

Challenges being faced during the Global Covid-19 Pandemic

The Befrienders Worldwide (BW) Board of trustees would like to extend their grateful appreciation for the invaluable work that all our BW volunteers carry out tirelessly day after day during this global pandemic. BW has included the message below on our website as recognition of the challenges being faced during this pandemic.

Dear Friend,

Befrienders Worldwide and our members around the world are fully aware and touched by the extreme challenges we are facing with the Covid-19 virus. We know how difficult it is to experience sudden restrictions on our lives, including the impact on our family and on our relationships, the impact on our working lives, and the sense of loss that we feel when we are physically isolated.

In this situation it is more important than ever for all of us to feel socially connected and emotionally supported. Therefore, we should reach out to friends, family, neighbours and work colleagues, using all of the technology tools available; 'phone, Skype, internet chat, text, WhatsApp and email. At the same time, we can be more observant and sensitive to voices that reach out to us for help.

The Befrienders Worldwide member centres and volunteers continue to provide confidential, emotional support no matter the cause of suffering. Please do not hesitate to contact your local Befrienders Worldwide help service using this link to our directory of members. Our members will always respond to your contacts even though, in some cases, it may take a little longer than normal, due to the impact of the current situation.

An article on the Covid-19 Epidemic and Suicide by:

Professor Brian L Mishara Ph.D.

Director, CRISE (Centre for Research and Intervention on Suicide, Ethical Issues and End-of-Life Practices)

Professor, Psychology Department, Université du Québec à Montréal.

There are no indications that COVID-19 will increase suicide rates while the epidemic is ongoing. An epidemic certainly increases stress and anxiety, which can increase risk in vulnerable people. Also, some people quarantined with others who are abusive or have alcohol or drug problems may be more

at risk. But at the same time, focus on a common "external" threat can decrease suicide risk, at least in times of war and conflicts.

The main suicide risk when people are quarantined is for persons who are already thinking of suicide and who have mental health problems, and are not able to access mental health services, help and social supports because of a quarantine. Helplines all having great increases in call volume during the Covid19 epidemic. In most countries, the increase in calls is not from people with acute or high suicide

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To contact us:

To submit articles or information for the Newsletter, please contact communications@befrienders.org. Contact information for the Chair of the Trustees is chair@befrienders.org.

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risk. More people are calling because they are anxious or worried, but not often suicidal. Also, people with mental health problems who cannot see their therapist, social worker or counselor for support, or are isolated from family and friends, can call helplines for support. Helplines are an important way to compensate for physical isolation during these difficult times.

Research shows that in the past there were usually no generalized increases in suicide during a major epidemic, although there were some exceptional local situations where vulnerable people felt hopeless about avoiding getting ill and risking death. However, in the past people could not remain connected with others over the internet and with landlines and portable phones. Connection with others, even over the internet, can be a

powerful protective factor for suicide. People who are isolated without access to internet and telephones, are particularly vulnerable when quarantined. Still, suicides may not generally increase while people are in the throes of the epidemic crisis, except for specific situations of isolation and hopelessness where no one reaches out to offer support.

After the acute crisis is over, the impact on suicide rates will depend upon whether or not there is an increase in long-term economic hardships, and a sense of hopelessness. If there is a large increase in unemployment and the economic prospects for the future seem dire, suicide rates could significantly increase. The mid and long-term impact of Covid19 will also depend upon how hopeful things seem when the infection rates are substantially

lowered, besides how well the economy is actually doing. Although the reality of economic hardships is usually (but not always) associated with increases in suicides, feeling more hopeful despite the current situation is an important factor in decreasing suicide risk. Hopefulness is influenced by the economic reality. However, having hope is also a psychological factor that can be increased by the general feeling of people in a country, by religious beliefs and practices, by small acts of kindness towards others, and having someone to listen and understand one's feelings and concerns. The negative economic impact can be tempered by how hopeful people feel. Contacting a helpline by telephone, text message, chat or email can increase hope in the most difficult of situations.

Peter R Barker

In the New Zealand New Year's honours of 2020 Peter was appointed by Her Majesty The Queen as a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in recognition for his services to the community: in particular to Samaritans & Befrienders Worldwide.

Peter became a Samaritan with Wellington (New Zealand) Samaritans in 1994. Over the next 25+ years he held numerous operational and governance positions; He was Co-ordinating Director for four years and is currently Chair of the Board. Peter has been part of teams that organised a number of conferences for all Samaritan centres in NZ.

Samaritans Wellington, NZ answers about 24,000 calls each year. In recent years we have been able to respond to some unique challenges in our country. These have included disasters like the Christchurch & Kaikoura earthquakes, the Muslim Mosque massacres and now

the Covid -19 Pandemic Lockdown ... all these increased our caller's needs.

In 2004 he helped create Samaritans New Zealand, an umbrella organisation to provide a national focus and support to the individual Centres. Peter has held representative roles for Wellington and been a Board member of Samaritans NZ.

In 2005 he became the Australia & New Zealand Regional Coordinator for Befrienders Worldwide Steering Group which was established with the support of Samaritans UK & Republic of Ireland. Later he became part of a small team that developed the groundwork and initial strategy for the current independent Befrienders Worldwide Charity.

