

SAMARITANS NEWS

AUTUMN 2014

NEWS + VIEWS FOR SAMARITANS PEOPLE



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SAMARITANS

INBOX



Edited by
Lynsey Rose

Top clicks

→ Our new **DEAL schools resources** are out now! If your branch works with schools in your local area, do take a look.

→ Read a blog from our Chair every month in our *Samaritans News* e-newsletter. Search '**Stephen Hoddell's blog**' to catch Stephen's final entries until December. After that search '**Jenni's blog**' to hear from our brand new Chair, Jenni McCartney.

→ Questions about the **support Samaritans provides**? What do callers want from us? Share your views.

→ There's a new **partnerships** hub on Samsnet, with everything you need to help set up a local partnership.

→ Festival branch need your help to support **Crisis at Christmas** to help the homeless...

→ Got a local event that you'd like nearby branches to come to? You can post the info in '**share local events**'.

→ Keep an eye on our '**volunteer vacancies**' section for the latest roles, including senior leadership positions.

+ **Type the words in bold into the search bar on Samsnet for more on all of these stories**

Welcome to the Autumn edition of *Samaritans News*. Our centre spread covers our Chair Election that took place at September's Council of Samaritans. You can also read features about our partnership with Network Rail, as well as where we're up to with Connect. In our Best Practice column, Stoke and Newcastle branch share how they are opening doors to build links in their local community.

There for all of us

In response to the viewpoint question, 'Can a volunteer be a caller?' I'd like to share my experience of calling Samaritans while being a volunteer.

I had broken up with my boyfriend and was upset, but not suicidal. I was lying awake in the middle of the night and thought 'what better place to turn to than Samaritans'? I did not mention that I was a Samaritans volunteer as it wasn't relevant. Talking things through really helped, and I got a good night's sleep.

The next day I told my Branch Director how valuable I found calling, and was surprised to be told that it is not good practice for volunteers to use our service. This stayed with me for many years, always questioning 'why not?' in my mind. I really believe in Samaritans, and the fact that we are there for anyone at any time is something I really value.

I have since used Samaritans a second time. It was following a very difficult confidential conversation I had with my manager at work and I needed to talk without breaking confidentiality – so again, not one for a chat with friends. I did feel at the time I was breaking some kind of 'golden rule' so I was very pleased to read about other volunteers like Holly and Bex who have used the service. I loved the quote 'volunteers are callers on good days.' I believe our service should be there for everyone, and that includes our volunteers.

Thank you, Samaritans!

Anonymous



A happy ending for Cyril

Reverend Cyril Grant was featured on the cover of *Samaritans News* in 2012, celebrating half a century of volunteering at Bristol branch. Since retiring, Cyril has celebrated his 95th birthday and became an author for the first time – releasing his autobiography *A Good Samaritan*, which I helped to write.

Cyril founded the Bristol branch of Samaritans in 1964 – the same year I first met him, aged 17. Cyril has been awarded both an MBE and the Bristol Lord Mayor's Medal for his work with Samaritans.

Since publishing his book, Cyril has been contacted by family members he did not know he had. The book tells how Cyril's mother Leah died when he was just eight. He became good friends with his step-nieces, marrying all three of them to their husbands, but didn't believe he had any direct family still alive.

However, it now turns out that Leah was part of a large family, and Leah's niece Olga heard about the book. They thought he had emigrated to the United States in 1947 and never returned. Her family have now been in touch with Cyril and visited several times.

So, through his endeavours of writing his book, he has found a long-lost family – adding a special post-script to his amazing story.

John Funnell – co-author of A Good Samaritan

CONTACT US

Email your letters to letters@samaritans.org or write to Lynsey Rose, Samaritans, Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF

There are many more ways to get involved with *Samaritans News*.

We want to hear your:

- examples of best practice
- interesting or unusual branch news
- ideas for viewpoint, voxpops or polls
- suggestions for articles

Green Sam

SamsNews is printed using vegetable-based inks.

Befrienders Worldwide

Martin Taylor, Chair of Trustees for Befrienders Worldwide, explains what they do – and how they link to Samaritans.



"Befrienders Worldwide was originally established by Chad Varah in 1974 and began as Befrienders International. Chad's vision was to spread the core principles of Samaritans' service around the world to bring together an international network of Samaritans help centres. Befrienders Worldwide was launched as an independent organisation in 2012 and Samaritans became a member in April 2014. We are a UK registered charity administered by a Board of Trustees.

Befrienders Worldwide is now a dynamic and expanding global network of 360 emotional support centres in 33 countries, spanning five continents. Our network is staffed by more than 25,000 volunteers who offer support to an estimated seven million people a year. All volunteers actively listen to people who are going through a difficult time.

Befrienders Worldwide has a strong history of supporting organisations like Samaritans, helping them grow and establishing best practice for emotional support on a global

scale. Members are given access to training materials and support via mentoring and twinning with centres in other countries.

Members and their contact details are all listed on the Befrienders Worldwide website at befrienders.org. There are approximately 60,000 visitors to the website every month, with a large proportion coming from the UK.

