

## Thank you from the Board

The Befrienders Worldwide Board of Trustees would like to express our gratitude to the members for your considerable sacrifice and effort to provide a continuing emotional support service in these exceptional time for all of us. Governments in many countries have recognized the work that organizations' like BW and our members are doing and have categorized our volunteers as essential workers.

With so many people around the world in some form of crisis, your work as listening volunteers has never been needed as much as it is now.

Thank you.

## BW Help App and Website Information

We are very pleased to report a successful launch of the new Help BW App which has received over 3000 visits to the site connecting to 71 member branches in the first 4 weeks of operation. It is even more encouraging to report that over 31% of the visits resulted in contacts to member branches with 64% visiting member websites, 16% making Email contact, 15% making phone contact and 3% making skype call contact. We are continuing to add more languages to the Help App to improve our connectivity.

Our BW Website received 1,784,370 visits during the period July 2019 to July 2020, up from 871,367 visits from July 2018 to July 2019. We are constantly updating our website to ensure that it remains current and topical.

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## New Members to BW

We are pleased to welcome a new BW member from Argentina- Centro de Asistencia al Suicida. Details of the new branch member can be found on our Website at: [www.befrienders.org](http://www.befrienders.org) and on our Help App at: [www.help.befrienders.org](http://www.help.befrienders.org)

### To contact us:

To submit articles or information for the Newsletter, please contact [communications@befrienders.org](mailto:communications@befrienders.org).  
Contact information for the Chair of the Trustees is [chair@befrienders.org](mailto:chair@befrienders.org).

# Sri Lanka Colombo

## A message from the SLS South Asian Conference Team

Dear members, we were so looking forward to hosting the BW SA Conference in November 2020. Sadly, we were compelled to postpone the Conference due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The SLS volunteers are a resilient group, full of energy and enthusiasm and we will rise up to this task again in order to create a once in a lifetime opportunity to ensure this Conference will be an unforgettable experience to all delegates from all parts of the world!

The new date for the South Asian Conference is 1st July to 4th July 2021.

The SLS team together with BW board members, BI India and KPR Bangladesh will be lining up topics of keen interest presented by BW members and experts.

A variety of memorable events will be planned for the evenings; a peek at Sri Lankan culture, culinary delights and a tour of Colombo, the financial hub of Sri Lanka to name a few. More information will follow in due course.

We look forward to inviting you all with a smile and Ayubowan

# Tokyo Japan

## Responding to the Economic challenges of COVID-19

### — An article from Reuters

TOKYO (Reuters) - The phones at the Tokyo suicide hotline start ringing as soon as it opens for its once-weekly overnight session. They don't stop until the lone volunteer fielding calls from hundreds of people yearning to talk, signs out early the next morning.



*Machiko Nakayama, director of the Tokyo Befrienders call center, a Tokyo's suicide hotline center, and a volunteer handle an incoming call at the center during the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Tokyo, Japan May 26, 2020. REUTERS/Issei Kato*

Both operating days and volunteer numbers at the volunteer-run Tokyo Befrienders call centre have been cut to avoid coronavirus infection, but the desperate need remains.

"There are so many people who want to connect and talk to somebody, but the fact is we can't answer all of them," centre director Machiko Nakayama told Reuters.

Health workers fear the pandemic's economic shock will return Japan to 14 dark years from 1998 when more than

30,000 people took their lives annually. With the grim distinction of the highest suicide rate among G7 nations, Japan adopted legal and corporate changes that helped lower the toll to just over 20,000 last year.

Worried the current crisis will reverse that downward trend, frontline workers are urging the government to boost both fiscal aid and practical support.

"We need to take steps now, before the deaths begin," said Hisao Sato, head of an NGO that provides counseling and economic advice in Akita, a northern prefecture long known for Japan's worst suicide rate.

National suicides fell 20% year-on-year in April, the first month of the country's soft lockdown, but experts said that was likely due to an internationally recognised phenomenon in which suicides decrease during crises, only to rise afterwards.

"It's the quiet before the storm, but the clouds are upon us," Sato said.

Prevention workers see echoes of 1998 when a sales tax hike and the Asian economic crisis first drove annual suicides above 30,000, then to a peak of almost 34,500 in 2003.

Economic circumstance is the second biggest reason for suicides, behind health, according to 2019 police data, which also shows that men are nearly three times more likely to kill themselves than women, and most are in the 40-60 age group.

The current crisis, which is forecast to shrink Japan's economy 22.2 percent this quarter, is especially dangerous for cash-strapped small and medium-sized businesses for whom government subsidies might not arrive in time.

