theological training is 11%. In the South Eastern area there are 69 clergy from the Church of Ireland on the database but only one person has attended an event and no one has attended the Theological training. The overall attendance of the training in this area is only 6%.

## 1.2 Recruitment Challenges

During the recruitment process, a few difficulties were experienced when contacting the non-engaging clergy.

The main reasons for difficulty making initial contact were the following:

- Contact details listed according to private home addresses
- Contact details were for an individual who had retired
- Contact details were for an individual who was deceased
- Contact details were for an individual who had moved to a different parish

Just to provide a sense of the proportion of contacts that were out of date - in total, out of the letters that were sent to the 51 clergy:

- 5 we were unable to find contact details for
- 14 were retired
- 2 are deceased

To meet the research targets we contacted an additional 16 clergy from the overall database.

Table 3: Analysis of Flourish Clergy Data

Trust Area	Denomination	(a) No. Attendees All events / training	(b) No. Attendees Theological Training	(c) Percentage Attendees  (b)/(d)	(d) Total	(e) Percentage Total
Belfast	Presbyterian	17	14	12%	119	50%
	Church of Ireland	4	4	9%	44	18%
	Methodist	11	8	19%	43	18%
	Unknown	16	12	60%	20	8%
	Catholic	10	7	54%	13	5%
<b>Total Belfast</b>		<b>58</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>17%</b>
Northern	Presbyterian	11	4	2%	251	65%
	Catholic	3	2	4%	45	12%
	Methodist	7	5	11%	44	11%
	Church of Ireland	4	3	8%	36	9%
	Unknown	13	4	31%	13	3%
<b>Total Northern</b>		<b>38</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>28%</b>
South Eastern	Presbyterian	12	10	7%	144	45%
	Church of Ireland	1	0	0%	69	22%
	Methodist	7	5	10%	52	16%
	Catholic	3	2	5%	39	12%
	Unknown	11	8	62%	13	4%
<b>Total S. Eastern</b>		<b>34</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>23%</b>
Southern	Presbyterian	4	1	1%	67	34%
	Catholic	14	4	7%	59	30%
	Church of Ireland	6	5	10%	50	25%
	Methodist	4	1	5%	20	10%
	Unknown	2	2	100%	2	1%
<b>Total Southern</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>14%</b>
Western	Catholic	20	10	8%	120	50%
	Presbyterian	8	4	6%	64	27%
	Church of Ireland	10	6	21%	28	12%
	Methodist	3	2	11%	19	8%
	Unknown	6	5	71%	7	3%
<b>Total Western</b>		<b>47</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>207</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>1381</b>	<b>100%</b>

## 2.2 Clergy who have not engaged with Flourish

### 2.2.1 Are clergy familiar with Flourish?

The majority of the 20 clergy that we spoke to are familiar, or are at least aware, of Flourish. All the clergy welcome the initiative and recognise the importance of suicide prevention and providing such support to clergy. In general they are open to any help they can receive, to support them to deal with families and communities that have been affected by suicide. Overall there is a very positive response to the initiative. There is recall of receiving the Flourish materials, and use of the materials without undertaking the training. Some clergy worry that talking about suicide too much could 'sow the seeds', i.e. encourage a focus on suicide that may be counter productive to preventing it. However, this way of thinking is in the minority.

"The group of churches in our locality has a Christian healing ministry service once a month and we organised a geographical meeting on mental health issues and mental wellbeing and as part of that we looked at the Flourish literature and made people aware that this organisation exists. We are aware but we haven't engaged."

"It is excellent, very good for a reference."

"Work around suicide and suicide prevention is very important and Flourish sounds interesting."

"The work and the intention of Flourish is very good and I find it very informative and supportive."

"It's about getting the balance right of people being aware but not giving options – suicide as an easy way out."



## 2.2.2 What are the personal experiences of clergy working with families / community that have been affected by suicide?

Only 2 clergy out of the 19 interviewed have not been directly involved with families affected by suicide or by the experience of individuals attempting to take their own life.

Overall, it is clear that clergy find working with families bereaved by suicide, and people who are suicidal, very difficult. Research participants described every situation as being different, and that every family reacts in their own way. However, there was a universal view amongst the participating clergy that the people left behind are always left in shock, and asking why a person has taken this course of action. They also recognise feelings of guilt amongst families, in terms of why they did not observe signs before their loved one took their own life, and in doing so, prevent it. Overarching themes of blame and shame characterised many of the descriptions by clergy of their experience of the emotions of families.

"I am aware of the affect of suicide to a family and wider parish community so any help provided dealing with suicide is very important."

"The shock, a sudden death but circumstances are especially traumatic. There is always a question could we have done something, could we have seen something."

## 2.2.3 Have clergy (who have not engaged with Flourish) attended any other suicide prevention training?

Only about a quarter of the 19 clergy have been through formal training, many of those had participated in the ASIST training through the HSC Trust. However, two had completed it a long time ago and could not remember what it was called. A number had taken part in other training with a more general mental health focus. Others mentioned attending other topical training or workshops on themes such as dementia, dealing with cancer, mental health.

## 2.2.4 What are the key barriers for clergy getting involved with Flourish?

A lack of time was indicated as being the main barrier for clergy getting involved (as indicated by 17 out of 19 research participants). One research participant did not see any specific barriers, and indicated that their only reason for not getting involved with Flourish was because they had no need for such training as they had already done some training elsewhere. Another participant viewed their biggest barrier in accessing Flourish training as being 'a lack of information and lack of confidence', perhaps hinting at some of the deeper reservations that we might have expected to see more widely.

As section 2.2.2 highlights almost all the clergy had had some experience of dealing with suicide but have not been able to make the time / not had the inclination to undertake specific training. Post the research discussions it seemed that a number were more motivated to undertake the training, having had the opportunity to take the time to think about it in more detail. There did not seem to be any barriers to engaging with an interdenominational training initiative.

## 2.2.5 What would be the key drivers for clergy getting involved with Flourish?

The research suggests that the main drivers that might trigger clergy to get involved in learning about suicide are due to personal interest, compassion and inclination, but also most pertinently if there is a specific need in their congregation. A number articulated that they could see benefit to meeting other clergy, including from other denominations, and sharing their experiences around the issues. Some clergy mentioned personal contact as a very important driver – *“To be able to put a face and a name to Flourish”*. A few of the clergy were very interested in getting involved and would be prepared to host the training in their church. A number of other clergy indicated that they would be happy if Flourish would come to talk to them at their regional church meeting. For some it seems it is a matter of more forcefully putting the theme on their agenda, gently encouraging them to take the time to consider it.



## 2.2.6 What is the response to the Flourish communication materials?



Most of the clergy were aware of the booklets and material received through the post previously distributed by Flourish. A number had forgotten where they had placed the materials and tried to find them on the Flourish website prior to our interviews. Thus it was commented that the pdf of the materials should be available on the website. The overall view of the material is that it is very good and very useful.

Opinions about the best way to distribute material are quite mixed – some clergy prefer physical hard copies to arrive in the mail, whilst others would rather receive material and advertising electronically so they can save it on their computer and always know where to find it.

Part of the awareness of Flourish is attributable to the wide scale sharing of resources and materials

# 2.3 Clergy who have engaged with Flourish

## Online Survey Findings – Gathering feedback on experience of TRAINING COURSE and Insights from telephone interviews

33 individuals completed the online survey, however they did not all complete all of the questions, so as you will see the base varies on the charts. (Due to the small number of responses the results are presented with numbers instead of percentages.)

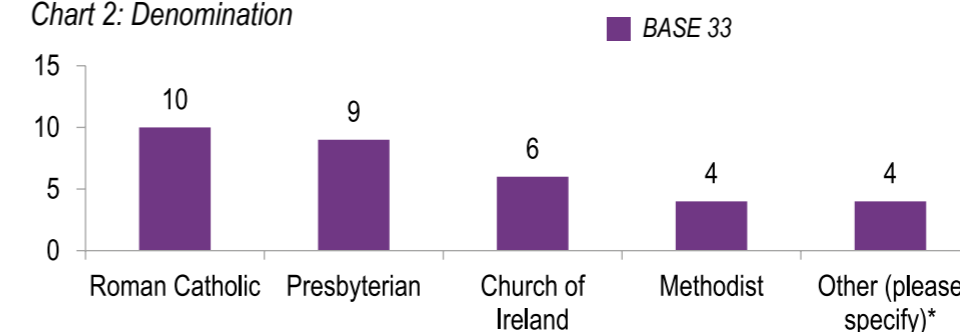
Five telephone interviews were also conducted with clergy who had undertaken at least one of the Flourish training activities. Two of the clergy have been through a couple of training events, and the remainder had attended one training session. Interviews were conducted with two clergy from the Methodist Church, one from the Presbyterian denomination and one from each of the Catholic denomination and the Church of Ireland. All had been exposed to suicide. Respondents were sometimes speaking about training that they had participated in some time ago so their recall of the training was not recent.

## 2.3.1 General demographics of clergy (who completed online survey)

### Denomination

Almost a third of the clergy who completed the survey belong to the Roman Catholic denomination, approximately another third are Presbyterian.