Samaritans contact details are on our website, and over time we hope that all Samaritans branches will have the opportunity to connect with the Befrienders Worldwide network. We share common goals, beliefs and ideals. Going forward together will help volunteers from both Samaritans and Befrienders Worldwide all over the world to connect and share their experiences of the incredible work being done.

We are delighted that Samaritans has become a member of Befrienders Worldwide, continuing the tradition of very close co-operation between our two organisations."

Facebook – on the same page

Our One Voice Policy originally stated that branches should shut down their Facebook and Twitter accounts. At Council of Samaritans in July 2013, Branch Directors/Chairs in Scotland asked if this could be reviewed, and if we could explore a safe way for branches to keep Facebook and Twitter.

A great deal of work has gone into exploring this, a social media working group, made up of both volunteers and staff was created, and the group drafted a proposal that laid out a new approach to social media, which was signed off by the Board of Trustees in January this year.

Branches with Facebook were asked to turn off the comment function, to make the page as safe as possible for callers. Unfortunately, earlier this year Facebook removed this function and a new proposal went to the Regional Directors



in August this year to address this change. The outcome was that the Communications team have been asked to liaise with Facebook to see if this functionality can be restored.

In the meantime branches with Facebook have been asked to unpublish their page, so that it is not viewable to members of the public. Don't worry – this won't lose any of the content or likes – it just hides the page. Instructions for how to do this have been sent to your Branch Directors/Chairs in Scotland. Branches who do not currently have Facebook

have been asked not to create one for now.

We hope that this will be a temporary measure while we negotiate with Facebook and we will keep you all updated via your Branch Directors/Chairs in Scotland. Thanks for your ongoing patience.

Social ties prevent suicide

A new study by the Center for Global Health in the US shows that men who have more social connections – such as through marriage or work – have a lower risk of suicide. Researchers used data from a study of 34,901 male health professionals aged 40-75, asking about marital status, social network size and frequency of contact with social ties. In the 24 years of the study, there were 147 suicides – four suicides per 10,000 people each year among the participants with the lowest social integration, compared to 1.5 suicides per 10,000 people per year among those with strong social groups. This reflects our own findings in our research *Men and suicide: Why it's a social issue*.

Postnatal care lacking

The NHS is only offering postnatal depression care in a quarter of its NHS trusts – despite one in ten mothers suffering from postnatal depression. Even in areas where postnatal care is in place, many mental health midwives and doctors only work part time. Maternal suicide is a leading cause of death in the first year of childbirth and the National Childbirth Trust says more must be done to support new mothers. Find out more about our work with the NHS on page 4.

Leaving custody safely

Independent Police Commission data showed sixty eight people took their own lives within two days of being released from police custody in England and Wales in 2013/14. The number of deaths while in police custody is on the decline nationally, but more needs to be done for those suffering from mental health issues once they leave custody. Our branches also work on outreach projects in this area.



News in brief

Helping friends on Facebook

World Suicide Prevention Day took place on 10 September, bringing together individuals and organisations from around the world with an interest in suicide prevention and saving lives.

As part of the theme of partnerships this year, we've teamed up with Facebook to create *Help a Friend in Need*, a guide for people to help identify when one of their friends may be struggling to cope online. The guide offers suggestions on how to approach their friend, what to say, how to react and what to avoid. Read the guide by searching for 'Facebook' on Samsnet.

We partner with North Essex NHS Trust



Catherine Johnstone and Andrew Geldard

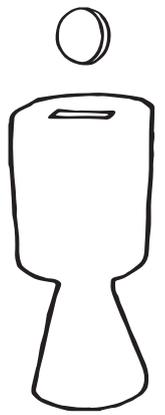
Also as part of World Suicide Prevention Day, Samaritans' groundbreaking partnership with North Essex Partnership University Foundation Trust (NEP) was launched at the House of Commons.

We will work with the NHS Foundation Trust to offer support for vulnerable residents and patients in north Essex, Suffolk and Thurrock.

The partnership between Samaritans and NEP will offer vital help for people experiencing mental illness and will support the Government's National Suicide Prevention Strategy to reduce the number of suicides in England.

The POD

have you popped in?



The POD is our new online resource that is stocked with all the awareness materials you need for your fundraising and outreach work including posters, pocket cards, collecting tins and t-shirts.

Over the next few months we will continue adding features to The POD, including new volunteer recruitment and Listener scheme materials, new products, and popular items that are currently created via the Branch Design Request service.

Who can access The POD?

All Branch Directors/Chairs in Scotland and Regional Marketing Officers automatically have access to The POD. Each branch can also have one additional user, ideally their Branch Publicity Officer (BPO) or the person who

historically ordered from the Product Catalogue.

If you think the additional POD user for your branch should be you, please speak to your Branch Director/Chair in Scotland. By limiting access we are giving branches more control over what is being ordered to help avoid multiple delivery charges. Volunteers who have access to The POD will find it in the drop-down menu in the top left hand corner of the toolbar on the homepage of Samsnet.

