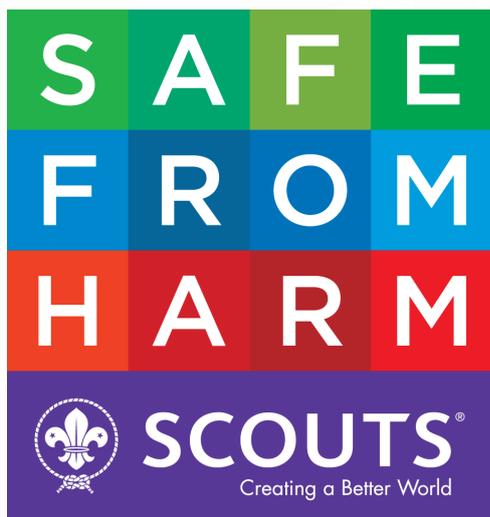




# Listening Ear Framework



© World Scout Bureau Inc.  
Listening Ear Framework  
April 2024

World Scout Bureau  
European Support Centre

Rue Henri-Christiné 5 CH-1205 Geneva 4  
Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 705 1100  
Fax: +41 22 705 1109

[europa@scout.org](mailto:europa@scout.org)  
[scout.org](http://scout.org)

Reproduction is authorised to National Scout  
Organizations and Associations which are  
members of the World Organization of the  
Scout Movement. Credit for the source must  
be given.

Mental Health and Wellbeing team  
Education Area of Operation, 2022-2025



# LISTENING EAR FRAMEWORK

## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>What do Listening Ears do?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Who do Listening Ears support?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Understanding Listening Ears within Safe From Harm (SfH)</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Setup &amp; Management of a Listening Ear Service</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Management of the Listening Ear Framework</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Reporting</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Listening Ear visibility</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Recruiting the team</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Role description</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Diverse representation</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Background checks</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Spiritual advisers as Listening Ears</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Training</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Suggested Listening Ear programme training</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Examples (case studies, role play, group reflection)</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Further support</b>	<b>28</b>

# INTRODUCTION

The role of a Listening Ear has evolved over the years as an integral part of Scouting's commitment to keeping children, young people and adults safe from harm. This framework recognises the importance of providing support during events, to listen to the challenges individuals may be facing, especially in times of emotional or mental difficulty. While the historical emphasis in Scouting was on physical first-aid, the evolving understanding of the mind and social awareness require us to proactively work to create a safe environment and support individuals in their personal needs, emotional, and psychological challenges.

Listening Ears (LE) play a crucial role, by lending a compassionate ear to those in need. Listening and understanding fundamental human needs, from the core of this service. The framework equips staff and volunteers with the knowledge and resources for supporting events and activities through a Listening Ear system.

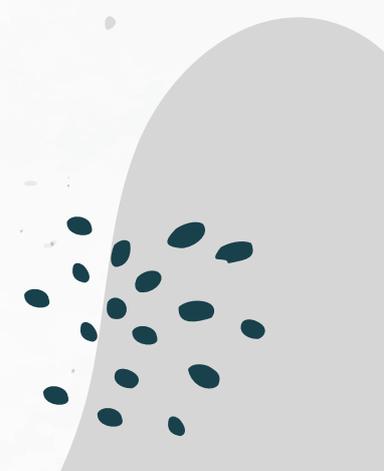
Member Organizations (MOs) are encouraged to adapt the Listening Ear framework and its components to their national needs. The approach outlined below can be adapted to build a Listening Ear structure in different aspects of Scouting operations such as in local Scout groups and patrols, to within national teams and working groups.

# WHAT DO LISTENING EARS DO?



The Listening Ear service plays a vital role in supporting individuals during their participation in Scout events or activities. They are frontline, initial support, for the individual and their immediate needs and signpost to additional support services where required. Whether facing mental or emotional challenges, a risk of harm, or experiencing discomfort, any member of a Scout event or activity can approach a Listening Ear who will offers a welcoming, safe, and non-judgmental environment.

This service serves as the first point of contact, supporting the mental and emotional well-being of all participants, irrespective of age or role. Additionally, Listening Ears contribute to the identification and escalation of cases for further action by other elements of the event's Safe from Harm services.