When the current Befrienders Worldwide Charity was established in 2012 Peter was appointed to the Board as a Trustee and elected as Secretary,

positions he has held until March 2020 when he retired after completing his three terms on the Board.

More recently Peter helped establish Project Unite - an international joint call-sharing service between the Samaritan Centres in Australia & New Zealand to provide a 24/7 service to both countries and making use of the different times zones.

Peter has kindly accepted the role of BW Ambassador for which we are very grateful to have his continued guidance and knowledge within the BW organisation.

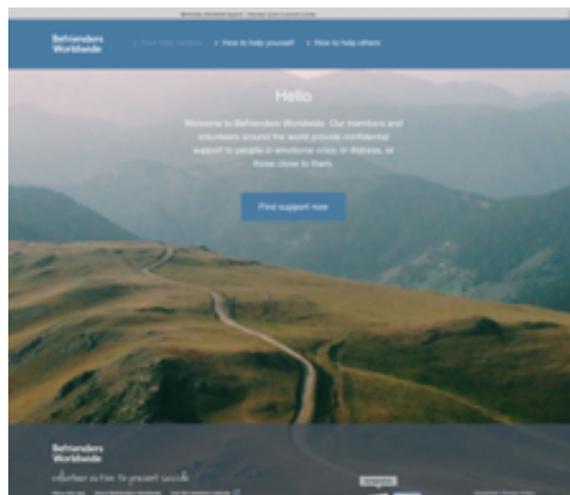


Update on the BW Client Help App

Our BW Client Help App has completed its development phase and we are now migrating all our member languages into the App before final checking and launching.

We plan to roll out the App to each member country as soon as the validation testing has been completed.

We have been very pleased with the feedback provided to us from our members and we would like to thank our service providers Base Creative for developing the App and to Oscar Monterio for his assistance in driving the project.



South Asia Conference Postponement

It is with regret that the BW Board of trustees and Sri Lanka Sumithrayo (SLS) have jointly decided to postpone the November 2020 South Asian Conference in Sri Lanka, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. A new date in 2021 for the Sri Lanka conference will be arranged and announced in due course.

The decision was taken after taking into account all relevant factors relating to the consequences of the pandemic, especially BW members' priorities and wellbeing, ongoing travel restrictions and concerns on the impact of local and regional economies.

The BW Chair and Board of trustees would like to express our gratitude and appreciation for the huge effort made by the SLS team and look forward to a successful conference next year.

BW Governance Profiles of the BW Board of Trustees

Martin Taylor Chair of Trustees

Martin Taylor has an MA in Economics from Cambridge University and is a qualified Chartered Accountant. He spent his early career in finance and consultancy and then joined Inchcape plc, the international automotive distribution and retail Group.

In 2009 he moved on to build a 'portfolio career' which now includes his role as Deputy Chair of the Board of Governors of Middlesex University and Chair of Infinity Health, an early stage health technology business.

In 2012 Martin was appointed as one of the founding trustees and Chair of Befrienders Worldwide, when the organisation became an independent registered charity.

Martin has worked in various international roles, including a total of 18 years working and living with his family in Greece and in Belgium. He now lives in London.

Oscar Monterio Treasurer

Oscar has worked in IT for many years developing computers system for a wide variety of businesses. He started helping out Befrienders Worldwide by managing its website a few years

ago. He was then co-opted as treasurer and now manages the finances of the organisation.

Oscar is married to Claire, a teacher and they have three children.

David Brodtman

David is a Psychotherapist, based in London. He has a special interest in working with people affected by physical disability or life shortening health conditions.

He became involved with BW through his involvement as a Samaritan volunteer with Brent branch, in North West London, since 1985. During that time, as well as being a regular volunteer responding to telephone, text and e mail callers, he has undertaken a number of roles including shift leader, deputy director, committee chair and director. He volunteered with Samaritans' Festival branch, providing emotional support at music festivals around the country, for approx. 4 years, and has also had a number of roles in the wider organisation, both nationally and regionally, most notably as London Regional Training Officer. His passion and interest have always been in training and enabling volunteers to provide the best service possible to

callers – wherever and however they may make contact.

For a number of years, David has been involved with Befrienders Worldwide, being a member of the team that organised and presented the International Training Event as part of the Samaritan's annual York conference, and was an active member of the team that organised the international conference in Thailand in 2008. He has supported centres in various countries and various ways whilst being a member of the training group, and has visited centres in the US, Thailand, Malaysia, and Spain.

He became BW Training coordinator in March 2014. He shares his London home with his partner, and their rescued spaniel.

Maggie Galliano

Maggie Galliano is from Gibraltar but has lived in London for the past 40 years. She has been a Personal Assistant to a well-known designer for many years. Previously, Maggie has worked as a Secretary/Personal Assistant in a Mexican bank in the City, helping to set it up from scratch, and for one of the owners of a renowned Sherry house. Having grown up bilingual (English/Spanish), Maggie has always tried to use her languages in her working life. In her thirties, Maggie took a degree in Hispanic Studies at Kings College London, as a mature student.