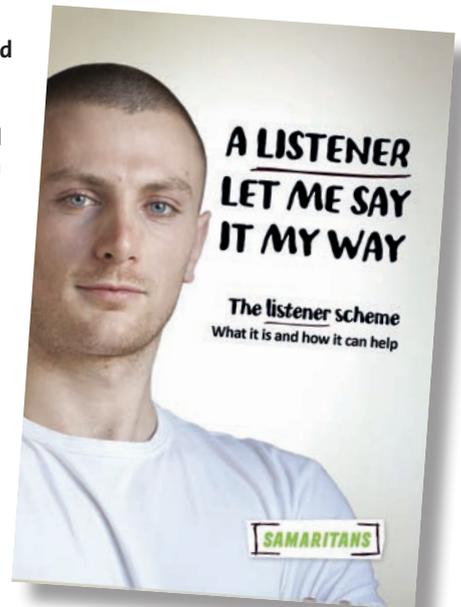
+ There is more information, as well as frequently asked questions about The POD on Samsnet. Search 'The POD' or email thepod@samaritans.org

New DVDs to promote the Listener scheme

Earlier this year we released a DVD to help promote the Listener scheme in female prisons in England and Wales. This winter we will be launching the male version. The male DVD will consist of two chapters, one for use in Young Offender Institutions (YOI) and the other for use in adult prisons. The DVD has been designed to introduce new prisoners to the Listener scheme, let them know it is available in their prison and how they can speak to a Listener.

The new DVD will be sent out to all prisons in England and Wales (there are plans to produce one for Scottish prisons soon) and to all branches that support an adult male prison or YOI. Like the female DVD, we will be recommending that the film is shown during prisoner inductions, so new prisoners are told of the Listener scheme when they arrive in prison.

Thank you to all the volunteers who have worked with the Prison Support and Communications teams at General Office to help produce both DVDs and a big thank you to Norwich branch who funded the production of both DVDs.



+ If you are interested in finding out more about our work in prisons, or would like to get involved, please speak to your Branch Prison Support Officer, your Regional Prison Support Officer, or get in touch with the Prison Support team at General Office at prisonsupport@samaritans.org

Exeter, Mid and East Devon – exhibiting our talents

To celebrate fifty years of Samaritans in Exeter, volunteers Louise, Sally, Judy and Liz put together an exhibition of pieces of art and craft work produced by thirty three of their volunteers. This included paintings, photography, woodwork, ceramics, textiles and calligraphy.



The exhibition also highlighted the branch's relationship with Exeter prison by including paintings and poetry from prisoners.

The exhibition attracted more than a hundred visitors each day, with volunteers on hand from the branch. Not only did the



volunteers help with the exhibit but they also ended up doing a number of face to face calls, and took enquiries from

prospective volunteers. Branch Director Helen says, "As well as all the amazing artists, I must pay tribute to our 20 fantastic cake makers – they really did us proud. During the exhibition we saw another side of our fellow volunteers – the skill and care that we put into other activities besides being a listening volunteer with Samaritans."

Celebrating a special volunteer in Central London

Central London branch held an event this summer to celebrate a special volunteer. Alan first joined CLS in June 1964, so 2014 marked 50 years continuous service at the branch. Today, Alan still does regular Tuesday morning shifts at the branch.

On the day, Alan heard messages from former volunteers and was acknowledged for his work with Holloway prison at the beginning of the Listener scheme.

Alan spoke with great humour about being trained by Chad Varah at St Stephen Walbrook church in 1964. He also spoke movingly of his 50 years at Samaritans.

The branch nominated Alan for a Mayor of London 'Team London' award, given out every year to outstanding volunteers – and he won! Alan also received a lifetime achievement award from Boris Johnson at City Hall in September.



Alan celebrates at Central London branch

Samaritans scores in Ireland

Samaritans and the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) have come together to offer support to people struggling to cope across the thirty two counties in Ireland.

This summer, volunteers from our branches were invited to two football finals.

It was a big stage for Samaritans, with more than 62,000 people at Croke Park stadium in Dublin and more than 30,000 at the football match in St Tiernach's Park in Clones.

Majella, Regional Marketing Officer for Ireland says, "We were delighted that Dublin football player Michael Darragh McCauley spoke about the importance of talking when things are getting us down, and reminded the



Our volunteers on the pitch

crowd that Samaritans is always there. This was broadcast on the big screen in Croke Park followed by the contact numbers for both ROI and NI. We were so proud to see the number on the screen. At the grounds in

Clones, there was a similar broadcast of our number and a photo opportunity at half time on the pitch."

Between both venues, thirty seven volunteers gave out 13,000 wristbands and 10,000 pens to the football fans. Coupled with the big screen advertising and match programme article, this was a fantastic opportunity for us to raise awareness of our service at two huge venues.

News in brief

Happy birthday Hastings and Rother

Hastings and Rother branch recently celebrated its 50th birthday. Volunteers had a stand in Hastings town centre, and chatted to people

passing and collected £400 over two days. Hilary from the branch says, "Our beautiful cake was supplied by a local bakery and was cut by our Deputy Mayor, Councillor Judy Rogers."



Game on!



The team from Glasgow branch

Glasgow branch volunteers helped out at the Commonwealth Games this summer. The team supported a number of sports at the event across various venues, as well as attending training sessions. All of the volunteers who took part said it was a 'once in a lifetime experience.'