Listening Ears are not a counselling or treatment service. Instead, their role is to support Scouts and others, helping with their immediate safety and well-being. This involves identifying, processing, listening, discussing, signposting, and sometimes escalating (when appropriate) the needs of each Scout. Importantly, Listening Ear volunteers do not operate as professional counsellors, even if qualified to do so. In cases of serious and severe situations, measures should be in place for the Listening Ear service to escalate the case to services appropriate to their needs or alert relevant authorities.





# WHO DO LISTENING EARS SUPPORT?

Listening Ears support youth participants, adult leaders, event volunteers and event staff. The Duty of Care for Listening Ears is always directed towards the Scout they are working with, prioritising their safety and best interests over organisational reputation or individual accusations. Regardless of position, it is essential for Listening Ears to advocate for the Scout's well-being and be prepared to take necessary actions.

# UNDERSTANDING LISTENING EARS WITHIN SAFE FROM HARM (SFH)

Safe from Harm is our commitment to safeguarding individuals against inappropriate behaviour and effectively managing risks. It extends beyond protecting children and young people from adults and encompasses preventing harm caused by people, situations, or among the Scouts themselves.

This comprehensive approach ensures that no one is excluded from participation due to mental health or disabilities and shields our Scouts from harassment, bullying, prejudice, and cultural intolerance.

Every participant, regardless of their role, shares the duty to maintain a Safe from Harm environment. At its core, Safe from Harm aims to prevent harm, encompassing stress, conflict, neglect, violence, unhappiness, and loneliness that are incompatible with the Scouting method.

Scouts pledge to care for themselves, others, and their communities, while adults commit to caring for young people and other adult Scouts.



The building blocks that support Safe from Harm are all relevant local laws, the Safe from Harm policies and procedures of WOSM and all human capacities involved in Safe from Harm. These make up some of the other components of the Safe from Harm services that you may be working with at an event or meeting. They include:



All relevant **local laws**.



The **Safe from Harm policies and procedures** of WOSM, event host MOs, and of Scouts' home MOs.



The event's **Stewards** or **Security** team.



The **local police and social services** may investigate law-breaking.



The event's **Emergency Centre** coordinates responses to incidents.



The **Safe from Harm Operations Teams**: Scout volunteers and professional staff handling serious cases such as abuse and breaches of local laws.



The event's **Medical Service**, usually (though not always) handles mental health issues.



The **local medical services** serve the event's venue.



The **Listening Ears** work closely with all these parties and passes cases to others as appropriate.



**WOSM Consultants** sometimes support certain WOSM events and most often help implement Safe from Harm systems within MOs that request assistance ([more info here](#)).



**Spiritual advisers** of all faiths offer faith-based advice and support at some events.

## **SETUP & MANAGEMENT OF A LISTENING EAR SERVICE**

As you prepare for your upcoming event, it is essential to recognise the dynamic nature of Safe from Harm implementation, varying significantly based on the event.

Each event will uniquely emphasize and utilize different building blocks in diverse ways, tailoring its approach to create a Safe from Harm environment. Listening Ears are within the Safe from Harm team and structure at any event.

During the event or meeting, the critical role of Listening Ears must be managed by experienced volunteers and staff, ensuring comprehensive coverage through specific shifts and assigned duties.

To maximise efficiency, it is vital for the event's Safe from Harm structure the Listening Ear and Safe from Harm Operations Teams within a Safety Department. This collaborative setup acknowledges their close synergy, preventing potential gaps in support for Scouts in need.

While this arrangement is common, variations exist, with some events placing Listening Ears alongside the medical service. Regardless of the specific setup, a cohesive effort from all teams is paramount to prevent Scouts from slipping through the support network.

Lastly, Listening Ears are not designed to replace existing practices or procedures, they exist to support existing Safe from Harm and Psychological First Aid (PFA) processes.

The below table outlines the operational setup of Listening Ears to consider for events:

Listening Ear in the event's organisational structure	Location on site	Hours of operation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Safety Department</li> <li>● Medical Department</li> <li>● Integration into Safe from Harm and Medical operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dedicated safe zone</li> <li>● Medical area</li> <li>● Roaming around the site</li> <li>● Be present where people are and consider large gatherings and celebration events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish a realistic shift schedule and numbers per shifts per day</li> <li>● Consider how many LE's you need on duty to cover each shift</li> <li>● Ensure overnight provision</li> <li>● Dedicate an emergency hotline/number for evening hours</li> </ul>

# MANAGEMENT OF A LISTENING EAR FRAMEWORK

There should be an appointed **Listening Ear Lead**, who is overseen by the **Safe from Harm Lead**. Both Listening Ears & Safe from Harm Leads should have international team management experience and have held similar relevant roles previously in Safe from Harm, medical team, well-being etc.

