



# TALKING GOT ME THROUGH

Ireland Impact Report  
2015/2016

SAMARITANS  
IRELAND

# VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

**Samaritans' vision is that fewer people die by suicide.**

We work to achieve this vision by making it our mission to alleviate emotional distress and reduce the incidence of suicidal feelings and suicidal behaviour.

**We do this by:**

- **Being available** round the clock to provide emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of emotional distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide.
- **Working in partnership** with other organisations, agencies and experts to achieve our Vision.
- **Influencing public policy** and raising awareness of the challenges of reducing suicide.
- **Reaching out** to high risk groups and communities to reduce the risk of suicide.

**We are committed to the following values:**

**listening, confidentiality, people making their own decisions, being non-judgemental and offering people human contact.**

Samaritans offers a safe place for people to talk when things are getting to them and you do not have to be suicidal to use our service. We're always here and volunteers keep conversations private. People can speak to us by telephone, face-to-face, email, text message and via letter. We also reach out to people at festivals and other public events, in prisons, hospitals, schools, the workplace and with other groups in local communities, such as at homeless shelters. Our services are about connecting with people who are struggling to cope.

People contact Samaritans about a wide range of issues, including depression, relationship and family issues, loneliness, physical and mental health issues, alcohol, drugs, self-harm, financial worries, illness and exam pressures, as well as suicidal thoughts and feelings.

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**As Regional Director of Samaritans Ireland, I never cease to be humbled by the hard work of our volunteers.**

The past year has been very busy for each of the 12 branches in Ireland and our volunteers have gone above and beyond to ensure that the service remains consistent for those in need. In fact, our volunteers are the very heart of the organisation, their dedication unwavering.

There are currently 1,836 volunteers in branches around Ireland and each plays a central role in ensuring that Samaritans' message reaches the most vulnerable of society. Samaritan volunteers answer telephones, respond to emails, texts and welcome visitors as face to face callers. This support to callers is offered every day of the year, at any time of the day or night.

The reasons people call us have remained consistent over the years - relationship problems, financial worries, stress and anxiety, loneliness and health issues may all prompt someone to call us. No matter what someone's reason for calling is, we offer a space to explore how they are feeling, in their own time and their own way.

The number of calls Samaritans receives shows that many of us are living in difficult times. While the amount of calls to our service shows that many of us are struggling to cope, we should also be encouraged by the fact that people are reaching out for support when they need it. We should take solace from the fact that our society is moving towards a more open one where fewer people feel the need to suffer in silence.

Samaritans has worked for over 60 years to both encourage people to talk and to provide the opportunity for them to speak to us in whatever way they feel most comfortable.

Our service has grown from very humble beginnings in a small office with one telephone line to a national helpline which is free to call from anywhere in Ireland at any time.

As well as providing the support with which we are the most known for, we also work to reach out to people in distress through our work in prisons, schools and communities.

As more people reach out to us for support, we will continue to work to ensure that we are there for people when they need us. We will also work to encourage those at increased risk of suicide to reach out to us through our outreach work. It is our belief that we can make a difference to the lives of people who are going through difficult times that drives this work forward.

I have visited many branches in Ireland and met many volunteers in my role as Regional Director. I never cease to be grateful to witness the commitment, service to others and sense of altruism shown by ordinary people from all walks of life, providing an extraordinary service to the whole community.

I look forward to Samaritans continuing to increase the number of volunteers, so that we can continue to answer the growing number of calls we are receiving.

**Giovanni Doran**  
Regional Director



**I am passionate about the cause, vision and values of Samaritans and am excited to be joining the organisation as it delivers its ambitious new strategy for 2015–2021.**

The strategy, *Working Together to Reduce Suicide*, aims to improve Samaritans' service, increase its influence and reach more people in need of support, including those most at risk and vulnerable groups. The past 12 months have been very busy as Samaritans Ireland works to deliver the strategy under four main areas: service, access, influence and evidence.

March 2016 marked the two-year anniversary of the introduction of a free to caller number in Ireland. Removing the barrier of cost made it easier for people to call us, and calls to the helpline increased as a result. We are delighted that the telecommunications industry has pledged to continue its partnership with us, meaning that our helpline remains free to callers. The amazing dedication of our volunteers allows us to be there for people when they need us. Our branches across the country continue to work tirelessly to recruit additional volunteers to respond to the increased demand in calls.

It is important that people who are in need of support are aware of how to access it. We have been working in partnership with the HSE and their Little Things campaign to encourage people to reach out for support when they need it. We also provide support to at risk groups through initiatives like our prison Listener scheme. The success of this scheme was highlighted in July at a conference which we held in association with the Irish Prison Service. We are continuing to work with the GAA to encourage help-seeking at club level across Ireland.

Samaritans has over 60 years of experience of supporting people in crisis and a vital role to play in influencing governments and other agencies to take action to reduce suicide.

In advance of the General Election, we launched our manifesto campaign, *Three Steps to Save Lives* and called on election candidates to commit to making suicide reduction a political priority. We are monitoring progress on suicide reduction and the implementation of *Connecting for Life*, the national strategy on suicide reduction. We continue our work to promote responsible media reporting on suicide through our media guidelines.

Evidence and evaluation are essential to help plan and deliver the best possible services to reduce suicide. Data collected from our phone system allows us to monitor the demand on our service and plan for that demand. We are excited to be working with the University of Ulster to model our call volume data in order to allow us to plan our service as effectively as possible. Evaluation of our services, such as the evaluation of the *Mojo Listens* project in Tallaght, allows us to ensure we are having the impact we desire.

By working across the areas outlined in our strategy, we can continue to do what we are best at; providing a space for people to talk about whatever is troubling them, while ensuring that we are there for everyone who needs us, including groups at increased risk of suicide. I look forward to working with our volunteers and staff to achieve this.