Remembering Joan

Volunteer Joan McIntosh passed away earlier this year. She was awarded an MBE for her involvement in setting up the Listener scheme in many Scottish prisons. She was also a Branch Visitor. Joan Cameron from Glasgow branch says, "Joan had been a volunteer for 28 years and she will be sadly missed."



SAMARITANS – THE A NEW CHAIR TO LEAD OUR NEW STRATEGY

At September's Council of Samaritans, the spotlight was on our strategy for 2015-2021 – as well as electing a new Chair to lead us for the next three years.

Overview of the weekend

Council of Samaritans (CoS) took place on 12-14 September at Hinckley Island Hotel in Leicestershire. The Board of Trustees presented the new strategy to Council, which was positively endorsed by Branch Directors/Chairs in Scotland and Regional Directors.

Council members learned more about E-logging and had their questions answered about Volunteering and Connect. There was also an excellent Sharing Good Ideas session on Sunday morning where branches shared their successful outreach work.

And last but not least, we elected our new Chair!



Choosing a Chair at Council of Samaritans

Our new Chair Jenni McCartney, will take over from Stephen in January 2015. Jenni is currently Regional Director for the South region and volunteers at Basingstoke branch.

On Friday night, Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind, moderated the Chair candidate presentations and question and answer session. Paul has a long history with Samaritans, first working as a Press Officer at General Office, before becoming a Samaritans volunteer and then Branch Director at Ealing branch, making him a great choice to run this session.

The four candidates had a huge breadth of experience between them, with 100 years of listening experience in more than 30 roles at Samaritans – and a huge passion for the charity. Each candidate gave a ten minute presentation, followed by questions from Council members.

The four candidates were Peter Hammond, Jenni McCartney, Cynthia Pearce and Marion Sacharin – and they all gave passionate pitches about their vision for the future of Samaritans.

In her pitch, Jenni discussed how she would make a difference if she were elected Chair. She said, "In three years' time I'd like the quality and availability for our callers to be excellent. We need to

adapt the way we recruit and work to reach more volunteers. We have people out there with expertise and enthusiasm and we need to harness these people.

We must get better at managing change and adapting – giving volunteers more information so they can embrace change. We need to feel connected across the organisation and build stronger relationships.

The ethos of trust and respect we show to the callers should extend to one another. Every role and every person – staff and volunteers – contributes to our shared vision. We have around 20,000 ordinary people giving their time to do something extraordinary, and at the heart of it is one person reaching out to another in their time of need. It's quite simple and it works."



Question time

Paul then put questions to the four candidates. Questions were submitted by volunteers and taken from the floor and Jenni answered questions on our finances and our future. She said, "If there's money in the organisation that has been donated to us, it should be put towards making the service free to callers, not sat in a bank account." Jenni sees our availability and the quality of our service as the issues she'd most like to address.

On Saturday evening it was announced that Jenni had been elected our new Chair. Jenni was overwhelmed by the positive response she received and said that it was a real privilege to be chosen, especially as all the candidates would have done such a good job.

Jenni says, "Having been a Samaritans volunteer for over 25 years, I'm proud and delighted to have been elected as your new Chair. I'd like to thank Council for placing their trust in me to lead our fantastic organisation at such a pivotal and exciting time in the history of Samaritans. I very much look forward to building on the great work done by Stephen over the last three years and to working with you all from January."

NEXT CHAPTER

MEET JENNI, OUR NEW CHAIR ...

Why did you choose to start volunteering for Samaritans?

I was at a stage in my life where I felt settled for the first time in a long time, and I wanted to give something back – and a leaflet for Samaritans came through my letterbox. I didn't know much about them, so I called the number. Selection was a lot easier than – I was interviewed the same week, and the training started the next week! I kept going, trusting that they would tell me if I wasn't up to it.

What made you move into a senior volunteering role?

After I had been a volunteer for three or four years, I was asked 'could you spare a bit more time' and it went from there...

What is the best thing about volunteering for Samaritans?

It has to be the people – both callers and volunteers – I have met volunteers who have inspired me to believe in what we do, and in myself, and I have had contact with callers who just took my breath away with what they were dealing with.

What is the biggest change you've seen since you first started?

I think the principle of what we do hasn't changed that much, but we are much more professional – providing a consistent approach to training, how we support our callers and our volunteers.

How would other people describe you?

That's a tough one – I asked the people who encouraged me to stand for this, and they said things I probably wouldn't have, like I get to the heart of what we do, and that I'm inspirational, direct and honest. I think I have got to the point in my life – probably a bit late – where I say what I think and do what I believe in.

Do you have a day job? What else do you enjoy doing?

I used to work for a large American IT Company, so very different from Samaritans. I gave that up four years ago, and do a little bit of freelance consulting in Business Development. In my spare time,



I love art galleries, listening to music, reading murder mysteries, good food with good friends, walking – strolling, mainly – and travelling. I would like to think I can paint, but I don't do it often. I know I will give a lot of time to Samaritans, but I want to keep some time to travel and see my friends, too.