These roles should also report to or be connected directly with:

- Head of Service team department
- One or more deputy Heads of Service as the Head of Service cannot be on duty 24/7
- Emergency Centre liaison staff (could rotate other managers depending on shift patterns)
- Case Management Team

The Listening Ear Lead is responsible for the team of Listening Ears, supporting the daily operations and necessary monitoring and reporting.

# REPORTING

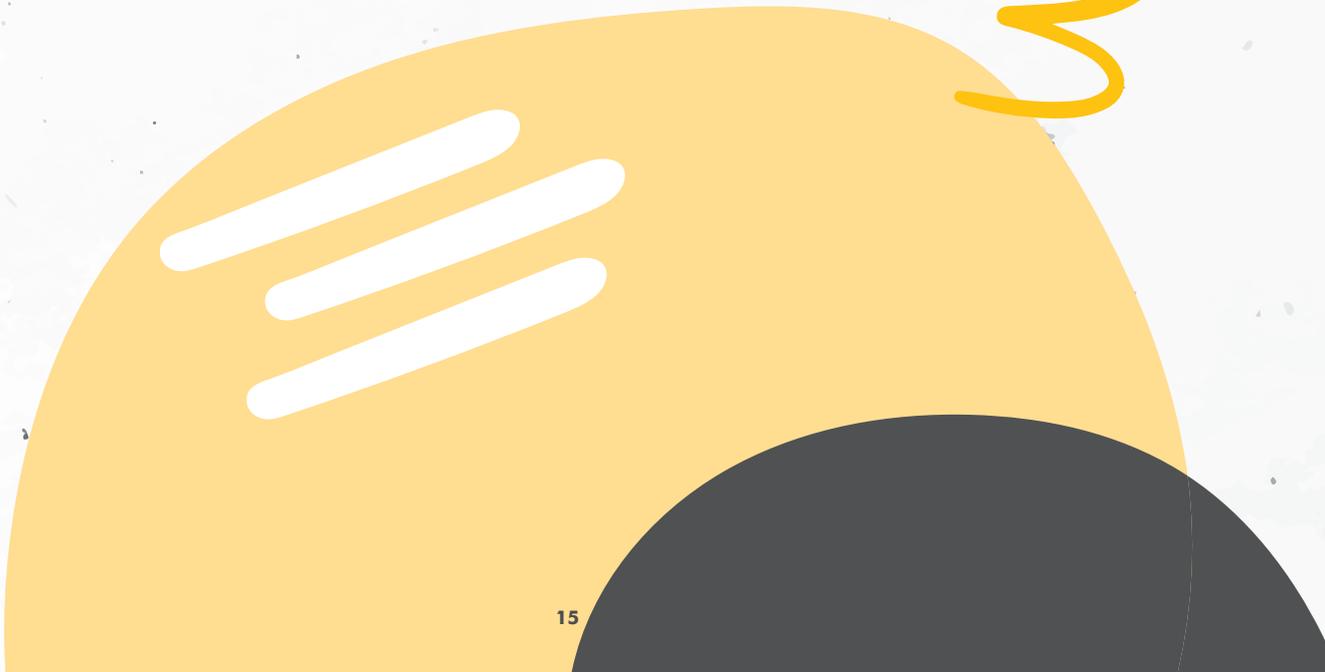
Reporting every Listening Ear encounter is essential, within this framework and for security, continuity and confidence. There is a [recommended template](#) for completing an encounter report.

Data on an encounter form is highly sensitive and therefore, confidential. The form should be complete after the encounter, where more than one Listening Ear were present. Each Listening Ear should complete the encounter form, either individually or together.

During an event, encounter forms should be collected or uploaded onto a confidential folder, at the end of each day by the Listening Ear Lead, reviewed and stored confidentially.

After the event, it is important that these reports are used for continuous improvement and further prevention. Feedback should be shared in the event report and with future planning teams.