**Deirdre Toner**  
Executive Director

# LET'S MAKE IT BETTER

In order to enhance the difference we make by 2021, we will improve our:

## 1 Service

Improve the quality and consistency of our services by making sure that:

- All Samaritans users experience a service that is responsive to their needs
- Quality assurance processes are consistently implemented across all our services and projects
- Samaritans' training, volunteer management and roles are designed in such a way as to ensure that we have the right people, with the right skills, in the right roles.

## 3 Influence

Have stronger and more effective external influence and connections with partners by making sure that:

- We have strong referral relationships with partner agencies working with vulnerable groups (especially men in middle years, people in socio-economic deprivation and people with mental health problems)
- Vulnerable people online are recognised, offered support and have less chance of coming into contact with online content
- We have strong effective relationships locally and nationally in order to influence the content and implementation of local suicide prevention policies and plans
- We understand the interests of our callers and use this knowledge to increase help-seeking and influence public policy and practice.

## 2 Access

Improve access to Samaritans services by making sure that:

- All helpline services are free to callers
- Awareness-raising campaigns are based on evidence of need, targeted at vulnerable groups and delivered at a local and national level
- Email, text and instant messaging support is provided in an integrated way
- People get through to a volunteer every time they contact us
- Support is provided in targeted settings for those affected by suicide.

## 4 Evidence

Improve collection and application of evidence so that:

- We are better able to demonstrate our approach to supporting people, the benefits this provides and its contribution to reducing suicide
- We understand the needs and profile to the different groups of people who use our services and what they get out of those services
- We apply existing evidence around 'what works' to improve and develop our support services
- We evaluate the impact of Samaritans' strategy.

# Samaritans work in Ireland

**Samaritans was founded in 1953. It is the central charity and coordinating body for the 201 Samaritans branches in the UK and Republic of Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.**

Each branch is an independent, charitable organisation. Samaritans branches are organised and work together in 13 geographic regions to offer space to talk for anyone going through a difficult time.

The 20 branches in Ireland comprise one region, with eight branches in Northern Ireland and 12 branches in the Republic of Ireland – as well as the new East Coast service in Arklow and our Festival team. This report deals solely with the work of the branches in the Republic of Ireland

The head office of Central Charity is based in Surrey and Samaritans Ireland is based in Dublin. Samaritans Ireland was established in December 2007 and began operating in April 2008. A staff member has been based in Belfast since August 2014.

Samaritans is governed by a Board of Trustees, which currently has the maximum 13 members. Two-thirds of the Board of Trustees must be Samaritans volunteers. The Board is advised by the Council of Samaritans, which is made up of a representative from each Samaritans branch, a representative from each of the 13 operational regions and the elected Chair of Samaritans, Jenni McCartney.

The Chair of Samaritans, as elected by the Council of Samaritans, is also the Chair of the Board of Trustees. The Regional Directors represent the Board of Trustees in the wider organisation and play a key role in supporting branches to bring in Samaritans' policies. In Ireland, the position of Regional Director is currently held by Giovanni Doran.

## Mojo listens

The Mojo project was developed in 2011 and has evolved into a dynamic evidence based training programme affording men the opportunity to build their mental and physical fitness in the face of adversity and life challenges. One of the key drivers behind this was to reduce the high levels of male suicide in Ireland.

To further develop their skills, Mojo approached Samaritans in 2015 to run a peer listening service for men struggling to cope based on the prison Listener scheme. This training was to equip the Mojo men with the necessary skills to listen effectively and offer appropriate support to their peers.

Evaluation of the project by Dr Celia Keenaghan found very positive outcomes and results from the Mojo Listens project.

*“The men were very satisfied with the training and enjoyed the methodologies used. The programme has had a positive impact on participants in a wide number of areas particularly in relation to listening skills, confidence, self-worth, team working/peer support and awareness of supports for men in distress.”*



### It further concludes that the expected outcomes of the project were achieved:

- A strategic partnership fostered between Samaritans and the Mojo project
- 10 Mojo listeners will be upskilled in the area of peer support and signposting
- Men in distress in the Tallaght area, will be offered peer support in the Mojo men's shed and other designated areas
- Increased awareness of Samaritans and other potential supports for people who are distressed
- Evidence of practice gathered through the evaluation.

Going forward, it is planned to continue to monitor and review the project in the Mojo Men's shed in Tallaght and to offer the training to a new group of Mojo graduates supported by the local Samaritans branch. The project was developed and delivered by Samaritans Ireland in collaboration with Dublin branch volunteers.



## Talk to Us 2016

Talk to Us is Samaritans' annual awareness month which is held in July each year to highlight the importance of talking about problems and to let people know about Samaritans' service.

Launched on Tuesday 5 July, Talk to Us 2016 focused on the Power of Listening and hoped to challenge the people of Ireland to become better listeners. We shared our SHUSH listening tips to encourage people to really listen to the important things their friends, family and colleagues need to tell them.

These tips were also implemented to get people to devote some time and attention to being better listeners. When people feel listened to it can save a life.

Samaritans volunteers were very active throughout the month with local events and our partnership with Iarnród Éireann meant they were given access to their local train stations for awareness days. These awareness days took place across the country throughout the month of July and helped spread 'Talk to Us' message while also providing commuters the opportunity to take some time out with our volunteers should they need it.

**Samaritans**   
**S.H.U.S.H listening tips**

- #1 **Show you care**
- #2 **Have patience**
- #3 **Use open questions**
- #4 **Say it back**
- #5 **Have courage**

Show you care  
 Have patience  
 Use open questions  
 Say it back  
 Have courage

[samaritans.org/shush](http://samaritans.org/shush)

**SAMARITANS**

## Prisoner Listener scheme: Changing Lives

Collaboration in delivering support to prisoners; the Irish Regions Inaugural Conference on the prison Listener scheme and on our work with prisons.