What do you look forward to about becoming Chair?

Making a difference to the organisation – improving quality – improving the way we all work together. Of course I don't think I can do any of that on my own, and I am most looking forward to meeting volunteers and finding out what motivates them, and what they want to contribute.

Bidding farewell to Stephen

Also at Council of Samaritans, we gave an early farewell to current Chair Stephen Hoddell for his hard work over the past three years.

Catherine said, "We couldn't let Council pass without recognising what a fantastic Chair Stephen has been. He has attended CoS in a senior leadership role for nine consecutive years and occupied almost all of the senior leadership roles in his 41 years at Samaritans."

Catherine acknowledged Stephen's significant

contribution to the direction of Samaritans. Since becoming Chair, Stephen has played a significant part in the roll out of the Network Rail programme, negotiating the Schools policy as part of Step by Step, and of course, bringing in Connect.

Importantly, he spent the past eighteen months helping develop the new strategy – making Samaritans fit for the future. Thank you, Stephen, we'll miss you!



Our Chairs – Jenni and Stephen

How we're tackling rail suicides

The Network Rail team celebrates another five years of the Network Rail campaign...

The challenge to tackle rail suicides is huge, and the support we receive from branches and volunteers across England, Scotland and Wales is essential. Our Network Rail partnership has given Samaritans huge exposure – and numerous opportunities to reach out to potential callers. We thought we'd take this opportunity to update you on some of the main elements of our partnership, and how you're really making a difference.

Our training – saving lives

The most publicised element of our partnership, the Managing Suicidal Contacts course, has now been delivered to more than 6,000 rail industry personnel, teaching Samaritans listening skills and saving lives across the rail network.

Here's a short example from one of our intervention case studies: Andrew from Network Rail arrived at Frodsham station to talk to a man

who was clearly upset and had been standing on the tracks. "As soon as I saw him I thought back to my training from Samaritans. I knew that this was the time to employ the skills I had learnt. I approached the man, who seemed to be confused and disorientated. He told me that he wanted to die. I was nervous as I hadn't been involved in a situation like this before, but the thoughts of my training gave me the confidence to speak to him."

"As we waited for the emergency services, we spoke for about 20 minutes. I continually let him know that I was there for him and that I had time to talk. I asked him if he had anyone to talk to. When he said no I recommended Samaritans."

Our Trauma Support Training course – aimed at managers and Trade Union reps who support those affected by an incident – is also proving popular. We've trained more than 1,000 delegates so far.

Both courses have received an average score of 4.8 out of 5 from people who've attended.



Post-incident support in place

We have now delivered post-incident support after a rail fatality at over 150 stations, which illustrates the great service you, as volunteers, are offering to your local stations.

Support after an incident is often provided on the same or following day by local branches, and can include one-to-one sessions with staff, general awareness-raising activities, and providing a supportive presence for

passengers and staff. Search for 'Intervening with Network Rail' on Samsnet to read a feature about this side of the partnership, including feedback and comments from volunteers and the rail industry.

“ The thoughts of my training gave me the confidence to speak to him ”

Outreach opportunities

This partnership has also offered many opportunities to grow branch outreach activities within your local communities. This was best illustrated during Talk to Us this year. On 24 July, thirty two Samaritans branches attended thirty three stations across the North West and North East of England during the morning rush hour. Many railway stations are hubs of their communities, and are a great place to raise awareness of our service.

'We're in your corner' campaign

Our campaign posters targeted at white males in their 30s, 40s and 50s are now up on the walls of countless – we've lost count! – stations across England, Scotland and Wales as well as in the wider community. The 'We're in your corner' campaign, now in its third year, is still going strong and relevant as ever. The Network Rail team plan to refresh the campaign in 2015.

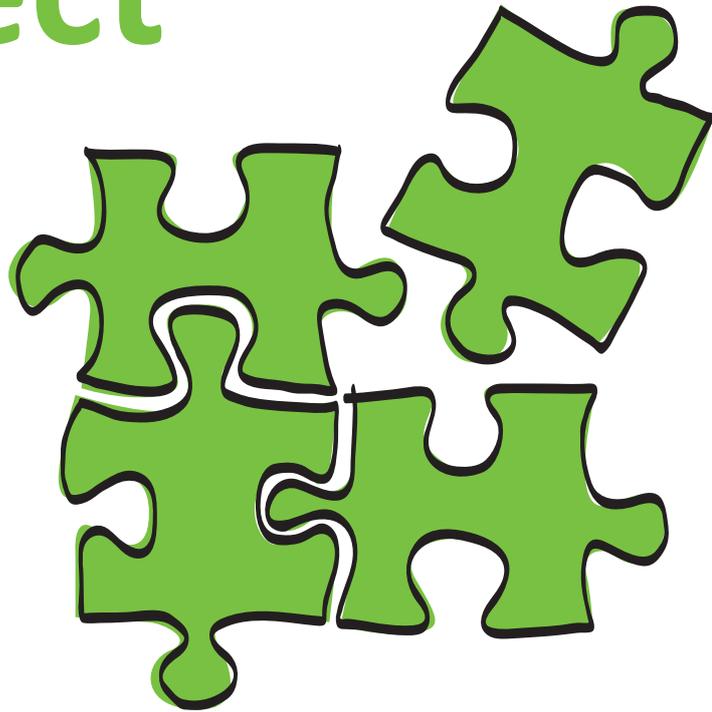


Our adverts on train ticket barriers

+ Examples of our intervention work can be found on our website at samaritans.org/networkrail or for more information email railcompanies@samaritans.org

Get ready for Connect

By now, you've probably heard about Connect. But what is it and why are we making this change?