Chart 2: Denomination

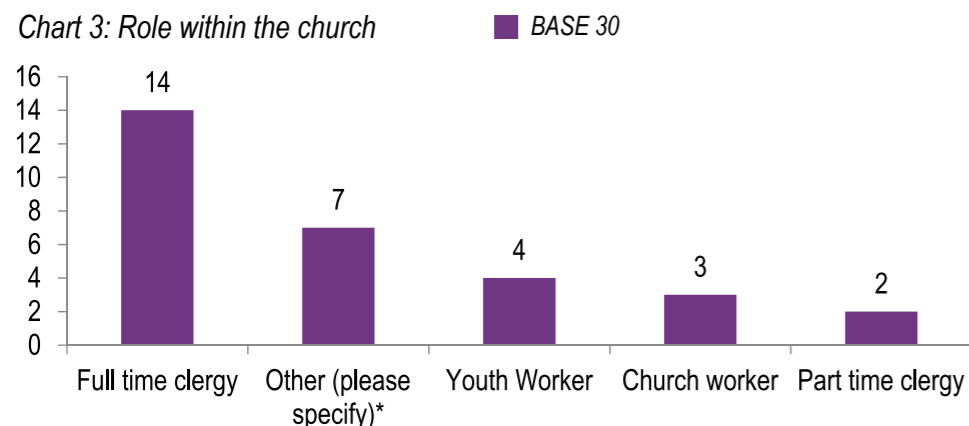


\*2 from Non-denominational fellowship church, 1 from Irish Council of Churches -staff member and 1 from Vineyard Church of UK and Ireland

### Roles within the church

Almost half of the respondents – 14 out of 30 are full time clergy. There are 7 respondents with a variety of different roles (see below Chart 3).

Chart 3: Role within the church



\* Counsellor working with couples on behalf of the Diocese, Pastoral care volunteer, Lay preacher, Convenor of Mission & Outreach, Committee and Council member – member of counselling advisory panel, Women’s ministry coordinator, Church Warden

### Years in Service

Chart 4 shows the number of years in their current role, where one third of respondents are only in their role 5 years or less. Another third has been doing their current job between 6 and 10 years. (This suggests perhaps that the course is more likely to be taken up by younger clergy – perhaps they are more likely to be concerned about having more formal training on dealing with these types of issues.)

Chart 4: Years in service

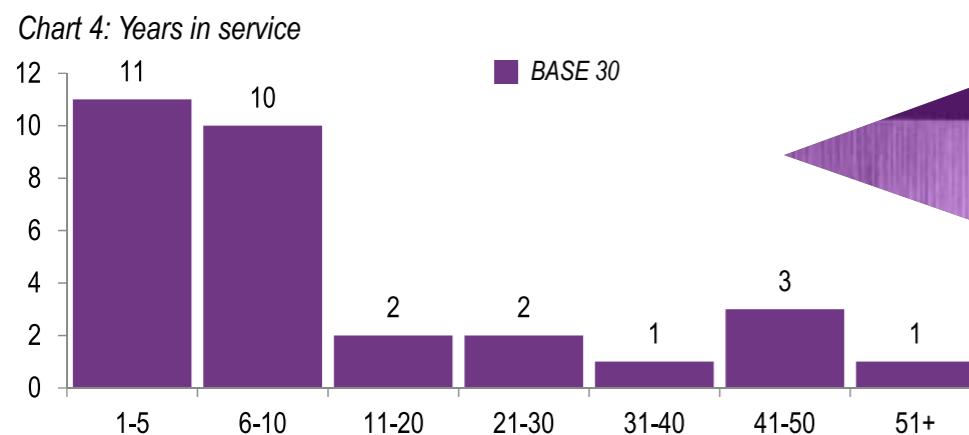
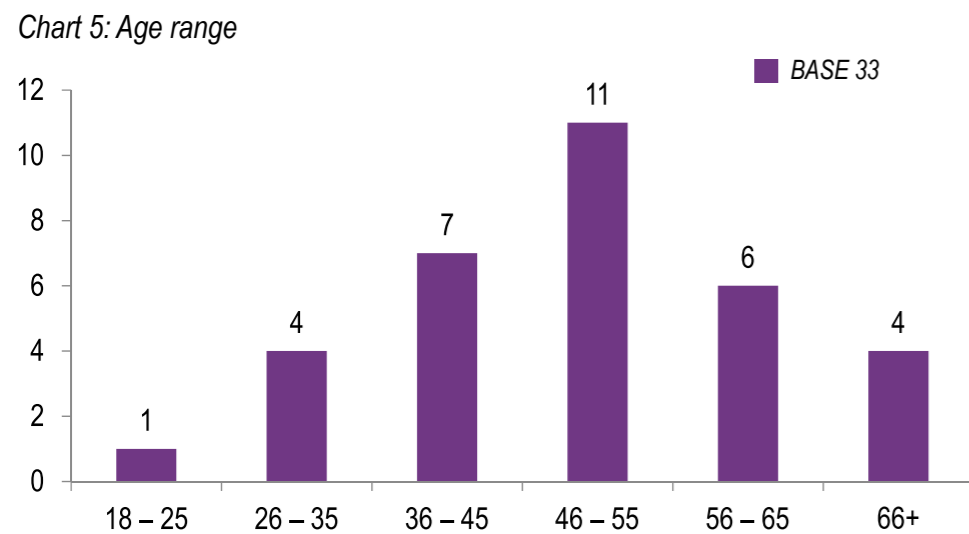


Chart 5: Age range



**Age**  
The majority of respondents are between the ages of 36 and 65. One third of respondents are in the age range between 46 and 55 years old. There are only 5 people younger than 35 and 4 older than 66 years old.

### Respondents Gender

The survey has been completed by an almost equal number of men and women.

Chart 6: Gender

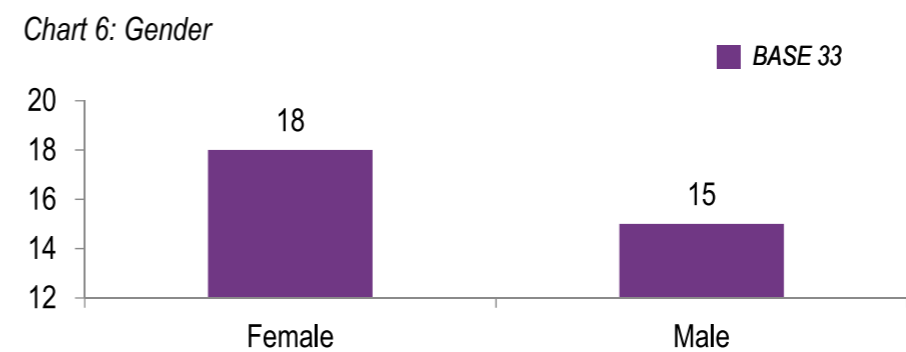
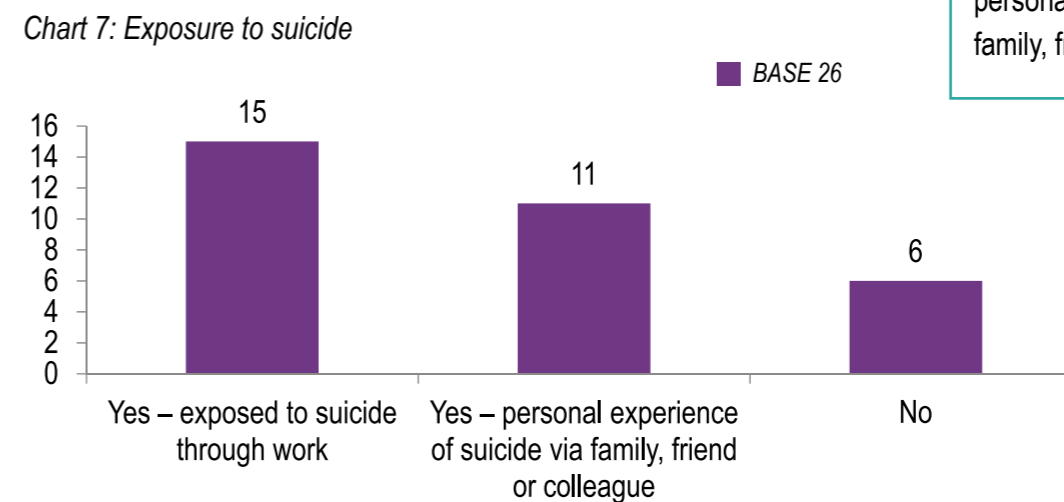


Chart 7: Exposure to suicide

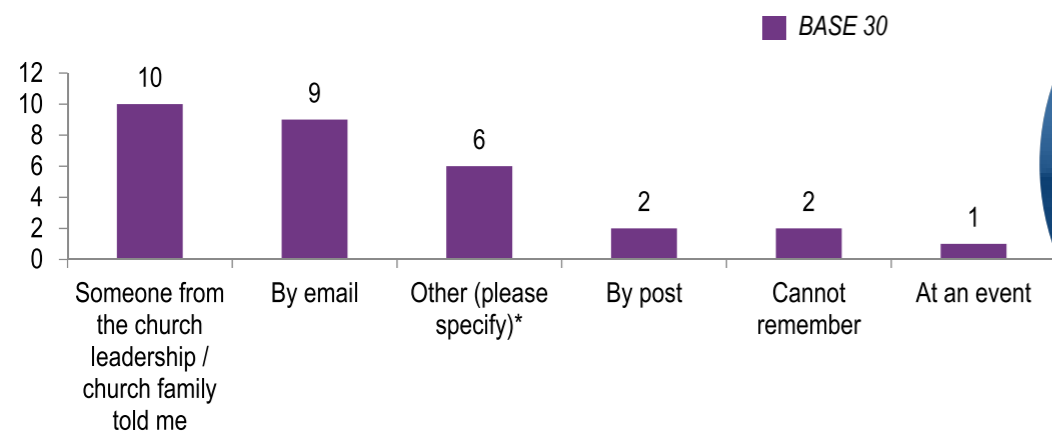


**Experience of clergy dealing with suicide or exposure to suicide**  
Only six out of the 26 respondents haven’t had any experience of suicide. More than half of all respondents (15 out of 26) have been exposed to suicide through work and 11 out of 26 have personal experience of suicide via family, friend or a colleague (Chart 7).