This year, Samaritans marked 25 years of the prison Listener scheme in prisons in the UK and in Ireland. We also marked our silver anniversary relationship with the Irish Prison Service. Up to 2002, Samaritans volunteers wing walked, providing support to prisoners face-to-face on landings and in designated rooms in prisons around the country. In 2002 the first prison Listener scheme was set up in Cloverhill Prison under the direction of Governor Ronan Maher and assisted by then ACO Fergus Woods. Ita Lawlor, who has been a volunteer in Dublin for 30 years, worked tirelessly and patiently with them to get things off the ground. All three have been huge advocates of the prison Listener scheme since and continue to be actively involved. Since that time the prison Listener scheme has expanded across the country and currently operates in 10 prisons in the Republic, with two more in initial stages of development. We work with three prisons in Northern Ireland.

The key strength of the prison Listener scheme is the partnership approach to the work, which sees equal emphasis on the roles of Samaritans volunteers, prison staff and, most importantly, on the role of the Listeners. At present, we have 75 Listeners (with a further 13 in training) who provide a round the clock service to their peers in prisons. This is an invaluable role and studies show that prisoners are more likely to discuss issues with their peers rather than members of staff. Living in a prison environment brings challenges that many of us will never face and the emotional support provided by trained Listeners is key to helping people cope with prison experiences.

In June of this year, Samaritans Ireland, with the Irish Prison Service, hosted its first prison conference to highlight the value of the prison Listener scheme, the successes it has had and to celebrate the strong

partnership relationship with the Prison Service and with Listeners. Over 100 people attended on the day from a variety of agencies connected to prison work including prison staff, Listeners, Samaritans, prisoner support groups, probation service and relevant stakeholders from the public and voluntary sector.

The conference was held in the auspicious surroundings of Dublin Castle and we were delighted to have Minister for Mental Health, Helen McEntee, who performed her first public engagement as Minister and officially opened the conference. Minister McEntee spoke very positively about the impact Samaritans' work is having in prisons and the wider impact of supporting people who are in distress. Other speakers included representatives from the Irish Prison Service, Samaritans and internationally published academics Dr Shadd Maruna and Dr Jackie Crassaiti. Fiona Malcolm, Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of Operations, spoke on the recognition and thanks due to those involved across the country in the branches who support the work and most particularly to those Listeners who make themselves available to support other prisoners in times of need.

Some of the most impactful presentations were from Listeners themselves, who spoke powerfully about the difference the scheme had made to their lives. A discussion between a prison officer, a Listener and a Samaritans volunteer brought the reality of the scheme to life and gave great insights into how the partnership works so well. The conference was an excellent opportunity to acknowledge the success of the Listener scheme and the hard work of everyone involved. The event was hugely successful and has had the effect of creating greater awareness of the value of the prison Listener scheme, affirmed the work of Samaritans, prison staff and of Listeners themselves and has firmly solidified the importance of the work in the minds of all the stakeholders, practitioners and recipients of the service.

**Cindy O'Shea**  
Regional Prison Support Officer, Ireland



## Prison Listener Case Study: The vulnerability of others

Being there for the people, from all walks of life, who have come to me for a chat when they're feeling vulnerable, along with doing the training has changed something in me. People have noticed it, recognised it and unknown to myself I had changed, and so I've been told, changed for the better.

As I have discovered since being sent to prison, it is the complexity of the incarcerated mind, more variables than any other situation that I have found myself in before, be it at college, during my working life, or whilst on my travels, I wasn't prepared. During my time in prison I have met people from all walks of life, artists, doctors, solicitors, business men, elected representatives, and of course the normal joe not unlike myself.

We are all at the same level when we pull on the jeans or tracksuit or whatever we are given. But when the bravado, usually a defence mechanism, subsides or is relaxed, nothing compares, even remotely, to the fragility of the typical prisoner's mentality at any given moment.

The fact is, people who you would think have everything in life, at that moment in time they haven't got the one thing that has meaning. It's not gold nor diamonds nor land or money, but it is pure and its simple, it's an ear to listen and that's all that matters in that instant, someone to listen to them, and it was Samaritans who taught me how.

**Derrick**  
Prison Listener

## Prison Listener Case Study: First Call

My first call came six months after I became a Listener. It was time to put my training to the test, no role play this time, this was for real. As I walked to the Listener Suite, I was a little nervous, hoping not to make a mess of my first call.

As the Listener Suite door opened, I recognised the person in the chair, I had worked with him in the prison two years previous and this made the call a bit easier. Of course, I still had to treat this call as a listener, not as a friend and the caller knew everything said would be in confidence. We spoke for around 45 minutes and my caller felt a lot better after our chat. I left the room feeling I had done something worthwhile.

I became a Listener to help prisoners who can have many different problems like anger, fear, shame, despair, separation and guilt. I met my caller a week after walking out in the yard and again he thanked me for the time I had given him.

Most people listen to reply. Listeners listen to understand.

**Ollie**  
Prison Listener



## Supporting the Traveller Community: Reaching out to communities in need

A key focus for Samaritans is working towards reducing the risk of suicide in specific settings and vulnerable groups. One such community is the Traveller community in Ireland which has a rate of suicide that is 6 times the settled population.

“Over 65% of Traveller suicides occurred among those aged under 30. National figures over the same period showed almost 34% of all suicides since 2000 occurred among the under 30’s. Suicide is predominately a male issue. For the total population, male suicide is four times as common as female suicide. For Travellers, the male suicide rate is 91%, over nine times as common as female suicide” (Walker, 2008).

Working in partnership with Exchange House Ireland, a four-module programme was delivered to primary health care workers from St. Margaret’s, Ballymun, Travact, Clonshaugh and Pavee Point. The participants were Traveller women working on sites and facing the daily challenges and unique struggles that the Traveller community face.

The training was to develop active listening skills in the women to enhance the support they can offer to those struggling to cope in the community. It was a collaborative piece of training where the women shared stories and gave context to the training team to help them better understand norms of the community.

The elements of the training most favoured by the women were learning about Samaritans and developing their listening skills. After the training, the women commented that they would be very happy to refer a distressed person to our service.