 Connect is our new system for connecting callers with volunteers. At the moment, there are times when our callers get an engaged tone, even though there are volunteers available in other regions. With Connect's 'intelligent' system, there will be more callers getting through to volunteers, rather than hearing the engaged tone, especially during the night when there are fewer volunteers on duty.

So once we go live with Connect, callers will always get through – if there is a volunteer available to speak to them somewhere. Connect will also help us to gather better data on call patterns, so we can find out when we need more volunteers on duty.

What will be different for volunteers on shift?

When Connect goes live later this year, all listening volunteers will need to sign in on a Connect PC when you come on duty and update your status throughout the shift to let Connect know that you are available to take calls. This way, Connect will know where available volunteers are at any one time and will be able to connect our callers quicker.

Connect has been developed specifically for Samaritans branches, and it's designed to be simple and straightforward to use. If you are at all worried about using Connect, please speak to your Branch Champion, who can offer support if you need it.

When will we start using Connect in branch?

We have just finished moving all our local and national telephone numbers from the current provider (generally BT) to Vodafone. All regions have already made the switch and are now taking calls on the new Vodafone helplines. That means we have now reached Milestone 2 – the final stage before going live!

If everything goes well, we hope to go live with Connect in November. This is when calls will be routed to volunteers who are signed in to Connect and available to take calls. But as always with technology projects of this size, delays are still possible.

“Connect will know where volunteers are available at any time and will be able to connect our callers quicker”

How can volunteers get ready for Connect?

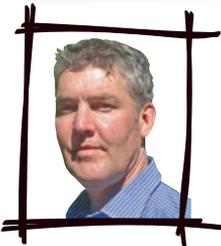
The best way to learn about what you will need to do when Connect is live is to attend a training session in your branch. This training should only take about an hour and will teach you everything you need to know to do a shift once Connect is live.

Don't forget to practise using Connect on shift after you've done your training, before we go live at Milestone 3. No calls will be affected during this time, so this is your chance to build your confidence and make sure you're ready for your first shift when Connect is live. We won't be able to go live with Connect until enough volunteers are signing in regularly, so please make it a habit to sign in to Connect every time you come on shift.

Signing in

It's also really important that you learn and remember your Samaritans Account username and password, so you can sign in to Connect and take calls when we go live. To make sure that you know your Samaritans Account username and password, please visit samaritansnet.org and try signing in. You can also recover your username or password from this page, if you've forgotten them. If you don't think you have a Samaritans Account, please contact your Branch Intranet Administrator, who will be able to check if one has been set up for you.

 To find out more about Connect, take a look at the Samaritans Connect pages on Samsnet. If you have a specific question you can't find the answer to on Samsnet, please contact connect@samaritans.org

(The Nations)

By Andrew Sim, Executive Director for Scotland

Scotland speaks

After two and half years of debate, with 97% of the electorate registered to vote and a massive 84.6% turnout, voters in Scotland have chosen to remain part of the United Kingdom.

In the lead up to the referendum it was impossible not to be impressed by the level of engagement in the debate. Never has politics seemed so exciting!

Although the political fall-out from the result rumbles on, organisations such as ours, that have a crucial role in civil society, now have a clear opportunity to help maintain the momentum that was created in the run up to the vote on the 18 September. Reflecting on the result, Martin Sime, Chief Executive of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations said: "Remarkably high turnout levels signal a reawakening of interest in democracy which we must nurture and use as a catalyst to make Scotland a better place to live. There is an appetite for change – and it's people not politicians that need to lead and direct these changes".

Samaritans will use our position to draw attention to the high rate of suicide in Scotland and we will continue our work to expand the range of our partnerships. The funding we receive from Scottish Government means we can now employ a training officer to deliver listening skills training and promote our third party referral scheme. We will work with small charities and community groups supporting people who may be struggling to cope, with particular focus on those working in disadvantaged areas.

BEST PRACTICE**A warm welcome**

Stoke and Newcastle branch volunteers have been attending OpenDoor, a drop-in centre for those in need in the local area. Branch Director Simon explains more...

OpenDoor is a charitable venture run by Vanessa Renshaw (pictured) in the Stoke-on-Trent area. She opened the centre last October to offer needy people a cooked breakfast and somewhere to go. Currently OpenDoor takes place on Mondays mornings in a local church, but Vanessa hopes to extend it to other times and venues when resources allow.

What makes this project different and exciting is that it is not just a soup kitchen or food bank, but a collaborative local effort. Vanessa has invited other local agencies in to help regularly. The other organisations involved are nursing teams, sexual health teams, Aquarius (an organisation that helps with alcohol addiction), the Citizens Advice Bureau for advice on benefits, and the Rough Sleepers team.