### 2.3.2 Prior to the training – how did respondents hear about the training? What encouraged them to attend? What were their concerns?

Word of the mouth seems to have been the most common way for attendees to have heard about Flourish, as 10 respondents heard from someone from the church and 2 from the Lighthouse team. Only two respondents heard about the training by post (Chart 8).

Chart 8: Way of hearing about Flourish



“To take part in the course alongside others with a similar desire to learn skills in this area.”

“I want to be in a position to provide help and compassion.”

\*2 heard from the Lighthouse staff, 2 from Facebook, 1 from the Priest Conference and 1 from the Working Group

The main themes identifiable in the responses of what encouraged respondents to engage with the training were mostly to develop knowledge in dealing with suicide, but also collaboration and sharing experiences with others. (See below some quotes from the survey.)

“To be prepared for the need to pastor to those who suffer from a suicide in their families.”

“To better my experience in dealing with mental health and suicide situations”

## Interview insights:

Likewise in the qualitative interviews it was clear that the Flourish training mainly sparked these individuals' interest because of their experience and work with suicidal people or families that have been affected by suicide but also because of their personal interest and desire to improve their knowledge and ability to deal with difficult situations as best they can.

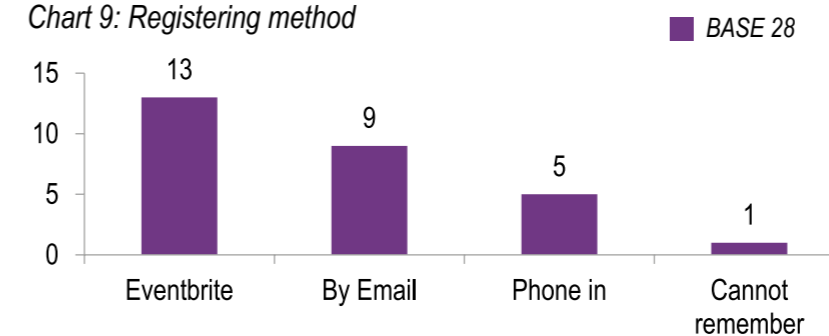
“It sounded interesting in the way of resources.”

“I’m always for further learning.”

Respondents had no concerns prior to the training, only one respondent (out of 27) was concerned if the course would fulfil his/her expectations and around what would be expected from him/her in taking part.

## 2.3.3 How did respondents register for the training and how easy was this?

Chart 9: Registering method



Almost 50% of respondents registered for the training through Eventbrite and the other half registered either by email or over the phone.

Respondents generally found registering for training easy: 19 out of 27 found it 'very easy' and 6 'quite easy'. Only two respondents thought it was 'neither easy nor difficult'. One of these two registered through the Eventbrite and another via email. No one found registration difficult.

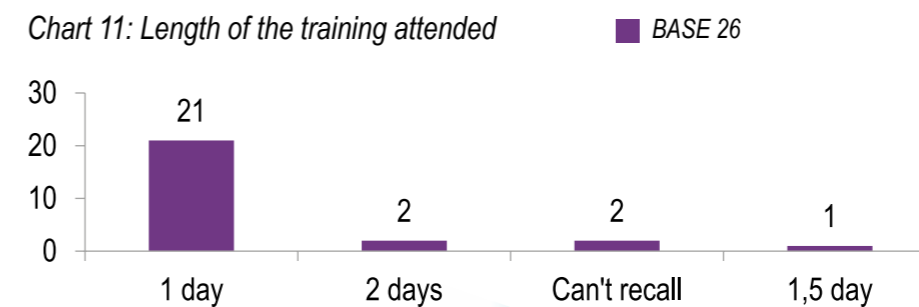
Chart 10: Easy / difficult to register



## 2.3.4 How long was the training?

The majority of the respondents attended one day training – see Chart 11.

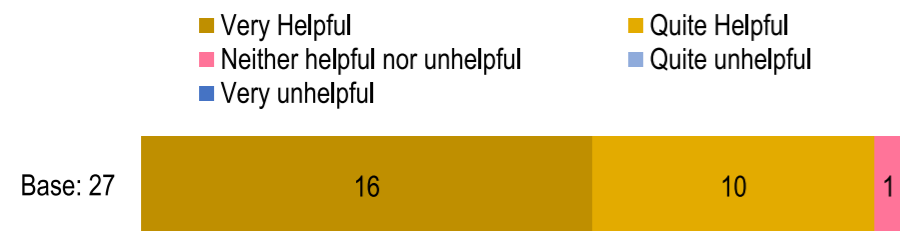
Chart 11: Length of the training attended



## 2.3.5 How helpful / unhelpful did respondents find the training?

Overall respondents were positive about the training - 16 out of 27 attendees said that they found the training to be 'very helpful', while 10 found it 'quite helpful'. No one found it 'unhelpful' and only one person responded with 'neither helpful nor unhelpful'.

Chart 12: Training was helpful / unhelpful



The main elements mentioned as most helpful were in relation to good materials and discussion, theological insights, great trainer / facilitators, raising awareness and hearing other stories with practical examples.

"It was clearly laid out and the delivery was full of love and compassion."

"It was helpful to hear people tell their own story - both those who had a loved one take their own life and also those who have tried to be of assistance in those situations."

"The authenticity of the material and the testimony of the gentleman who had experienced this loss."



"Gave a good theological insight into suicide and how to support people from a Biblical perspective."

"The importance of self-care for those involved in ministry. The availability of resources for deeper theological thinking about these issues."

Some of the key messages that respondents detailed that they had taken away from the training were in relation to theological insights, the importance of self-care, the importance of talking about suicide and just being able to listen.



"Not to be afraid to talk about suicide, the importance of self care and resources."

"The importance of being prepared to come alongside those who are under stress and being prepared to listen."

### Interview insights:

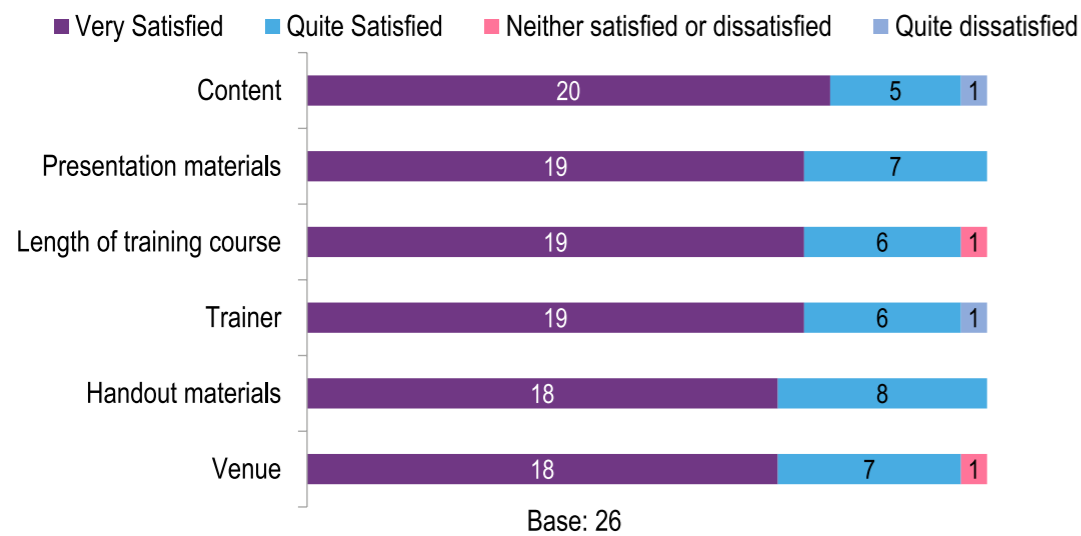
Likewise all the qualitative interviewees emphasised that they had found one of the most helpful elements of the training to be learning about the resources available to support themselves/ to support families, as well as hearing others talk about their experience.

"Ministry of presence and not always to fill with words."