The learning for Samaritans on what prevented engagement with us prior to the training was the lack of information in relation to the services provided and a greater understanding of our confidentiality policy. We also learned that to make our service more accessible to the Traveller, we need to raise awareness of the service and also provide resources that are literacy friendly, traveller specific and delivered direct to the community.

We are delighted to have started this partnership and will continue to build and develop these relationships going forward.



**Reference:** Walker, M. R. (2008). Suicide among the Irish Traveller Community 2000-2006. Ireland: Wicklow County Council.

## Three Steps to Save Lives – Samaritans pre-election campaign

Samaritans is committed to reducing the number of lives that are lost each year to suicide. We can't do this alone and believe that government has a major role to play on addressing some of the complex factors which can contribute to suicide.

Together, we can make a difference to the rate of suicide and find ways to respond to people who are struggling to cope.

In the run up to the general election we called on all candidates and political parties to commit to making suicide reduction a priority if elected.

**We shared our manifesto which set out three areas where targeted action is needed:**

1. Make suicide reduction a political priority
2. Address gaps in mental health service delivery
3. Tackle alcohol misuse as a leading factor in suicidal behaviour.

The campaign received a positive response with many of the candidates and parties making commitments to take action to reduce suicide in Ireland. We welcome the commitment to implementing the national suicide reduction strategy in the programme for Government and we continue to monitor policy developments and highlight areas where action is needed.



## Working with the GAA

Since 2014, Samaritans has been the official mental health charity of the GAA with a focus on offering emotional support to GAA members who are struggling to cope.

At grass roots level, Samaritans volunteers liaise with health and wellbeing GAA volunteers, raising awareness of our service and encouraging anyone going through a difficult time to access the support we provide. These relationships at club and branch level seek to ensure the message of Talk to Us is highlighted in the community and encouraging people to talk about what affects them. We will continue to grow and develop these relationships and strengthen the links into the GAA community.

In August, this year, the GAA promoted the HSE's #littletings emotional wellbeing campaign at the football semi-finals in Croke Park.

Samaritans volunteers from Dublin branch were present at this event, ready and willing to offer support to anyone who might need a listening ear. The promotion at the event also encouraged people to contact 116 123 for extra support.

This year also saw the first delivery of listening skills training to key volunteers in clubs. The session was attended by representatives from Kilmacud Crokes, St. Peregrine's, St. Olaf's and St. Bridget's GAA clubs who all found the training very useful in their day to day dealings with club members. The next session of listening skills training is planned for end of 2016 to be hosted in Newry.

Finally, as in the years past, Samaritans had a stand at the GAA Health & Wellbeing Conference in October continuing to build awareness and provide information about our service and our partnership.



## Samaritans Ireland and Facebook

Social media has increasingly become a part of our day-to-day lives, with people sharing personal details daily with their friends and followers. While many use their social media platforms to showcase life events, there are many more still who use social media to communicate their feelings when they're having a tough time.

In October 2016, Facebook launched a new safety tool in partnership with Samaritans in Ireland. The tool provides resources, advice and support to people who may be struggling with suicidal thoughts. It also offers support to their concerned friends and family members.

People can flag any troubling posts which they see to Facebook, teams working around the world, 24/7, review any posts of concern that are highlighted. They are prioritised and help options and resources are sent to those suspected of being in distress.

The Suicide Prevention Tool provides an opportunity for friends and Facebook to reach out to anyone who may be struggling and provide them with sources of support that they may not have otherwise considered, such as Samaritans. As well as encouraging people to connect with a trained volunteer at Samaritans, the tools now prompt the option of reaching out to a friend, and provides tips and advice on how they can work through these feelings.

Facebook also provides new resources and support to the person who flagged the troubling post, including options for them to call or message their distressed friend letting them know they care, or reaching out to another friend or a trained volunteer for support.

We are delighted to be working with Facebook to make it easier for people to reach out for support for themselves or a loved one.



## Caller case study

When a good friend died after a brief illness at a young age, Wilson felt angry. In fact, he felt a whole range of emotions but didn't know how to deal with them. Was this normal? Was he OK? Was there anyone around who'd listen, especially in the middle of the night? Samaritans listened, and Wilson felt calmer, more peaceful, and better able to cope.