Belinda and I have been attending OpenDoor every Monday since February this year and we have both found it very rewarding. Those attending are offered hot and cold drinks, cereals, fruit, and a full cooked breakfast made in the church kitchen. We now serve about ninety cooked breakfasts every Monday. Food bags and clothing are also offered to those that need them, resources permitting.

This is currently all funded by donations from individuals. A donation of £30 pays for the cooked breakfasts each week, and £1 pays for a food bag. OpenDoor have public liability insurance, and those who work in the kitchen are trained in food hygiene. There are procedures in place for safeguarding and all volunteers are vetted.

Having attended similar places in our area, in my experience



“ People are surprised that we sit and listen without being in a hurry to do other things ”

OpenDoor is the most welcoming and friendly place to go. Although it is held in a church, those of all faiths, and none, are welcomed. Those attending are mostly men, as there are more men than women sleeping rough, but some women and children do come along.

Each week it is good to see the same faces there, although about 10% of the people are new each week. OpenDoor is advertised by word of mouth, although agencies such as the Rough Sleepers team and the hostels do signpost to them. We hand out Samaritans contact cards when we're at the centre, so people know how to contact us outside of OpenDoor.

While there, we sit at tables and encourage people to talk. We have found it surprising that many have been so frank and honest with us about their lives, and many have said how good it is to have someone there who is prepared to give them time to talk about how they are feeling. People talk about things like their childhood, relationships and job histories.

Many have been through alcohol and drug addiction, or have been in prison. Two people I have met so far have been part of our Listeners scheme while in prison. Some are homeless and sleep rough, but most have a roof over their heads, whether it be a hostel or rented accommodation.

The feedback we've had has been positive – people we've talked to have said it's been good to talk at length – and many have been surprised that we sit and listen without being in a hurry to do other things. Most have said that they would never have called Samaritans if we hadn't been at OpenDoor.

CASE STUDY

Hazel is a teacher from London and rode in Ride London this August to raise money for Samaritans. Four years ago, Hazel's father took his own life. Hazel shares her memories of her dad and what she is doing to raise awareness of our service.

My Dad was an amazing person – one of the most cheerful, caring people you could ever meet. Some of my earliest memories of Dad are of him playing guitar and me and my brother bouncing along to his songs.

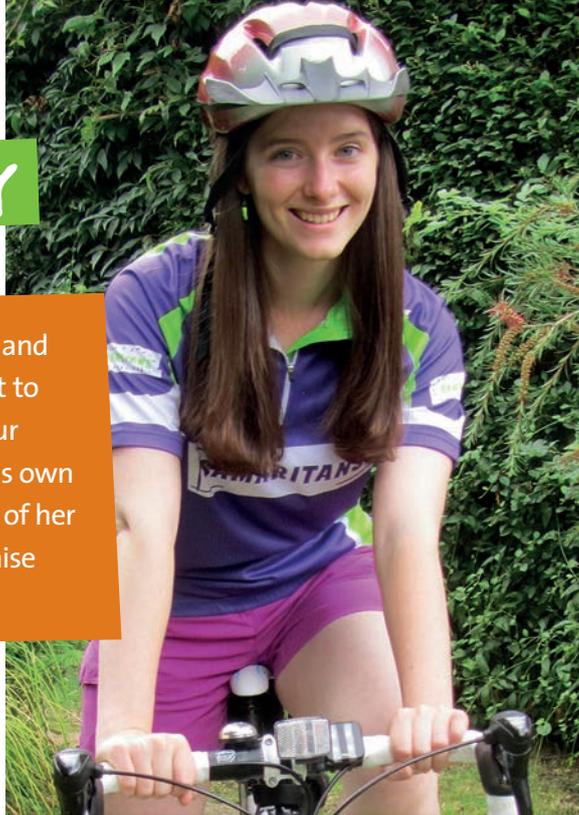
As we got older we went on holidays where we cycled as a family through the Bavarian Alps – one of his favourite places. He loved to photograph everything, and we always had to be pointing or jumping or posing in some way.

Dad's death was very sudden and unexpected. He was under a lot of pressure at work and stopped sleeping properly. Although he must have been experiencing a lot of stress, he didn't let us know how bad things were. He didn't talk about it to anyone. I think he thought he was protecting us and that things really would get better. Very sadly, in November 2010, Dad took his own life.

When I found out that Dad had died I was in total shock and disbelief – I thought it couldn't be true. It was very difficult for us all to come to terms with.

For a long time it was very hard for us to think about the future. It felt like life could never be good again and that we would always feel crushed by what had happened. I remember the first few weeks, waiting all day for it to be night, and all night for it to be day.

People don't always know what to say when they find out someone has taken their own life. It's a taboo subject and people worry they will say the wrong thing to you, so they don't say anything at all. We were lucky to have family and friends who were amazing, rallying around and helping us organise things during a very difficult time.