**Escalation** - If, despite all the measures in place, a more severe breach of any aspect of the Safe from Harm framework occurs, all procedures to protect the victim and the organisation must be in place. Efficient and clear procedures may prevent the situation from escalating. As several teams play a part in delivering Safe from Harm, especially the Listening Ears team, the procedures need to be as clear and structured as possible. You can find more information here in the [WOSM SfH Guidelines for World & Regional Scout events](#).

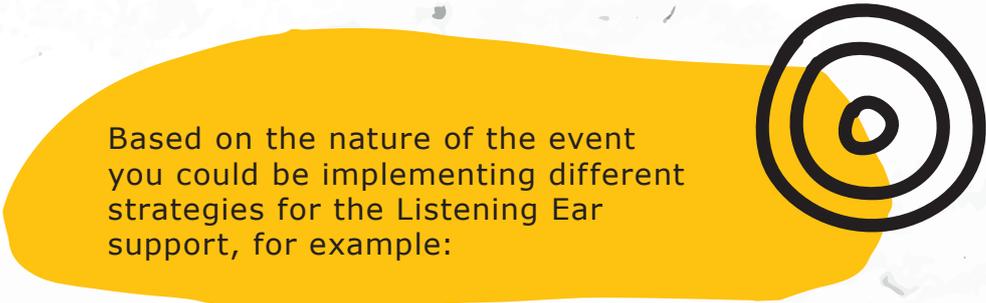


# LISTENING EAR VISIBILITY

All Listening Ears should be visibly recognisable during the event. This could be a labelled vest, badge or coloured armband to ensure they can be approached at any time, without the requirement of going to the 'Listening Location'.

After agreeing where your Listening Ears would be located, it is important to consider the necessary conditions required to support them in performing their role.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Locations where you can have private conversations (tents are not soundproof).</li><li>• Locations where people can arrive and depart somewhat privately</li><li>• Patrols of Listening Ears who regularly walk around the event spaces</li><li>• Comfortable chairs/bean bags</li><li>• Screens</li><li>• Notice board</li><li>• Workstation</li><li>• Secure storage</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Board games and puzzles</li><li>• Art material</li><li>• Radios</li><li>• Bikes/transport</li><li>• Chargers for your electronics</li><li>• Chargers for visitors' electronics</li><li>• Drinks/water</li><li>• Snacks</li><li>• Banners</li><li>• Clothing</li><li>• Candles</li></ul>
--	---



Based on the nature of the event you could be implementing different strategies for the Listening Ear support, for example:



1

**Pairing** - Listening Ears should be paired with another individual. This is for their safety and the safety of our Scouts. In adult events, this may be uncomfortable or discouraging for someone seeking a Listening Ear, therefore in exceptional circumstances 1:1 can be used, but under the visibility of one or more adults.

2

**Layering Talent** - Matched pairings will be arranged by time zone, availability, language, and other factors. When experienced Listening Ears are matched with relatively new Listening Ears, take this opportunity to observe and learn from each other. Layering talent also allows you to spread out our most experienced Listening Ears, who otherwise may be paired together which would be less effective.

3

**Case Referral** - Scouts cannot simply be referred to another building block and then dismissed. Cases should be referred to in a manner that is guided, friendly, and clearly explained. Ensure the Scout receives the care they need. Follow up when appropriate and offer the next level of support like Psychological First Aid, when needed.

4

**Strategic Coverage** - In both physical and digital events, it is not possible to be in all places at all times. There are many places online where Scouts will congregate during the event. We must be strategic where we can and cannot be. Please follow your Listening Ear station leads or Safe from Harm team lead's instructions as to where you are expected to be.

# RECRUITING THE TEAM

In Scouting, various adult leaders, consultants, or even adult Scout Leaders who are support workers or mental health professionals in their daily lives, may take on the role of providing a Listening Ear for Scouts or fellow leaders who need someone to talk to or seek guidance.

However, not every adult leader wants to be or has the skills and attitude to be a Listening Ear – this is OK! You are searching for people who appreciate the responsibility and potential personal consequences of this work, who routinely engage in active listening, who have empathy and a careful approach to mental health issues, and who believe they are capable of taking on this challenging role.