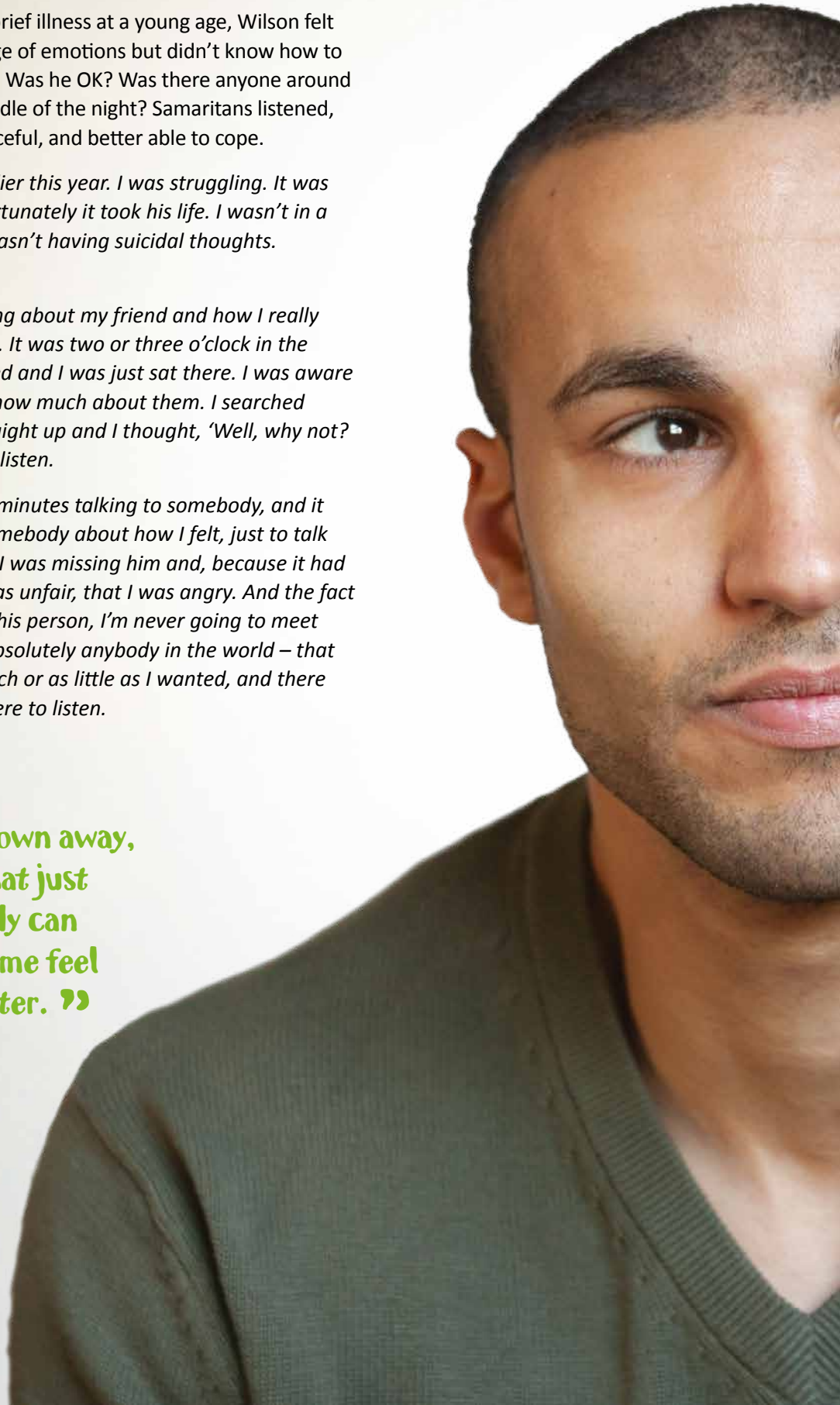
*"I lost a good friend of mine, earlier this year. I was struggling. It was a short, sudden illness, and unfortunately it took his life. I wasn't in a particularly deep, dark place. I wasn't having suicidal thoughts. I was just..."*

*I couldn't sleep. I just kept thinking about my friend and how I really could do with someone to talk to. It was two or three o'clock in the morning, my wife had gone to bed and I was just sat there. I was aware of Samaritans but didn't really know much about them. I searched online and the number came straight up and I thought, 'Well, why not? I'll see if anybody there wants to listen.'*

*I was on the phone for about 40 minutes talking to somebody, and it felt really good. Just to talk to somebody about how I felt, just to talk about my friend, and to say that I was missing him and, because it had come so suddenly, that I felt it was unfair, that I was angry. And the fact that this person – I didn't know this person, I'm never going to meet this person, it could have been absolutely anybody in the world – that I could tell them anything, as much or as little as I wanted, and there was no judgement, they were there to listen.*

**Wilson**  
Samaritans caller

**“ I was absolutely blown away, with the effects that just talking to somebody can have, and it made me feel a million times better. ”**





## Free to caller number

A ground-breaking partnership with Ireland's six largest telecommunications providers – BT Ireland, eir, Virgin Media, Vodafone, Sky Ireland and Three through the Telecommunications and Internet Federation (TIF) made it possible for Samaritans to launch 116 123, a free to caller number in 2014.

The number replaced Samaritans' low cost number in Ireland and made it possible for people to access the service at any time of the day or night, free of charge. The free to caller number is part of an EU-wide initiative where numbers beginning with 116 are designated for services of social value that are common across all EU member states. The number 116 123 has been given for all 24-hour emotional support helplines and was assigned to Samaritans by ComReg.

Removing the barrier of costs has made it easier for people to call us and calls to our helpline have increased by 60% since we became free to caller in 2014.

The industry has committed to continue its support for the helpline until 2019. This vital support means we can continue to be there for anyone who needs us whenever they need us, at no cost to the caller.



# Support service review

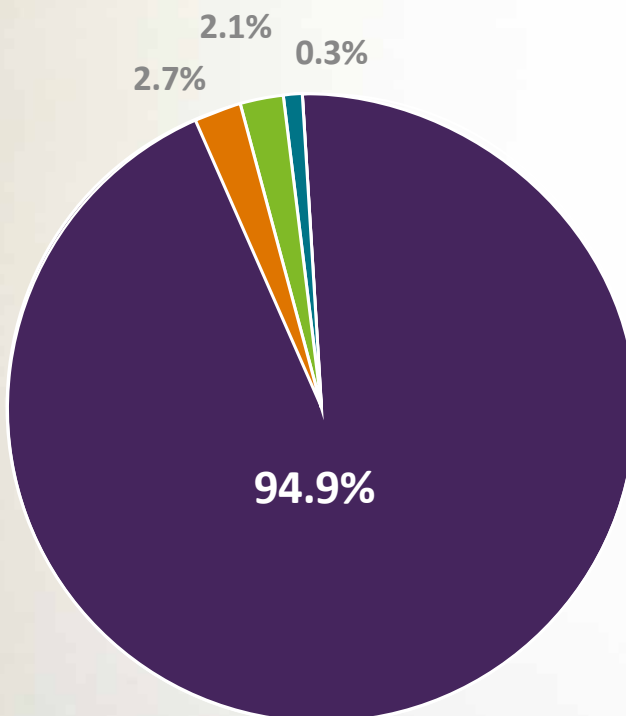
## Calls for help

During the 12 months from October 2015 to September 2016, a total of 639,652 calls for help were answered in Ireland. This includes contacts by telephone, email, text and face-to-face visits to our branches.

During the 12 months from October 2015 to September 2016, Samaritans answered 606,816 telephone calls for help, and a total of 2,081 people received face-to-face support. Within the same period, 13,444 emails and 17,311 text messages were received.