## 2.3.6 Overall how satisfied were respondents with specific elements of the training?

There were high levels of satisfaction with the individual elements of the training. Participants were most satisfied with the content, 20 out of 26 (see Chart 13) said they were 'very satisfied'. 19 respondents were 'very satisfied' with the presentation materials, length of the training course and the trainer, and 18 were 'very satisfied' with handout materials and the venue.

Chart 13: Satisfaction with training elements



## 2.3.8 Have they used any advice / techniques since the training?

Chart 15: Usage of the training

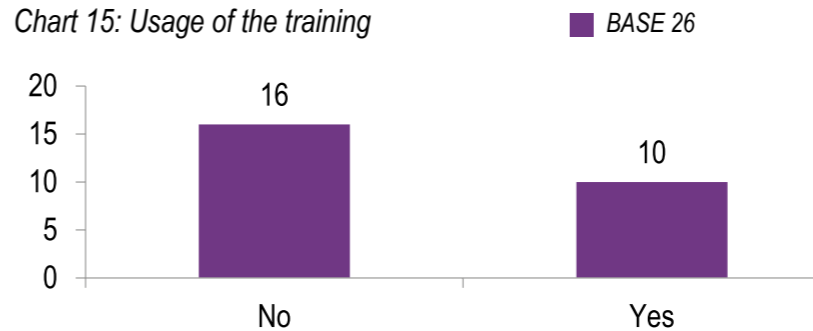


Chart 15 shows that 16 out of the 26 respondents (62%) haven't used any advice / techniques since the training, and the rest have. (It is important to note that they may not have experienced appropriate incidents in which to use the training, so this should not necessarily be read as a negative). Those that have used some advice / techniques have mostly been focused around raising awareness, looking for signs of suicidal thoughts and have not been afraid to talk to / listen to people about the topic (as they may have been previously).

## Interview insights:

Likewise the qualitative interviews with clergy suggested high levels of satisfaction overall with the individual training elements and positive comments were made particularly about the sensitivity with which the training was delivered. Regarding the content one of the five clergy commented that they would like to see more practical elements of the theological perspective.

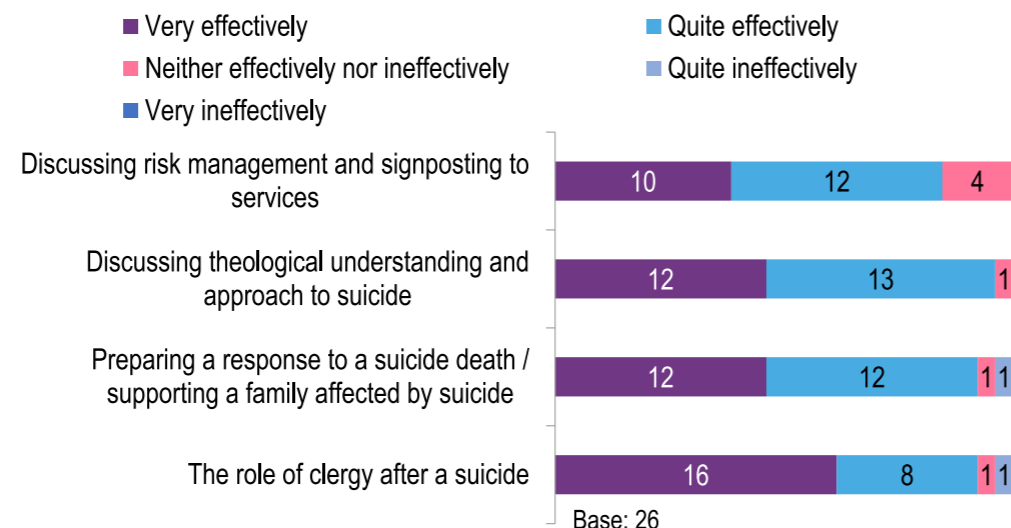
"The trainer was good and the whole atmosphere and attitude was very positive."

- "Increased awareness of triggers has allowed me to appropriately refer clients for medical, spiritual and financial help."
- "Ability to ask about suicidal thoughts/intention."
- "Speaking to people about the negative feelings they are having."
- "Listen to what the family have to say."
- "Advised parishioners not to be afraid of talking to a person to ask if they have thought of it."

## 2.3.7 How effectively did the course help them to reflect on / learn about the following themes?

Chart 14: Effectiveness of the course themes

The individual elements of the course, highlighted in chart 14, were considered to be either 'very effectively' or 'quite effectively' delivered. If we consider the hierarchy of the responses, the role of clergy after a suicide is the element that is considered as the most effectively delivered, whilst discussing risk management and services ranks at the bottom – so it may be an area for some consideration.



## Interview insights:

Three out of five interviewed clergy mentioned that they had completed other training besides the Flourish course; they commented that there was nothing specific / particular that they had learnt from the Flourish training but rather that it was more the combination of multiple training sessions that had helped them to deal with the difficulties of dealing with suicide. However one of the themes that seems to be frequently mentioned about the Flourish training is that it is very sensitively delivered and non-judgemental in its content.

## 2.3.9 Areas for improvement?

There were a variety of suggestions in terms of thematic improvement. Four respondents mentioned that there should be more emphasis on clergy's/ pastoral care provider's self-care. Other respondents mentioned three times that more practical examples and support would be helpful.

There were also a couple of suggestions around learning about the mind and mental issues of suicidal people and how to support them or how to support people who have attempted a suicide. A longer focus on theological insights was also recommended by a minority.

There were no suggestions in relation to the length of the training or the venue. Some respondents commented that everything was good or that nothing needs to be changed.

"I didn't come out as any expert but it did provide good reference and resources."

"Maybe just how we can more practically help someone with suicidal thoughts and their families."

"How best to support those who failed in genuine suicide attempts."

"While the Bible characters who died were referenced briefly, I think it would add greatly if the actual (all relatively short) scripture passages were read in the first session. The material is all there, and perhaps it was just the particular trainer who glossed over it, but I think for the sake of a few more minutes, this would give the course attendees a real sense of the theological element of this course - which is really what makes it unique over secular courses which look at suicide prevention/ support."

"More about how to encourage positive self-care and good mental health in an ongoing way within a congregation, rather than simply responding to crises or tragedies. There was a little of this but more would be good."

"More emphasis on personal care for clergy."

"Self care could be more focused on."

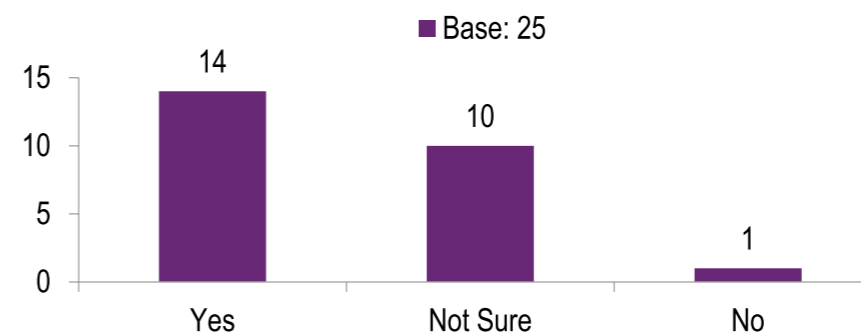
## Interview insights:

A number of clergy through the qualitative interviews suggested that maybe there should be more practical examples included (e.g. how to talk to families after the suicide or deal with suicidal individuals) in the training. Two out of five also commented that it would be useful to be kept informed of other related training opportunities.

## 2.3.10 Preparedness to pay for training?

As we can see from Chart 16, 60% of respondents (14 out of 25) said that their organisation would be prepared to pay a small amount of money to support the administration costs of the training (e.g. £10). Ten respondents were not sure if their organisation would be prepared to pay something and only one respondent said no.

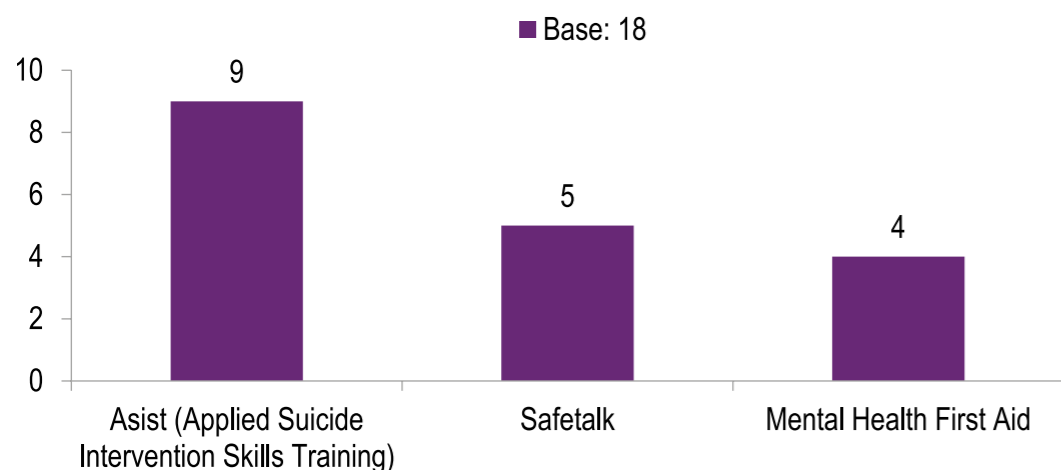
Chart 16: Prepared to pay small amount of money for the administration cost of the training (e.g. £10)



## 2.3.11 Attendance at any other training on the theme of Suicide?

There were 18 participants, out of 25, that had attended other training on the theme of suicide.

