**Research Assistant (Part time, Fixed Term), Selective Mutism & ASD research.**

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| **Job Title** | Research Assistant |
| **Contract** | Fixed term: 22 months |
| **Hours** | Part time  Flexible working  34 hours per month (hours per week may vary depending on the stage of the project). |
| **Location** | Remote working |
| **Salary** | £14.47 per hour |
| **Closing Date** | 31st October 2021, 23:59 |

**Job Description**

This is an exciting and rare opportunity to undertake a research project on Selective Mutism and ASD with SMIRA (Selective Mutism Information and Research Association), the foremost charity in the UK giving support and information on Selective Mutism (SM) to families, professionals and individuals with SM.

SMIRA became a UK Registered Charity in 1992, having been set up initially to support families with children with selective mutism. This work has since been extended to provide information to health and education professionals involved in the upbringing of such children and young people. SMIRA also helps adults with SM.

SMIRA trustees collectively have decades of expertise in working with people with SM and also have wide-ranging knowledge of other coexisting conditions. SMIRA Trustees include an Educational Psychologist, Speech and Language Therapists, teachers and parents. We have a large, enthusiastic, and active worldwide membership.

SM is an anxiety-based mental health disorder which usually commences in early childhood. Those with SM speak fluently in some situations but remain consistently silent in others. With early intervention the prognosis for recovery is good, but in some cases, if left untreated, SM may persist right through a child’s school life and into adulthood. SM is estimated to affect 1 in 140 children, however this is likely to be an under estimation.

Selective Mutism is known to develop in many cases around the age of 3-5 years, which is also the time when a child’s language and general development rapidly expands. Language competence by age 5 is often a predictor for future development into adulthood and learning achievements.

When children are unable to speak to adults and their peers they miss out on reciprocal communication, negotiation, and friendship building. There is also the potential for phonetic disorders to go unnoticed. Where SM persists into teen years or adulthood it can have a significant detrimental effect on educational attainment, the development of skills for independent living and on mental health.

Treatment is known to be most effective when children are young and SM has not become entrenched. Early intervention can prevent the development of other mental health disorders such as social anxiety and depression, academic, social and economic impacts and long-term disability as a result of untreated SM.

SM can be comorbid with other conditions such as Social Anxiety Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This has important implications when developing treatment plans since these conditions require different approaches to treatment.

**The successful candidate will assist with a research project:**

* To establish the level of co-morbidity between SM and ASD, any gender differences, and the overall prevalence of SM in the study population.
* To determine the prevalence of the freeze response in physically preventing speech.
* To gather information on support techniques used for students with SM and autism, SM or SM traits, their efficacy and any differences in the way the groups are treated.

The study is funded by The Communication Consortium Grants Programme (funded by The Rayners Special Educational Trust).

**Main Duties**

* To assist with the smooth day-to-day running and completion of the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research project by supporting the research manager and Chief Investigator.
* To assist in the recruitment of participants and to assess the eligibility of potential participants.
* To explain clearly and in detail the study to services users and participants and to answer their queries regarding the research.
* To obtain consent from participants who wish to take part in the study.
* To assist with the development of online research questionnaires for participants as required to explore, elicit and analyse information (both quantitative and qualitative) regarding the experiences of young people and their parents/carers with SM, SM traits and comorbid SM and ASD.
* To maintain the highest standards of confidentiality when dealing with participants, data collection and in reporting results, to ensure participants’ consent is received before data is collected and reported, and to comply at all times with the UK GDPR requirements.
* To ensure that ethics procedures are followed.
* To conduct systematic literature reviews.
* To communicate with other groups researching similar topics as necessary to further this research.
* To assist in the preparation of publications, conference and other Powerpoint presentations and dissemination materials.

**Data collection and management**

* To contribute towards the accurate collection, entry and management of data using study related databases and statistical programs.
* To retrieve complex data from relevant datasets and analyse research outcomes to produce summary reports on research activity for a variety of purposes including updating the research team and the funding body.
* To be responsible for the safe keeping of data files.
* To assist with the quantitative and qualitative analysis and interpretation of the results of the research.
* To provide suitable results tables and figures.

**Other duties**

* To form and maintain close working relationships with other members of the research team and to liaise with the SMIRA Coordinator and Trustees as required.
* To assist with the promotion of the research to service users and other relevant stakeholders.
* To assist with meetings, which may include the preparation of reports in advance and taking follow-up action as required.
* To assist in the organisation of events and seminars to disseminate information.
* To undertake specific administrative duties as required.
* To participate in regular supervision with the research manager and Chief Investigator.
* To act under the guidance of the research manager and Chief Investigator to ensure that ongoing workloads are prioritised and completed within agreed timeframes.
* To help the research team achieve research objective and deadlines.
* To report any concerns raised by study participants to the research manager/Chief Investigator.
* To continue to update knowledge and develop skills.
* To identify appropriate training to support professional development.
* To act in a professional manner and with appropriate behaviour at all times while under the employ of SMIRA.

**Person Specification**

**Qualifications and Training**

Essential

* Undergraduate degree in a relevant subject area (e.g. psychology, speech and language therapy, social science, etc) with a minimum of 2:1.

Desirable

* Postgraduate degree in a relevant subject area (e.g. psychology, speech and language therapy, social science, etc).

**Experience and Knowledge**

Essential

* Strong understanding of cognitive development in children and adolescents with and without neurodiverse conditions.
* Understanding of using quantitative methods for conducting research.
* Understanding of analysing quantitative data using statistics software.

Desirable

* Experience of quantitative and/or qualitative research in a related area.
* Experience of using statistical software such as SPSS or R Statistics.
* Understanding of, and experience in, organising and conducting online surveys.

**Skills and Abilities**

Essential

* Effective communication and interpersonal skills, both written and verbal.
* Good analytical skills, ability to analyse data and present results appropriately.
* The ability to prioritise workload and work to deadlines.
* Good computer skills, including MS Office, Powerpoint, Excel and Zoom.
* Ability to work remotely as part of a team.
* Willingness to attend occasional online meetings on weekday evenings or Saturdays.

Desirable

* Proven project management skills.

**Other Requirements**

This position is remote. You must have access to computer equipment of your own to run statistical software, MS Office or equivalent and access to an internet connection fast enough for Zoom meetings.

The successful candidate will be required to hold a satisfactory basic DBS check, or submit a basic DBS check before being appointed. Continued employment will be dependent on this being satisfactory.

The successful candidate will be expected to commence as soon as possible.

**To apply please download and fill in the Application Form and return to Lindsay Whittington, SMIRA Coordinator by email at** [**smira.leicester@ntlworld.com**](mailto:smira.leicester@ntlworld.com) **by 31st October 2021, 23:59 hours.** If you have any questions please contact Shirley Landrock-White at [shirley@selectivemutism.org.uk](mailto:shirley@selectivemutism.org.uk)