It is recommended that the Listening Ear is the only role the Adult Leader fulfils during the event. It is a mentally consuming role and requires as much balanced work-time and downtime as any other role.

When appointing/recruiting Listening Ears, it is encouraged to follow Scouting background checks as outlined below.

# ROLE DESCRIPTION

The below is an example of a role description for Listening Ears. It is not limited to this and should be updated depending on the event and your progressive learning as an MO in implementing a Listening Ear framework:



Safeguard and protect event participants of all ages and types by following all relevant policies and procedures.



Serve as an initial source of attention, empathy, and support regarding anything expressed by a Scout.



Provide, when appropriate, information and signposting to help a Scout find a pathway to resolve their issues.



Provide, when appropriate, a reasonable assessment of the nature and potential seriousness of any identified problem.



mm



Refer/hand-off, when necessary, a Scout to appropriate resources that can meet their immediate needs.



Report immediately all cases of actual or suspected abuse and self-harm or suicidal thoughts.



Be curious, open-minded, and tolerant regardless of the situation in front of you, not intruding your values, experience, personal opinion or beliefs.



Serve as a source of unconditional compassion and empathy.



Help and support all participants towards the goal of making the most of the event they are attending.



Make an accurate record of all encounters and pursue any agreed next steps and follow-up.



Sufficiently fluent in one of the required languages to conduct a complex conversation with good understanding.

# DIVERSE REPRESENTATION

Providing the necessary safe space and accessible support varies for each individual. Having a Listening Ear who speaks the same language or shares cultural similarities may help the Scout feel more comfortable to reach out. Consider the following when forming the team of Listening Ears:

- What languages do you need / can you cover?
- Gender identity balance
- Age balance
- Geographical balance
- National balance

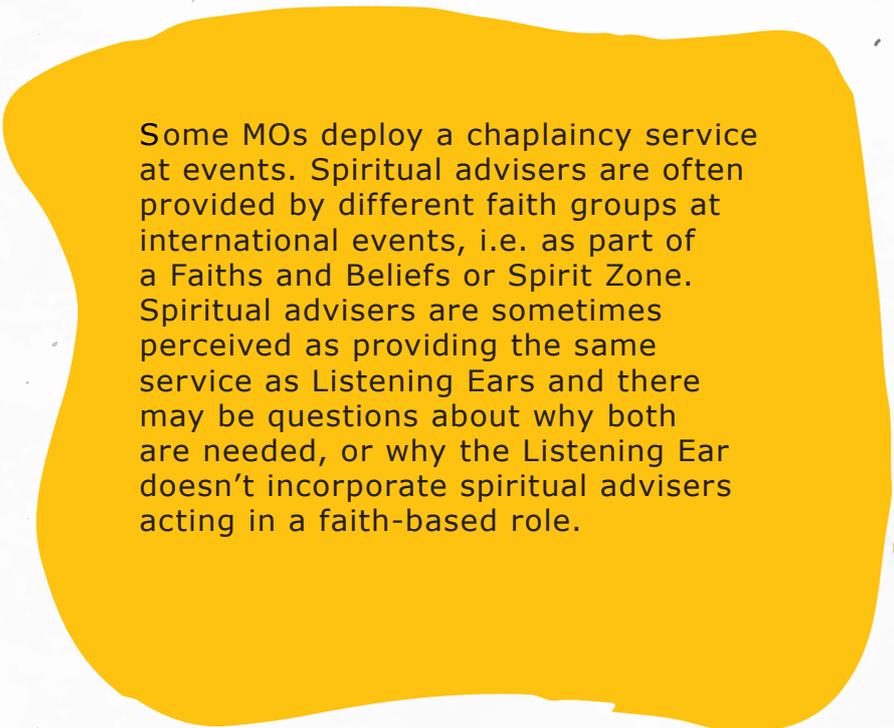
# BACKGROUND CHECKS

Listening Ears must be above reproach, so it's important to check, if possible, that their MOs know nothing against them that may affect the perception or reality of their ability to safeguard others.

You should liaise with the event's Human Resources (HR) team to ensure that all people selected for the Listening Ear service are appropriately vetted where possible. HR may already have suitable measures in place. As this is also a requirement for other Safe from Harm and medical personnel, it's something to work the directorate to secure.