Chart 18: Other training attended

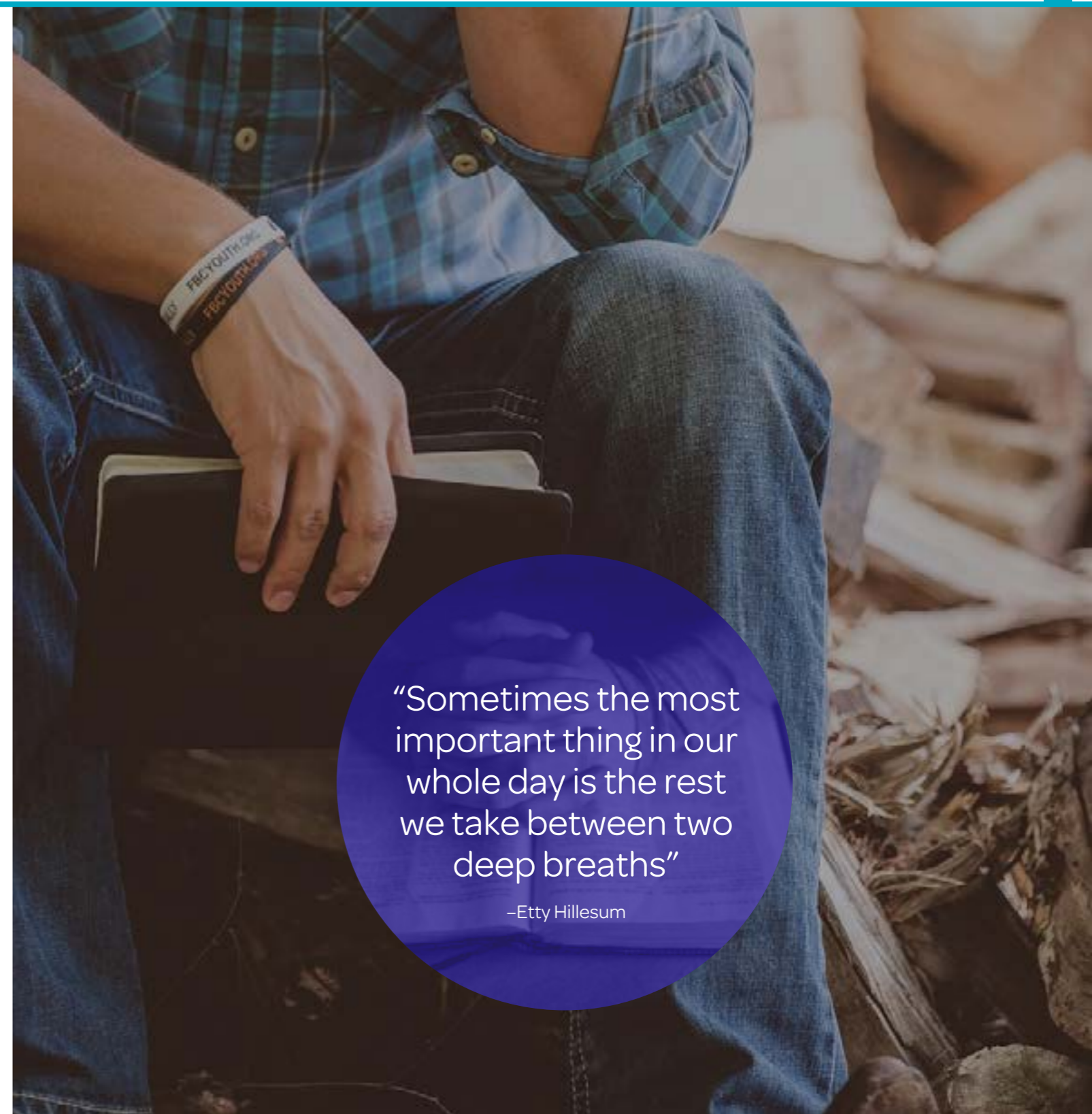
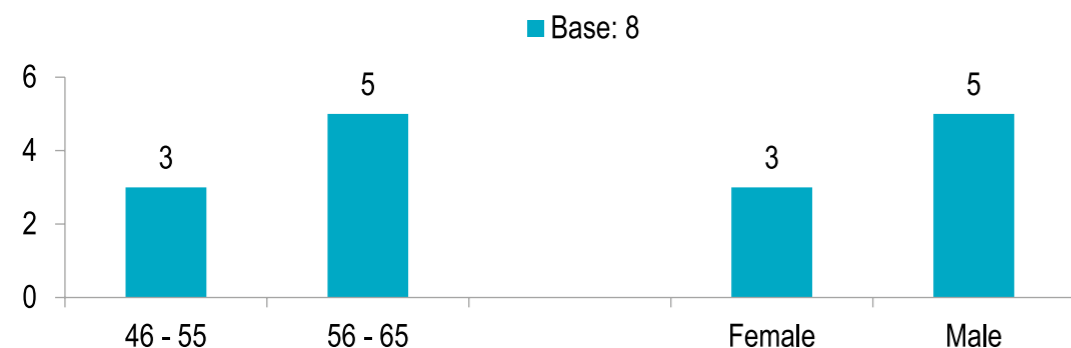


## 2.4 Feedback on training provided to trainers

### 2.4.1 Trainer demographics

This section details the findings from the online survey that was directed to clergy who completed the Training for Trainers (T4T) course. There were 8 responses; 7 have fully completed the survey. The trainers are from the main four denominations – three are from the Roman Catholic denomination, two from Methodist and Presbyterian, and one from Church of Ireland. All the trainers are between 46 and 65 years old. There are three women and five men. (Chart 19).

Chart 19: Age and Gender



“Sometimes the most important thing in our whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths”

—Etty Hillesum



Five of the trainers are full time clergy, one is the psychotherapist who developed and delivered the original training modules, another person is a member of church council, and one is the developer of the T4T training.

All of the trainers have been exposed to suicide through work, and 5 out of 8 have had personal experience of suicide via family, friends or colleagues.

The main reasons for these individuals seeking to be trained to be trainers, are due to their personal experience with suicide, their personal interest, and just seeing the need to help others.

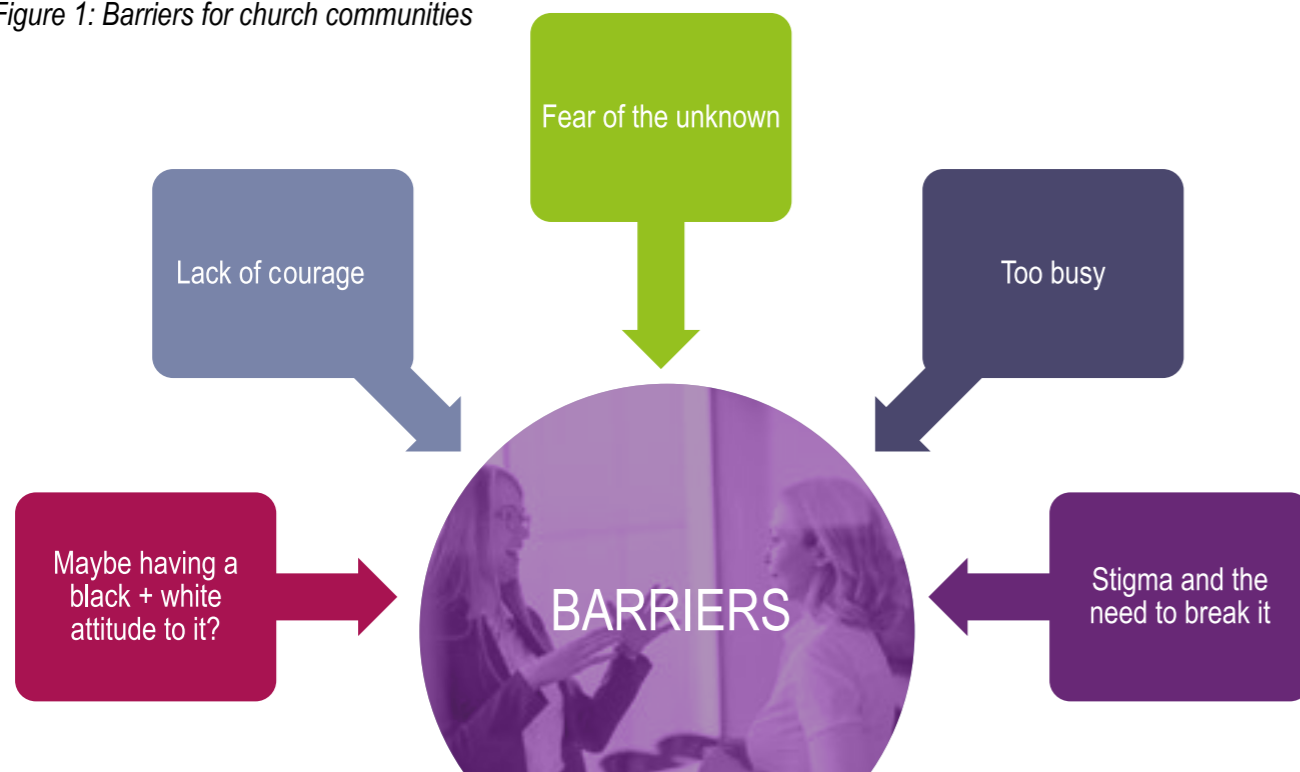
“I saw from personal and professional experience the lack of understanding within the faith community about the area of suicide.”