"It's tough. A lot of people are really worried," said Shinnosuke Hirose, chief executive of a small human resources firm that has lost nearly 90% of its business. "It's like waiting at the execution grounds to see if they survive or not."

A Health Ministry official in charge of suicide policy told Reuters his department planned to ask for more money from a \$1.1 trillion central government stimulus package to help fund measures such as extra hotlines. The official, who declined to be named as he was not authorised to speak on the record, added there were limits to central government action and local efforts were crucial.

### **JOBLESS LINK**

Some believe the steps taken in recent years to bring down the suicide rate will hold firm through the current crisis, but others are not so sure.

Kyoto University's Resilience Research Unit has predicted 2,400 more suicides for each 1% rise in unemployment. If the virus subsides in a year, unemployment could peak at around 6% by March, lifting annual suicides to around 34,000, it estimated. If pandemic conditions persist for two years, a rise to 8% unemployment by March 2022 would see suicides spike over 39,000.



"Of course, social support is important ... but they won't be able to ramp this up suddenly," said unit director Satoshi Fujii. "Preventing bankruptcies will start helping immediately."

At the Tokyo Befrienders call centre, the phones continue to ring. The former nightly service now opens on Tuesdays only, with one volunteer a shift instead of four, although it plans to reinstate another day in June.

"Everyone has tried hard to get through lockdown, but now they'll reflect and think 'why was I doing it? What hope do I have?'" Nakayama said. "At that time, I think a lot could choose death."

Reporting by Elaine Lies; editing by Jane Wardell  
*Our Standards: The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles.*

## **USA - Samaritans Rhode Island Branch Working with community partners during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Samaritans Rhode Island (SAMSRI) have been working very closely with their community partners, including RI Emergency 911, RI Department of Health, the RI Commerce Corporation, and the RI Hospitality Association.

SAMSRI has updated its website banners to provide immediate, helpful visual links to International, National and Local information and resources. Of particular concern are small businesses and their workers shut down by state

ordered closures. SAMRI's links include, RI Emergency 911 Services, information regarding COVID-19, RI business support links, handling stress, and staying strong and positive during the crisis.

Through their website links, they are encouraging visitors to stay connected to Befrienders Worldwide and Samaritans USA.

To view, please visit [www.samaritansri.org](http://www.samaritansri.org)



# Morocco Casablanca Sourire De Reda Branch

## Sharing information between BW members

BW would like to thank the work carried out by our member Sourire De Reda Casablanca for producing the E-Book My CARE (Confinement Attitude & Resilience E-Book). The book deals with coping with isolation in general terms but is particularly relevant during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The E-Book has been shared throughout all BW members and has been very favourably received. BW would like to thank,

President Meryeme Bouzidi Laraki and Director Myriam Bhari of Sourire De Reda for their excellent work and for their enthusiasm to promote the vision of Befrienders Worldwide. The My CARE E-Book can be found by going to the [www.help.befrienders.org](http://www.help.befrienders.org) and clicking on the "Coping with Isolation" tab.

# UK Samaritans Central Office Core Development Programme for New Samaritans

People joining Samaritans may lead busy lives and find it difficult to fit the initial training around their other commitments. We wanted to make it easier to become a Samaritans volunteer, and decided to take a new approach to their training.

Rob Christopher and Lucia Capobianco from Samaritans' Learning and Development team took on the challenge of redesigning training received by our volunteers, with almost 40 years' experience of working and volunteering at Samaritans between them, including being part of their Branch Training team.

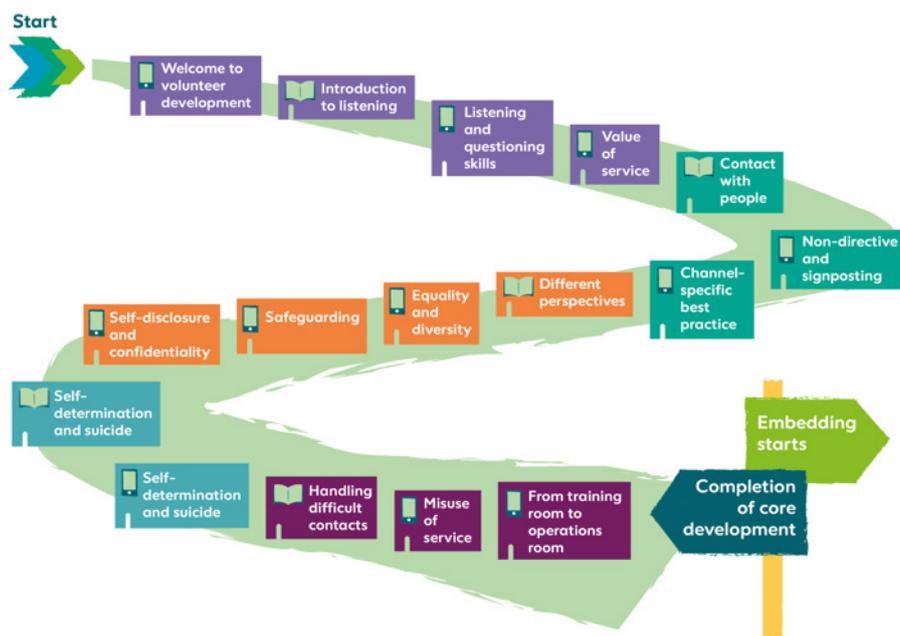
We looked at the role description of a listening volunteer, which shows the six key skills required to provide emotional support:

- Structuring a contact
- Support for self and others
- Warmth / empathy
- Honesty and self-disclosure
- Non-judgmental / acceptance
- Self-determination

Lucia Capobianco, Senior Learning and Development Officer: "Working out what core skills a listening volunteer needed took us right back to the beginning and enabled us to design the new learning course to develop these skills. It seemed right to name the new course *Core Development* as that is exactly what it does!"



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Next, we needed to determine what content should be delivered by trainers, and what could be included in online learning modules. The previous training contained a lot of information to be read out by the trainers and much of this was converted into engaging digital learning. This enables the trainers to spend time in the group sessions sharing their experiences, and leading exercises and discussions to help build the confidence of the new Samaritans.

The new course was broken into five stages, each designed to flow from one module to the next, building on skills and confidence at each step. Each stage consists of both group sessions and online learning.

We decided from the outset that Core Development should be a very positive experience and demonstrate how effective listening could be used to have a meaningful, supportive conversation. The course builds these skills in the early modules, and the new Samaritans can then apply their knowledge to having a conversation with someone who may be suicidal.

Rob Christopher, Learning and Development Manager: "We wanted to create a workbook that would bring the group sessions and the online learning together. There is space in the workbook for the new Samaritans to make notes, there are examples of phone calls and emails, feedback forms to complete after each skills practice, and a skills checklist for them to complete with their mentor to show their progress."



Ten branches across the UK and the Republic of Ireland ran

pilots of the new course. We incorporated their feedback into the final version which is now being used.

Rachel Calder, Head of Learning and Development said, "The branch trainers told us that they enjoyed the challenge of delivering these new materials and are keen to keep using the new format. Feedback from some branches was that they would also like an optional 'Mock Duty Room' exercise that can be run to increase the time for skills practice, so we included this in the final version of the materials."

"Portsmouth has really enjoyed piloting the new Core Development course and we have involved trainers from other branches in the region, so we are spreading the knowledge around. It is bang up to date and a good mix of serious content and some fun items."

*Liz, Portsmouth Samaritans*

Once the new Samaritans have completed Core Development, they spend time in their branch with a mentor responding to those that contact us. They then move on to the second part of their development journey, known as Embedding Development, where they can share their experiences and build their skill set even further.

"Training modules in stage 2 of the new volunteer development journey includes action learning sets, and modules on subjects such as self-harm, taking calls from prisons, outreach and mentoring. There is also an opportunity at this point for branches to add in their own content."

*Lucia Capobianco, Senior L&D Officer*

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“For a long time now, we have asked our volunteers to complete training each year – this keeps their skills current and ensures they are aware of any changes to Samaritans policy. It is really important that we continue doing this. We are working hard to provide interesting, relevant and up-to-date content that can be used by branch trainers so our volunteers can meet their commitment to continuous development.” Rob Christopher, L&D Manager

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic that has affected the whole world and resulted in lockdown throughout the UK and Ireland, prompted the L&D team to convert Core Development into a format that can be delivered remotely. The online version has ten modules that have 1 hour of discussions and exercises, followed by at least 30 minutes of skills practice with a trainer. Several branches took part in a pilot of this modified format and the content is now available for Samaritans branches in the UK and Ireland to start using immediately.

The Samaritans Learning and Development team have committed to keeping Core Development up to date – every six months the content will be reviewed and the feedback that we receive from the trainers and new Samaritans will be taken onboard.

Core Development consists of interactive eLearning with video, animations and participative exercises, engaging face-to-face (or virtual) classroom sessions, and realistic skills practice. We have great ambition that we will be able to work with Befrienders Worldwide to enable Core development, as well as our ongoing development modules, to be adapted and made available for your organisation worldwide. We hope to be able, in the next months via online conference, to show your members more detail and demonstrate some of the training we have created.

Finally, a word from one of the trainers who has delivered Core Development in their branch: *“It’s much easier and professional, and I also felt that with the old course it was very wordy.... It’s great! It’s the way forward definitely.”*