## **SPIRITUAL ADVISERS AS LISTENING EARS**



Some MOs deploy a chaplaincy service at events. Spiritual advisers are often provided by different faith groups at international events, i.e. as part of a Faiths and Beliefs or Spirit Zone. Spiritual advisers are sometimes perceived as providing the same service as Listening Ears and there may be questions about why both are needed, or why the Listening Ear doesn't incorporate spiritual advisers acting in a faith-based role.

There is no reason why spiritual advisers of any faith who are also Scouts should not be utilised in the Listening Ear service. However, if they are, they must operate under the same rules and guidelines as all Listening Ears. In the same way that, mental health professionals don't act in their professional capacity when they are in the role of Listening Ears, neither should spiritual advisers.



This is partly because Scouting internationally is non-denominational, but mainly because the Listening Ear is not the place to offer faith-based advice or solutions. It is a gateway to other support if it is needed. That may include talking to a spiritual adviser if a Scout has a faith-related concern. In other words, spiritual advisers acting in their faith-based capacity may be a next-step resource for Scouts with spiritual or faith questions, in the same way as services such as mental health for someone with a psychological issue, or a Safe from Harm Operations Team for someone alleging abuse.

# TRAINING

A Listening Ear Training programme for volunteers, should consist of theory, practical tips and experiential learning.

The goal of a Listening Ear training is to equip volunteers to provide a confidential and supportive environment for individuals who may be going through difficult times, such as loneliness, stress, anxiety, depression, physical harm or grief. Their role aims to reduce feelings of isolation and help individuals feel heard and understood, through a safe and non-judgmental space for individuals to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns.



The Listening Ear framework is part of Scouting's overall focus on promoting the well-being and development of everyone involved. It is also a clear commitment to Safe from Harm and safeguarding individuals against inappropriate behaviour and effectively managing risks. It extends beyond protecting young people from adults and encompasses preventing harm caused by people, situations, or the Scouts themselves.

A Listening Ear training programme should help volunteers build resilience and coping skills, by encouraging them to seek help when needed and providing them with tools and resources to manage difficult situations.

# SUGGESTED LISTENING EAR PROGRAMME TRAINING

The training syllabus for a Listening Ear programme covers the below:

- 1 Active listening skills:** Volunteers are trained to listen carefully and attentively to what the person is saying and to respond in a non-judgmental and empathetic manner.
- 2 Confidentiality:** Volunteers are trained to respect the confidentiality of the person they are speaking with and to keep their information private.
- 3 Mental health awareness:** Volunteers are trained to recognise common mental health challenges that people may face, such as depression, anxiety, and trauma.
- 4 Crisis intervention:** Volunteers may be trained to recognise when someone is in crisis and how to provide immediate support and assistance.
- 5 Referral resources:** Volunteers may be trained to provide information about resources and services that can help individuals with their concerns, such as mental health professionals, support groups, or crisis hotlines.
- 6 Cultural sensitivity:** Volunteers are trained to be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences and to understand how cultural factors may affect a person's mental health and well-being.
- 7 Self-care:** Volunteers are taught to recognise the signs of burnout and to practice self-care techniques to prevent emotional exhaustion.

Overall, the training for a Listening Ear volunteer is focused on providing the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to offer empathetic and supportive listening to those who need it most.



## **EXAMPLES (CASE STUDIES, ROLE PLAY, GROUP REFLECTION)**

You can find further training material, templates and example case studies to assist you in preparing your training agenda [here](#).

## **FURTHER SUPPORT**

Information regarding case management, scenarios and sanctions, SfH training and working with Contingents, can be found in detail within the [WOSM Safe from Harm Guidelines for World and Regional Scout Events](#).

For further advice or guidance on implementing a Listening Service and Listening Ear framework in your Scouting, you can visit the [WOSM Services Safe from Harm page](#) which has additional resources and the support of dedicated consultants.

# NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---







**SCOUTS**<sup>®</sup>  
Creating a Better World





**SCOUTS**<sup>®</sup>  
Creating a Better World

© World Scout Bureau Inc.  
APRIL 2024

World Scout Bureau  
European Support Centre

Rue Henri-Christiné 5 CH-1205 Geneva 4  
Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 705 1100  
Fax: +41 22 705 1109

[europa@scout.org](mailto:europa@scout.org)  
[scout.org](http://scout.org)