“The need to help others in the church to be better equipped.”

## 2.4.2 Trainers views on the barriers to clergy engaging in training

Trainers were also asked what in their opinion are the barriers for encouraging the church community to engage with training on suicide. Seven of the trainers gave their thoughts on what might be the barriers. The range of themes mentioned are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Barriers for church communities



## 2.4.3 Satisfaction with the training received

Overall, trainers were satisfied with the training received. Chart 20 shows that 3 of the respondents rated the Training for Trainers (T4T) as 'excellent' and another 4 rated it as 'good'.

Chart 20: Rating of T4T

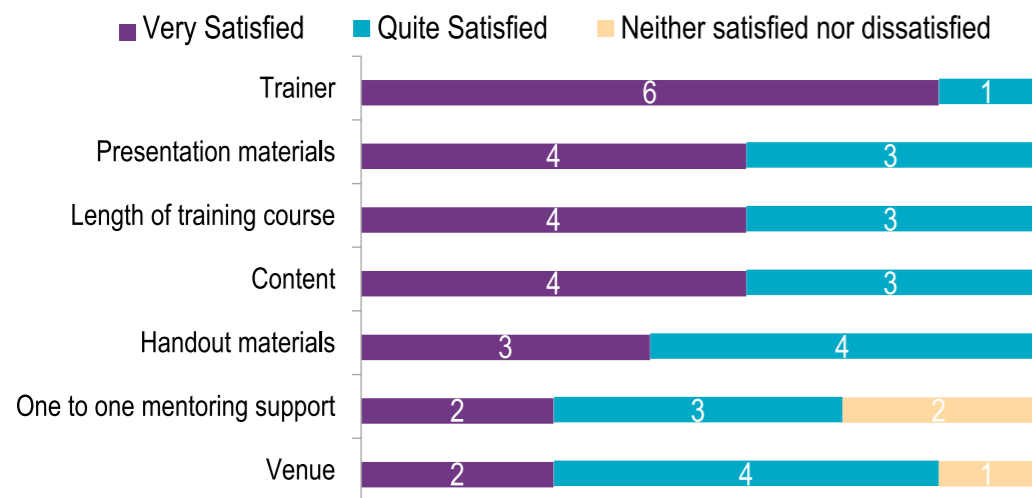


“I thought there was excellent material provided. But I also wondered if more might have been done to help the group relate to each other and thus create support and enthusiasm. Less change in the material right up to point of delivery would have given more confidence to me, but it was absolutely fine in the end, and the help with technology was invaluable.”

- “The information provided is good. The pace at which you are allowed to develop is good. Good material which is continually improving and good support.”
- “Facilitator had clear understanding and professional experience of suicide and training was delivered with compassion.”
- “The course is excellent and is an effective way of reaching out to clergy in their ministry at what is a very difficult time.”
- “It was an excellent course. Was apprehensive at the beginning but that quickly disappeared. Good opportunity to extend network of contacts.”
- “Really pleased to have had the opportunity to learn more, and be trained, and now look forward to more opportunities to deliver the training to support clergy etc and ultimately prevent suicides and more bereavement.”

Chart 21 shows the satisfaction of respondents with the different elements of the T4T course. Overall trainers were 'very satisfied' or 'quite satisfied' with almost all elements. Two respondents were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with one to one mentoring support, and one was 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with the venue. Almost all the respondents – 6 out of 7 were 'very satisfied' with the trainer, and one was 'quite satisfied'.

Chart 21: Satisfaction with training elements (Base 7)



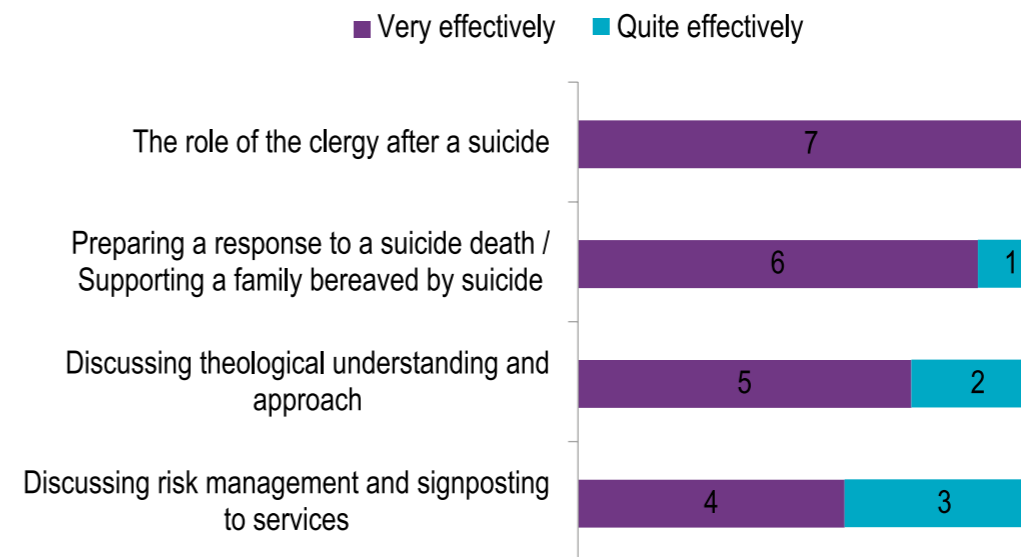
## 2.4.4 Things learned from the T4T course

The key areas respondents commented on learning about from the T4T are very similar to those that those participating in the training commented on. Almost everyone mentioned learning about biblical examples of suicide. Others described their learning in relation to just how to respond, that it is possible to offer some help, that it is important to have compassion

- "Suicide and Scripture was a revelation to me."
- "Increased theological knowledge."
- "We can help."
- "Importance of compassion."
- "It's ok not to have all the answers."

All seven respondents said that the course helped them 'very effectively' or 'quite effectively' to reflect on, or learn about, how to teach / train. Everyone found 'The role of the clergy after a suicide' learning as very effective – again in similarity to those who had undertaken the training.

Chart 22: Effectiveness of the T4T course (Base 7)



## 2.4.5 Improvement of the T4T course

The trainers each individually suggested some improvements, some around providing support / feedback to them as a group including sharing their experience on course delivery with one another.

- "Seems long time ago that I completed training. Personally I don't feel that engaged as I've only delivered one session since and not really had any feedback or sense of progression."
- "Another opportunity for trainers to meet together to discuss delivery of the course."
- "Some of the power point slides needed adjusted."
- "I feel that there needs to be some more emphasis on preparing for, and celebrating funerals. Certainly from my perspective as a catholic priest I know that priests want to hear more on this."

A couple of specific suggestions were made in relation to the content of the training:

“Probably a need for more presentation skills.”

There were no particular suggestions for improvement of the length, timing or venue, just a couple of minor comments:

“I would start a little later as it was difficult to cross Belfast and arrive at start time.”

“It depends on the number being trained whether it should be a 2 day or 3 day workshop.”



“If two people are to deliver it together they must know each other well and be confident with each other.”

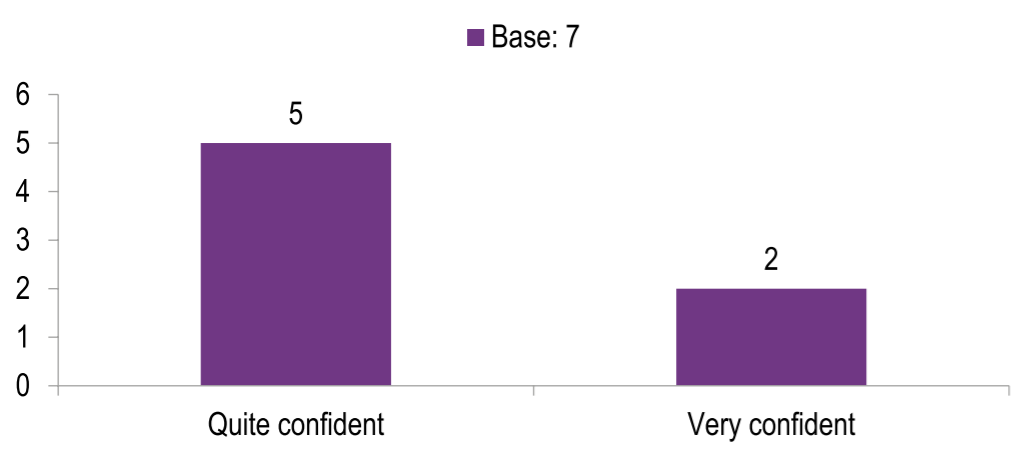
“As a trainer I feel strongly that the delivery of the Flourish programme should be co-worked. As we don't know the individuals who are attending the training and their experience of suicide, it would be important to have 2 trainers to deal with any distress that might present itself from individual participants.”