Maggie has been a Samaritan volunteer at Central London Branch since 2004. She started as a regular volunteer and slowly took on more and varying roles within the branch such as leading Information Hours, helping with Selection and Training, being a Shift Leader and, after being a Trustee for a year, Maggie was asked to become Chair, a role which she held for three years. After that, Maggie was selected to be Director of the branch for three years. She is now back to being a regular volunteer.

Maggie's involvement with BW began when she helped David Brodtman with

the training of the first volunteers in Gibraltar as they took their initial steps in setting up a helpline. She is currently a Trustee and focuses on keeping in touch with all our branches worldwide.

Merab Mulindi

Merab Mulindi is a Counselling Psychologist (M.A.) with a passion for suicide prevention. She is a founder member of Befrienders Kenya and has hands-on experience of working both as a volunteer at Befrienders Kenya and also as a member of the centre management team. Before appointment as a BW Trustee, Merab served as BW Regional Coordinator for Africa. Apart from the Befrienders Kenya centre volunteer activities, Merab is also greatly involved in educating communities on suicide prevention and in efforts aimed at reduction of stigma through a joint project with International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP). Through Befrienders Kenya she is currently the national representative for IASP in Kenya.

Merab is married to Patrick Mulindi and they have three children.

Melanie Paranvavitana

Mela joined Sri Lanka Sumithrayo in 1994 wanting to help people in need and quite unexpectedly her life changed. She stated, "Volunteering does that to you, kindness, acceptance, respect. People will always remember how you made them feel". What she recalls most is the support and care she received from all the volunteers both in urban and rural areas of Sri Lanka. Working together as a family is a page in her life she will never forget.

Sri Lanka Sumithrayo shares a very close bond with Befrienders India and Kaan Pete Roy in Bangladesh but, it is Mela's hopes that by interacting with BW Centres worldwide it will help change the feeling of isolation to one of collaboration; working together to expand our innovative plans in order to help and support people who are desperate and suicidal worldwide.

I have enjoyed and appreciated this

new opportunity I have been given, especially being able to share the news from all of our centers in South Asia with the BW board members during our regular video conference meetings. I can see more than ever the enormous steps BW has taken in connecting with BW members worldwide.

Mela joined the Board of trustees of BW in 2018

Paulius Skruibis

I'm a PhD in Social Sciences (Psychology) and I'm the Chairman of the Board of Youth Line in Lithuania. I'm teaching and working as a researcher in Vilnius University and have a private practice as a clinical psychologist.

I was a volunteer in Youth Line from 1999 to 2002 and spent more than 1,000 hours taking calls. I also was a president of Lithuanian Telephone Emergency Services from 2007 to 2013.

I think that volunteering in Youth Line shaped me personally and professionally a lot. Actually, before joining Youth Line in my teenage years I called Youth Line and was supported during a very difficult time for me. I'm grateful for that and want to give back while volunteering as a trustee both in Youth Line and Befrienders Worldwide.

I'm married to my wife Irma and have two children.

Dr. Marion Gibson MSSc, Dip S.W., CQSW

and Advanced Dip. in Psychological Trauma Management

Initial training as a student nurse were followed by fifteen years of community support working in the front line of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland supporting those traumatised by sectarian terrorism in an interface area of Belfast.

In 2001 Marion gained her Doctorate on 'Supporting employees and Organisations who face Traumatic incidents in their workplace.

Following her work in Thailand at the time of the Asian Tsunami in 2004, Dr.

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Gibson was a founding member of the British Red Cross Psychological Support Team.

Marion's research, publications, training and continued practical experience has led to the opportunity of lecturing worldwide in such countries as the Philippines, Poland, Estonia, Belarus, Africa, Australia, India, Singapore, Hong Kong, the USA and South America.

Dr. Gibson has long been involved with Mission to Seafarers (MtS), providing training for MtS globally and was a key contributor to the production of interactive online training on responding to maritime disasters. Marion was also instrumental in setting

up an emotional support service for the seafarers and office staff of a major shipowner in 2016.

Marion published her book 'Order from Chaos - Responding to traumatic incidents' (first published in 1991 with an up-dated Third Edition in 2006, The Policy Press).

Pornthip Yoskittipat

Pornthip graduated in Social Sciences and then spent most of her career working in the hospitality business.

She joined the Samaritans of Thailand in 1986, was promoted to Director of the Thailand Samaritans in 2009 until 2013. Pornthip now devotes her time as

a trainer for the Samaritans of Thailand.

Pornthip was appointed BW Regional Co-ordinator East Asia in 2009, and was appointed to the BW Board of Trustees in 2019.

Final Thoughts

A message from a caller from Spain to Befrienders

I simply felt the need to let you know of my situation. I thought of taking my own life and looked desperately for help on the internet. I found your website and read it and I was very grateful to know of the existence of

people like you. Something specific made me change my perspective on things. And it was that I read that suicide will always be a permanent solution to a temporary problem. I can now see that my problems are

temporary and that I can get through them. Thank you again for caring about people. I hope I am not being inappropriate, I simply felt the need to thank you.