## Modes of contact

- Telephone
- SMS
- Email
- Face-to-face



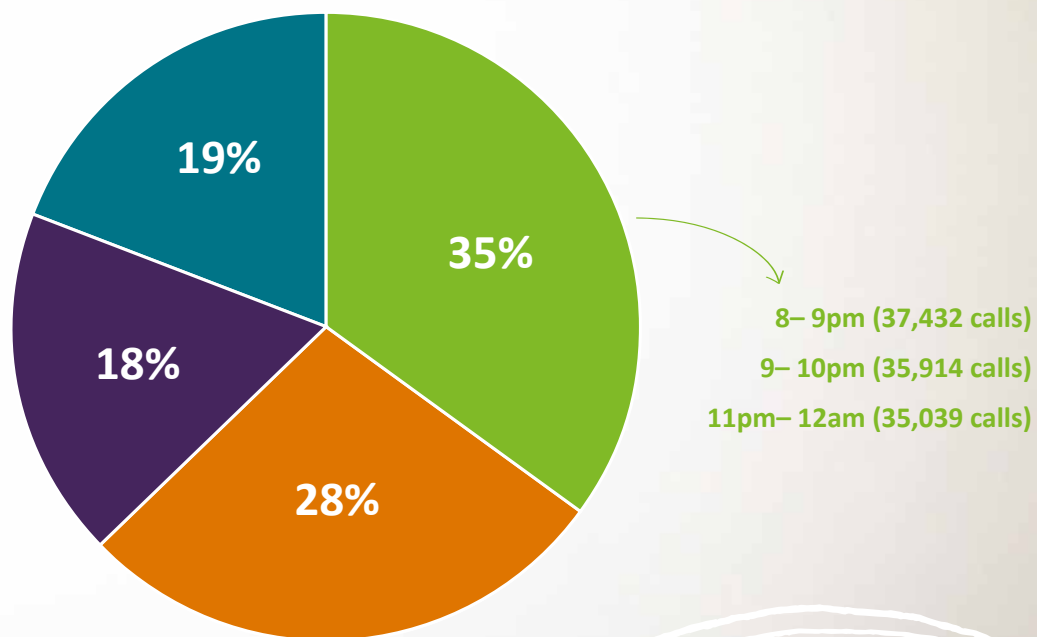
## Focus on the helpline

Telephone remains the most popular way for people to contact us. We received an average of 1,700 calls each day.

The busiest time for calls is from 6pm to midnight. Over one-third of all calls are answered during this period, suggesting that this is a time when people feel the need to talk but may not have anyone to talk to.

## When we answer calls

- Evening – 6pm to midnight (211,241 calls)
- Morning – 6am to midday (111,877 calls)
- Afternoon – midday to 6pm (167,891 calls)
- Night – midnight to 6am (115,807 calls)





**Monday  
5 October  
2015**

**Saturday  
3 October  
2015**

**Sunday  
21 February  
2016**

## Our busiest days

The busiest days of the week for our helpline are Saturday, Sunday and Monday with these three days accounting for over 55% of all calls received.

Our busiest days for calls over the 12-month period were Monday 5 October 2015, Saturday 3 October 2015 and Sunday 21 February 2016.

Bank holidays are a busier time for our helpline with volunteers giving 17,448 listening hours over a bank holiday weekend. The average number of calls received on a Bank Holiday Monday is 1,835 while the average number of calls received on non-Bank Holiday Mondays is 1,705.

The average length of a call is 8 minutes, but calls can be significantly longer. The length of a call also varies depending on the day of the week and time of day. For example, some of the longest calls received were on Mondays and Tuesdays between 3am–7am. These calls generally last between 14–16 minutes, which is nearly twice as long as an average call and suggests that this time of the week can be particularly difficult for people.

Samaritans is the only service available around the clock, ensuring our volunteers are on hand when there's no-one else to call.

## Nature of calls

The issues which people call us about remain consistent. During 2016, the five main issues that arose were:

- Family/relationship problems
- Depression and mental health issues
- Loneliness
- Stress/anxiety
- Financial problems

## Volunteer impact

Samaritans is a volunteer-led organisation with 1,836 volunteers providing support to people who are struggling to cope at any time of the day or night. Our service would not be possible without the dedication of our volunteers across the country. There are seven full time staff employed to support the work of Samaritans in the Republic of Ireland. This means that the ratio of volunteers to staff is 262:1.

Samaritans volunteers in Ireland gave 74,372 hours in listening time to people in distress during the 12-month period from October 2015 to September 2016, the equivalent of just under 4,000 days of listening. Volunteers have increased the amount of time they give by 38% since our number became free to call in 2014.

Number of volunteers to staff





There are currently 1,836 volunteers in Samaritans branches across Ireland. The largest branch is Dublin with 340 volunteers and our newest service is East Coast Samaritans in Arklow.

Samaritans core mission is to reduce suicide by providing a beacon of hope to those going through a tough time. As such, we invest heavily in initial and ongoing training for volunteers.

The introductory training programme lasts 16 weeks with between three and eight hours of training per week; only after this is completed are volunteers allowed to answer calls alone. The initial training is followed by a six-month mentoring programme for new volunteers, while experienced volunteers participate in compulsory, additional training on an ongoing basis.

Volunteers are at the very heart of the organisation, delivering the core support service running all branches, raising much needed funds and raising awareness of the work Samaritans does. The need for Samaritans service has remained consistent and we endeavour to expand on our volunteer base to meet such time demands on our volunteers.

# A volunteer's view

**Do you know where 'the best little' Samaritans branch to take calls is – yes, it's East Coast Samaritans based in Arklow, the newest member of the Samaritans family.**

Well, I am biased, I suppose, but I really do love it. And if you are a Dublin or Waterford volunteer, well, thank you; you have helped us get firmly established by supporting and nurturing us along the way.