### 2.4.6 Experience of delivering training to others

Only one out of seven haven't delivered the training yet, three respondents have delivered the training once, one has delivered it twice so far, another has delivered it 3-4 times and one trainer has delivered it approximately 15 times.

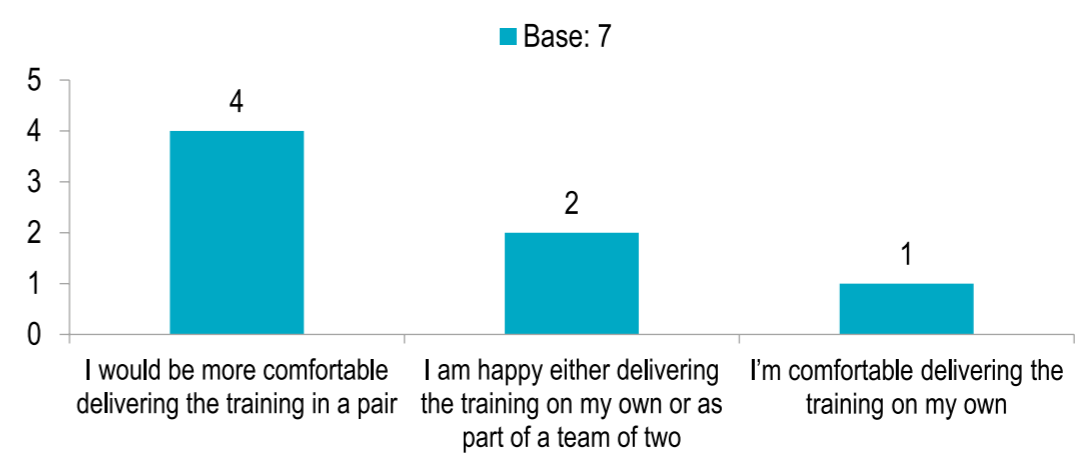
All the trained trainers feel confident delivering the training – 5 of them are quite confident and 2 are very confident in doing so. (Chart 23).

Chart 23: Confidence delivering the training



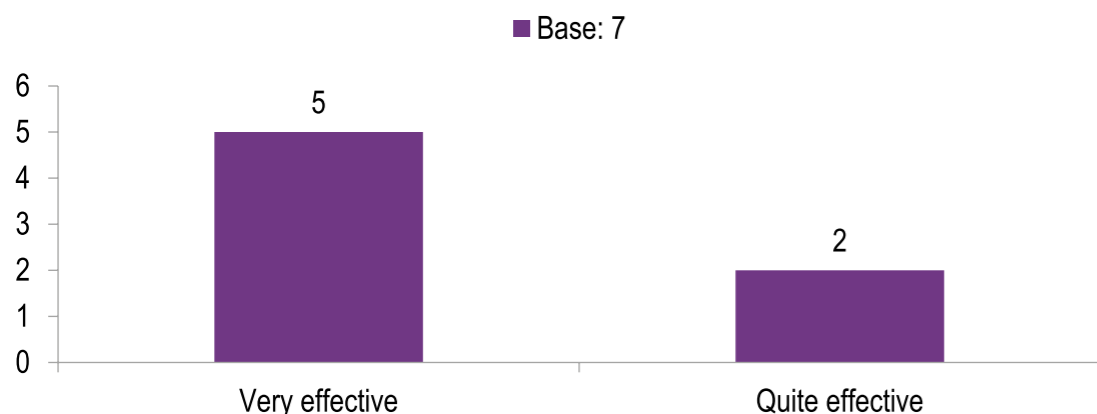
Just over half (four out of seven trainers) answered that they would be more comfortable delivering the training in a pair, two would be happy either delivering the training on their own or as part of a team of two, and only one is comfortable delivering the training on their own (Chart 24). It was commented that if delivering in a pair that it is important to know the other person. Another individual emphasised that delivery as a two is very important.

Chart 24: Ways of delivering training



All the trainers think that the training they are delivering is effective. Five out of seven trainers think that training is 'very effective' and two think that it is 'quite effective'.

Chart 25: Effectiveness / Ineffectiveness of current training programme



Other improvements suggested to the course included more time for mentoring and the sharing of materials prior to the course:

“Send out some of the course info before hand to the participants.”

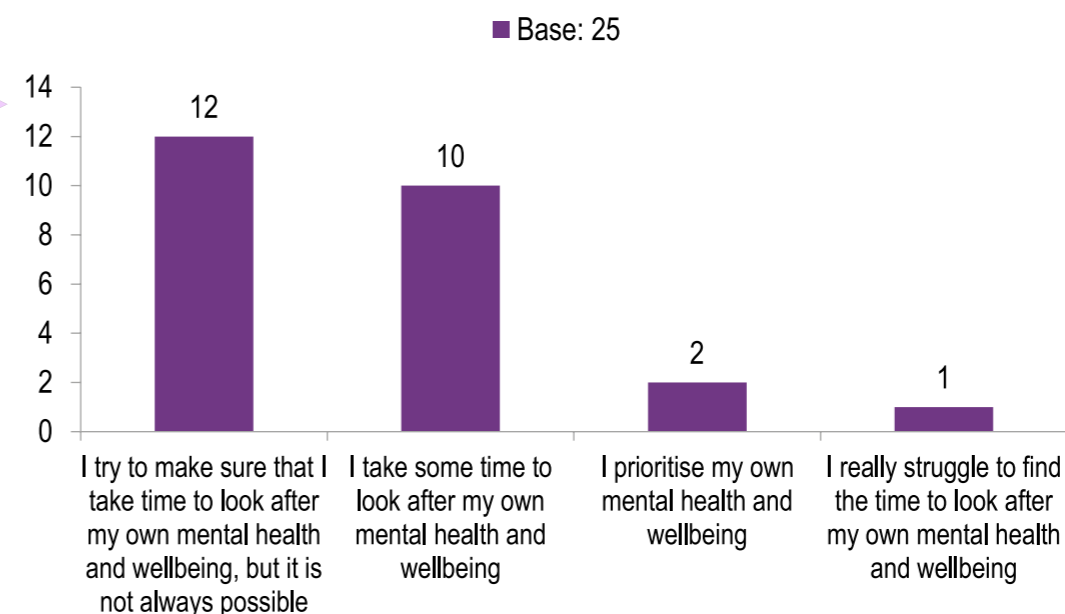
“Just more time for one to one mentoring.”

## 2.5 Self-care of clergy

During the qualitative interviews with non-engaging clergy self-care was mentioned frequently by the clergy themselves. Most of the 19 respondents commented that they are very much aware of how important it is to take care of their own mental health and that situations like suicide affect clergy more than they think. The main approach to supporting their mental health seems to be through pastoral supervision, which in most cases (outside of the methodist tradition), is not provided for by the churches themselves.

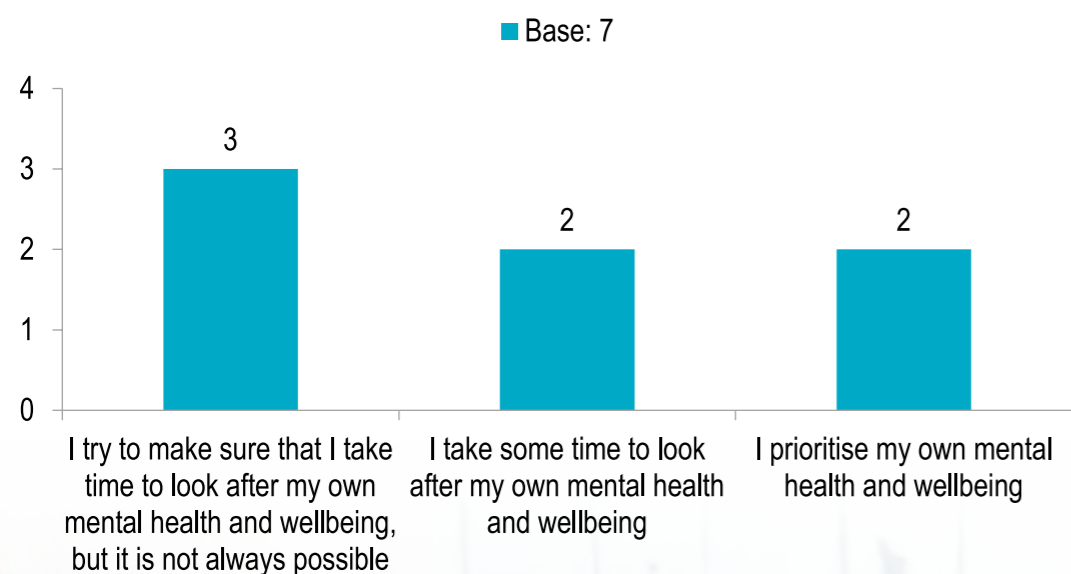
The clergy and church workers who have been through at least one of the Flourish training activities (and completed the survey) are also conscious of trying to take the time to look after their own mental health and wellbeing. Almost 50% of the respondents from the online survey ‘try to make sure that they take time to look after their own mental health and wellbeing, but it is not always possible’. 10 out of the 25 respondents do take ‘some time’ to look after themselves. Only a couple of respondents prioritise their mental health and wellbeing and one person is really struggling to find time for self-care.