“ I remember the first few weeks, waiting all day for it to be night, and all night for it to be day ”

I vividly remember the first day I felt really happy again. It was about a year and a half after we lost Dad. I was sat on a bus with a friend, and suddenly this warm feeling flooded over me. I got so excited when I realised that I was really feeling happy, that it was possible, that I excitedly announced it to the entire bus! I felt like I could finally be sure that life really could be good again.

Mum, my brother and I are starting to feel like life is good again, not 'back to normal', but like we're starting a new chapter of our lives. Rather than letting Dad's death define him in our memories, it is getting easier to remember the fun we had with him, and laugh about what he would think of the things we are getting up to now. There are still days when we can feel low, but we know now that they won't last forever, and they are fewer and further between.

People must know about Samaritans, and be aware that no matter what time of day or night, there is always someone to talk to. It is okay to pick up the phone and get help, I think if Dad had, he would probably still be here today.”

“ People must know about Samaritans and that there is always someone to talk to ”

+ Could you share your story as a case study for Samaritans?
Contact samaritansnews@samaritans.org

Branch life

By Shaun Delaney



A safe place

We pride ourselves on offering a safe place for callers. Sadly, this year, we have seen other organisations in the news for not keeping people safe – Rotherham's child sexual abuse scandal being the latest example. One thing all we all have in common is our duty to keep vulnerable people safe. We already do lots of things to safeguard our callers, and to demonstrate to the media that we take people's safety seriously – something we have been challenged on before.

Back in 2010, we decided it was right to ask for a criminal records disclosure for anyone responsible for supporting callers. Since then, your recruitment teams have been using these checks to help make safer decisions about people joining Samaritans. Branches have also been asking for checks for current volunteers and most branches will be completing these checks over the coming months.

A criminal record won't necessarily stop someone from volunteering with us. If someone does have previous offences or allegations on their record, this information is treated very sensitively. Usually, the Branch Director/Chair in Scotland is the only person in the branch who would see this. Outside the branch, this information is restricted to a handful of people, and most of them will never know who the information relates to.

People make allegations all the time. If this happens to a volunteer in your branch, we want to be able to say we did everything possible to offer a safe place for our callers.

VIEWPOINT

What is your branch doing to get ready for Connect?



Denis from Horsham and Crawley branch explains how his branch has been practically preparing for Connect...

Libby from Tyneside branch explains how she's been supporting volunteers in the lead-up to Connect...



At my branch careful planning, along with the hard work of the Connect team, has helped us to prepare for each milestone.

One of the first steps of our Connect journey started with two new computers for the two listening booths, since the existing PCs had reached 'vintage car' status. Our joint Branch Chairman and Branch Connect champion realised that the new set up was less like his computer at home and much more like using computers to run a business, so he approached me to take specific responsibility for IT Support.

My first step was to document and present a plan describing the changes and enhancements that would be needed to both the systems and the Operations Room – you can read this document in the Connect section on Samsnet. We are now getting volunteers to practise signing into their Samaritans accounts in a quiet area. We are also using the training material provided by the Connect team as part of a structured training programme within the branch. The next stage will be looking at reorganising our Operations room to bring together the telephone, email and SMS services for our listening volunteers.

Many of us may feel that the hard part about Connect has been the waiting – but hopefully the wait will be worth it!

As a first step for preparing volunteers for Connect, we've asked everyone to practise signing in to Samsnet to make sure they know their username and password. We have two volunteers with visual impairments and a couple who don't use computers, so we have mentors for those people. We will also be starting four sessions of training in October.

As we have a single computer for our three work stations, we bought an additional computer as a back-up. We are hoping to manage most Connect issues within our branch with a comprehensive troubleshooting manual, and a chain of support including day leaders, duty directors and our IT support team.

Our branch was one of the first to port and we certainly were a little apprehensive. Line transfer day and porting went smoothly, thanks to some excellent support from GO when we had questions to ask. We now leave phones on even if we are doing face to face, and sometimes the phone only rings a couple of times before it stops, presumably because it has been answered elsewhere. We seem to be taking plenty of calls. For now, our volunteers have taken it all in their stride – so far, so good!

+ Do you have a subject you'd like to share your view on? Email l.rose@samaritans.org to suggest a viewpoint topic

VOX POPS

How would you sum up Samaritans in one word?

Available
Simon, Uxbridge branch

Complicated
Carol, Hereford branch

Supportive
Trish, Northampton branch

Dedicated
Eileen, Southport branch

Welcoming
Ida, Swansea branch

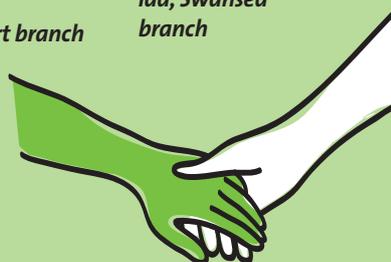
Human
Jeff, Mansfield branch

Trusted
Dave, Cornwall at Truro branch

Worthwhile
Jeff, Tunbridge Wells branch

Empathic
John, Limerick branch

Privileged
Suzy, Harrogate branch



+ To join in the next vox pop, visit www.samaritansnet.org – just type Samaritans News into the search bar. You can add your reply as a comment or email your answer to l.rose@samaritans.org