So just to tell you that we're now over two years old. We started taking our first calls in September 2014 – how time has flown. I became involved early on, having attended a meeting in the town and was attracted to the idea of being involved in what they called 'a listening service'. I thought "actually, I could probably do that". I was looking to become involved in something and wanted to contribute on a voluntary basis. And Samaritans setting up in the town hit the spot in terms of timing and the commitment that they asked for.

I was unsure of what Samaritans really did, but got more clarity from speaking with the people who came to talk to us. However, the apprehension of being accepted at interview and being able to do the work, was there. I still wonder whether I'm any good at it, but at least the training eased things for me in the early days. And when they promised that we would be trained, they meant it. I thought it would be just a case of a few hours over a couple of nights and then being let loose on the phones. But it was so much more in depth than that and I gradually realised the breadth and depth of what is involved in 'taking calls'. We were certainly well prepared. Somehow or other, I managed to get through all of that and have been involved consistently since.

I suppose the 'stand out' thing for me in being involved with Samaritans has been the support of other volunteers, especially the experienced ones, who looked after us newbies as our confidence levels grew over the months. The other thing that is impressive is their overall level of commitment to callers, the provision of the service and to us, as volunteers.

We've had great support locally and had a very successful Golf Classic fundraising tournament earlier this year which was a great fundraiser for us – so good, in fact, we're going to do it again in April of next year in Woodenbridge Golf Club. We've been very lucky to have received monies from various local groups, including from the local schools, without which we wouldn't have been able to pay the bills.

It's great having our own Samaritans branch in the town. It means that people from the locality and beyond can volunteer to support this great work whereas we wouldn't have travelled to volunteer in Dublin or Waterford branches, the nearest to us here.

So, what about the future for me as a volunteer? Well, I've grown a lot through the experience, and feel that it is a real privilege to be there for our callers. So, I reckon I'll be around for some time yet all other things being equal!

**Volunteer**  
East Coast Samaritans

# Branch highlights

## Festival

The Irish Festival branch is 18 years old in 2017 having been set up in Dublin in 1999. The initial concept was to attend large festival type events to reach directly those experiencing depression, loneliness, suicidal feelings or just in need of someone to listen. Samaritans felt that festival would be an ideal way to reach those potential callers who did not contact us by telephone or call into a branch.

The objective of Festival branch remains the same as does the commitment of our 65 plus volunteers who travel all over Ireland from Portrush to Lisdoonvarna in order to provide a listening ear on the street. Together we are stronger, as festival volunteers are also branch volunteers who commit to attend a minimum of two festivals each year to be there for our callers. Seven festivals were attended in 2016: The North West 200 motorbike race weekend, Belfast and Dublin Pride, Galway Arts Festival, Electric Picnic, the Fleadh in Ennis and the Matchmaker festival in Lisdoonvarna.

During the festival year we spoke directly to almost 1,200 people and had over 1,500 acknowledgements or compliments regarding our presence on the street and the general work of Samaritans in Ireland. Feedback received indicates the strength of the Samaritan organisation within local communities. Typical comments were, "Samaritans were there for me when I needed help", "I would not be here if you hadn't been there for me", "You do great work."

The main topics of concern were loneliness, depression, family and relationship problems, financial difficulties and drink and drugs. A unique aspect of our caller base is that men are much more likely to talk to our volunteers than females by a ratio of approximately 3:1. Our national statistics show that men are four times more likely to take their lives than women. Festival branch helps us reach this important group.

Our branch depends on local organisations that provide accommodation for our volunteers at festival venues, we are most grateful for their generosity. Thanks also to our branch network, directors and volunteers, for their support throughout the year; Festival branch could not function without their dedication and generosity.

Seán Higgins  
Festival Director





## Athlone and Midlands

The past year has been a busy one for Athlone branch with a noticeable increase in calls. We have been making a big effort again to reach out to vulnerable groups in our community and attended Teenaware in Kibeggan, distributing cards, bios and wrist bands.

We also had a very worthwhile visit to the inter-generational event in Mullingar where a group of young people from Comhairle na nÓg entertained people from active retirement groups around the county. While we regularly work within the community to increase awareness around Samaritans and what we do, there are still those that are unaware of the service so this was a good opportunity to explain what we do and promote our free to caller number.

Schools feature highly in our outreach team's priority and we are continuing to visit as many as possible, resulting in some really good feedback. We were also invited to attend Athlone Institute of Technology's 'Your Welfare Week' which took place in October and featured a talk from Blindboy Boatclub from the Rubberbandits, highlighting his own struggles and the importance of talking and seeking help.

We had awareness days at Longford and Athlone rail stations and hope to do the same in Roscommon. We also plan to attend marts in Roscommon to reach out to the farming community and increase their awareness of Samaritans and the importance of opening up in times of distress.

One of the highlights of the year was our involvement with the prison Listener scheme in Castlerea prison which we did in conjunction with the Galway and Sligo branches. Listener training started in January and the presentation of certificates to 14 Listeners took place on 6 May.

The Listeners had their families there on the day and were able to sit down and have a meal with them for the first time since going into prison. It was great to see the prisoners being so proud of the fact that they had become Listeners and were now starting on a journey where they were there to help their fellow prisoners. We hope that not only will they succeed in helping distressed fellow prisoners but that it will also contribute to their own wellbeing and self-worth. We are very grateful to the staff at Castlerea prison who made us most welcome and facilitated us in every way.



## Cork

Talk to Us is Samaritans' annual campaign to raise awareness of the importance of talking, and our round the clock service, which is there for anyone who is struggling to cope.

The campaign ran throughout the month of July and this year its theme was The Power of Listening, something of considerable importance in not only our branch in Cork, but branches throughout the country. Lending a listening ear to someone in distress is something that can make all the difference, sometimes all people need is to be heard.

As part of the campaign, volunteers from Cork Samaritans held awareness events in Cork Kent Railway Station on Friday 15 July from 3.30pm–8pm. Our volunteers were on-hand throughout the day to spread awareness, but also to actively listen to any commuters who were having a tough time or just wanted a chat.