Chart 27: Looking after their own mental health and wellbeing



Trainers are likewise conscious of caring for their mental health but only 2 of the 7 prioritise it.

Chart 28: Attitudes towards mental health and wellbeing



One of the trainers also commented that there should be more emphasis on self-care for clergy.

“Your body hears everything your mind says”

–Stay positive

## 2.6 Focus Group with Programme Steering Group

The discussion at the focus group workshop was oriented around four key points:

- What are the strengths of Flourish?
- What are the weaknesses of Flourish?
- Where are the opportunities for Flourish?
- Where are the threats for Flourish?

There were 7 attendees at the workshop, who were asked about their thoughts on the issues above. The discussion highlighted the following:

### STRENGTHS:

- Connections / relationships / the network
- Shared vision / shared experience
- Cross community work / mix of clergy involved
- Funding to deliver so far
- Resources developed / material provided to all clergy

### WEAKNESSES:

- Funding
- Inter-churches approach (Churches need to take ownership of the programmes)

### OPPORTUNITIES:

- Marketing and communication ideas – spreading the word and breaking the stigma
- Funding – looking for other funding opportunities
- Self-care as part of the module to be expanded
- Partnering with other people / groups – cross-sector opportunities
- Getting more engagement from the churches
- Ways to access support from the church e.g. use of church hall facilities rather than hiring

### THREATS

- Funding
- Not being able to progress and develop to deliver more
- Not getting leverage through church hierarchy

In discussions, the general view of the Flourish initiative is very positive, but there was also an awareness of the weaknesses, and that the reach of the programme could be improved. Funding was emphasised during the discussion as a current strength, as Flourish has currently full support from PHA funding. However, being completely dependent on this funding is also a weakness. There are opportunities to look for new ways to fund the initiative, but due to unpredictable political environment this could be a challenge.

## 3.0 Conclusion and recommendations

The overall view of the Flourish Initiative from this research is very positive and encouraging for the future. Below we summarise our response to the two research questions and suggest some recommendations in response for going forward.

### HOW CAN ENGAGEMENT WITH THE FLOURISH PROGRAMME BE INCREASED, AND SPECIFICALLY HOW CAN INCREASED UPTAKE OF THE COURSE TRAINING BE ENSURED?

To understand how to increase involvement we need to understand what underlies individual engagement with the training, as well as the actual mechanics of what marketing / promotion activity is best / underway. Those who have engaged with the training seem to have done so, because the theme is of some sort of personal interest to them. They have been motivated by a desire to understand and a compassion to help. Most (20 of the 26) have had some sort of exposure to suicide through work or family.

#### RECOMMENDATION

**Messaging around the Flourish programme should perhaps thus more fully emphasise the capacities / skills that the training provides to deal with and support clergy in working around the issue of suicide. Sensitive materials that highlight the journey that some clergy have been on, on responding to the issues of suicide could help address wider societal stigma as well as gain wider engagement.**

From a marketing and promotion perspective it is clear that to create more engagement, more needs to be done to promote engagement with the training. The research would suggest that there is awareness about the Flourish programme amongst many of the clergy but despite this clergy have not investigated further / sought to undertake the training. Much of the current work is positively supported by 'word of mouth' promotion, which is important.

#### RECOMMENDATION

**More targeted and effective marketing of the programme is required. This would be aided by ensuring an up to date database of clergy and associates is developed and maintained, thereby ensuring the greatest reach of information about the initiative; Due to nature of Northern Ireland more personal contact is required in order to reach more clergy by presenting Flourish in their local / regional intra or inter denominational meetings. We suggest that Flourish formalise a group of advocates within each church denomination, with attention to regional spread, who could have a more formal role in talking on and promoting the discussion of suicide / self care etc. and the training in their locality.**

While the Flourish training is currently completely funded, the sustainability of this funding in the long to medium term was raised as a potentially limiting issue given that it comes from one source.

#### RECOMMENDATION

**The next stage of development for the programme we would suggest is to get more extensive backing from the churches to engage in the programme. Financial support and more proactive marketing by the church bodies themselves will ensure the future growth in outreach and uptake of this initiative.**

### IS FLOURISH IMPROVING THE CONFIDENCE AND COMPETENCIES OF CLERGY IN SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES WHO HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY SUICIDE?

Support work in the area of suicide is complex and is increasingly requiring clergy to go beyond supporting individuals and families in the wake of someone taking their own life to include dealing with wider mental health and importantly focusing on prevention. On the whole clergy find the Flourish training helpful in terms of resources and find it a safe space to talk about difficulties related to suicide – and to discuss how best they as clergy respond. The training is rightly centred for this audience, starting from a biblical perspective and building from there, this is an important unique element to the Flourish training when compared to other training that is available. Both those who had been on the training and the trainers themselves made some suggestions for how to continually tweak and improve the training that is on offer.

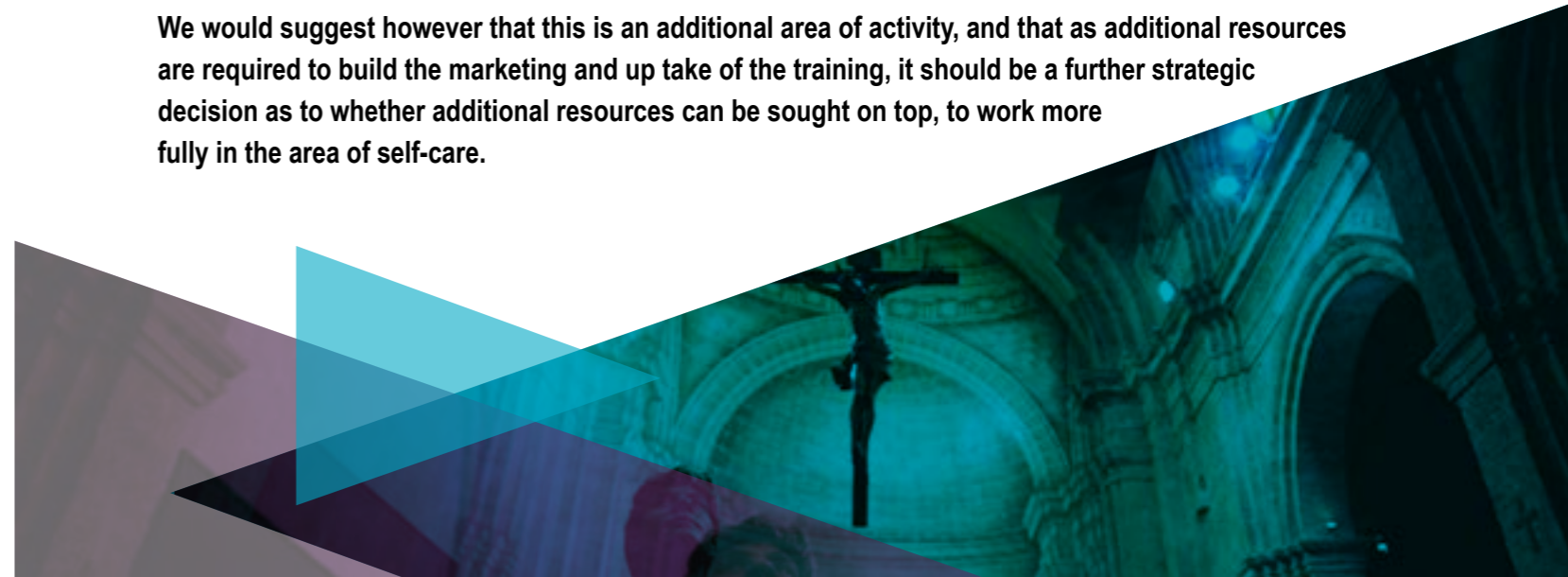
#### RECOMMENDATION

**Areas for development we suggest would include increased promotion of the overall training directory offered to Churches to cover a broader range of issues such as Mental Health First Aid, ASIST, Safetalk, Self Harm Awareness and Bereavement support – in order to provide Clergy/Church workers with a focus on practical examples, more training on working with individuals and families in relation to suicidal thoughts/attempts, as well as awareness training on the identifiable risk behaviours of those likely to take their own life.**

There was also an apparent need for an increased focus on the development of self-care and the coping skills of those clergy engaging with individuals and families in such emotive and distressing contexts. It is important to build the resilience of these individuals to ensure self-care is the cornerstone of both outreach in the wake of suicide and in its prevention.

#### RECOMMENDATION

**We would suggest however that this is an additional area of activity, and that as additional resources are required to build the marketing and up take of the training, it should be a further strategic decision as to whether additional resources can be sought on top, to work more fully in the area of self-care.**



# Evaluation of Flourish! Programme Activities

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