The support of Iarnród Éireann and the dedication of our volunteers helped us reach out to people who we may not usually meet and let them know a little bit about Samaritans and the support which we provide. Hopefully, we also encouraged people to be there for the people in their lives who may need to talk. This event was just one of over 100 which took place across Ireland and the UK as part of Talk to Us.



## Drogheda and North East

This year was a big one for Drogheda and North East branch as we celebrated our 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. The official date fell on 25 March but as this was Good Friday the celebrations were postponed until 22 April. Five of the original group who were trained in Drogheda and North East Branch are still volunteering and were presented with commemorative watches to mark the occasion. We also held two surprise awards for volunteers who had reached the 10-year mark with the branch and it feels very special to have such committed volunteers in the branch. The venue was Bru Bar and Bistro, just across from the branch, with a view out over the Boyne River. Volunteers, retired and new, came along, as did a number of Regional Officers, including the Regional Director at the time, Robert McBride who gave a speech on the night.

The evening was opened officially by Paul Bell, the Lord Mayor of Drogheda. It was a fantastic night celebrating all the good work done by the branch and all its volunteers over the last 20 years. The evening was punctuated by good food, great speeches and plenty of music. Having reached such a milestone in the branch there was great media interest which meant there were pictures of the event in local papers the following week, allowing us to raise the profile of Drogheda and North East Samaritans. This year, we combined our 24/7 day with our Irish Rail Awareness Day; we were a strong presence at McBride Rail Station with the full support of Conor Keane, Station Master.





Brendan Gallagher, Dublin Volunteer; Críona Ní Dhálaigh, Former Lord Mayor; Richard Lewis, pin designer

## Dublin

Dublin branch had a busy year through 2015/2016 which was reflected in our volunteer numbers. We currently have 340 active volunteers, 60 of which went through training in 2016. Our volunteers are available round the clock on the phone and the branch is open from 10am-10pm to any face to face callers who need someone to speak to. None of this would be possible were it not for the dedication and commitment of each of our volunteers, both old and new.

Our volunteers have continued their outreach work in prisons, schools and colleges. We also have 'Feet on the Street' once a month, which we also ran on Leaving Cert Results Night. It provides a service to people out on the streets who, for whatever reason, may not come into contact with Samaritans otherwise.

Volunteers from Dublin branch made a big effort for Talk to Us 2016, or awareness month in July, we had a presence in the two biggest train stations in Dublin as well as in Grand Canal Dock on 24 July. We spoke to passers-by and handed out thousands of cards and leaflets, as well as taking some calls there and then as the need arose.

The highlight of the year so far was the launch of our 'Always There' lapel pin, which was held in the Oak Room of the Mansion House. The pin was exclusively designed by Richard Lewis, who was once a Dublin Samaritan, and is on sale in selected retail and fashion outlets. Lord Mayor, Criona Ui Dhalaign, who was in position at the time and Richard Lewis were guest speakers on the night and all proceeds from the sale of the pin go directly to Dublin Samaritans.

## East Coast

The newest member of the Samaritans family is the service operating out of Arklow, known as East Coast Samaritans, serving the Wicklow & North Wexford areas. Under the umbrella of Dublin branch of Samaritans, the service which was formally established and opened to respond to callers in September 2014, has continued to prosper and develop over the past two years. Following the initial heavy involvement of both Dublin and Waterford volunteers in early and mid-2014, East Coast Samaritans' own volunteers have been trained to be more involved in the leadership and operation of their own 'branch'. With the continued support of a reduced number of Dublin Branch volunteers, it is intended that local volunteers will continue to be recruited, trained and developed to bring it to full independence and thus enable sustainment of the service under their own management and leadership.



Having started with fewer than 30 volunteers, the service now has just short of 50 trained volunteers, providing over one hundred hours of listening per week. Our availability has expanded from the initial six days per week, to now be available to callers each day, including two full overnights on Fridays and Saturdays. This represents a great commitment on the part of all involved, and together with the active support of people in the Wicklow/Wexford areas in so many ways, the service is becoming more an integral part of the fabric of the local community.

A highlight for us in the past 12 months was the decision to move from our upstairs location in Paramount Arcade, Main Street, Arklow, to two adjacent ground floor units, which provides much greater ease of access for both callers and volunteers, whilst giving us a greater visibility within the complex.

We continue to provide support to those in need via the various media of telephone, email and text. We also very much welcome those who would like to speak with us directly on a face-to-face basis at our premises. In the past year, we would have had over 16,000 contacts from callers. With our small volunteer base, and when measured against the limited times our service can be offered, this is a great achievement. It represents tangible evidence of the commitment of our volunteers and the very practical support that we have received locally, in the communities we serve.



## Ennis and Clare

It has been a busy year for the Ennis and Clare Branch. In December, we were involved in the Blazing Saddles 24-hour on-the-spot cycle by local man Rob O'Neill, to shine a light on mental health and support four local Mental Health Charities in Clare, including Samaritans.

Twenty-four teams of twelve cycled throughout the 24 hours, the Ennis and Clare branch participated in the cycle, providing a presence and gave out information about Samaritans. In December, we also had the relaunch of the *Don't be Afraid of the Light that Shines Within You* Charity CD with Luka Bloom and the Ennis Gospel Choir performing a concert at the Temple Gate to again raise awareness on mental health issues.

In telling people about Samaritans and the service we offer, the Ennis and Clare outreach team were active and attended the Clare Age-Expo forum and manned tables at a number of shows around the county. They gave out publicity material and were also there to talk as people passed by. They attended workplaces and talked to many groups, including the GAA about what Samaritans do. The team have visited schools in the county to talk to young people about taking care of their emotional health, looking out for the wellbeing of others, as well as raising awareness of what Samaritans does.

Getting out and about is very beneficial for the branch and gives volunteers the opportunity to meet and talk with people. The public are able to see volunteers as ordinary people who have time to talk and just want to support others who are struggling with their feelings of despair and distress.

## Galway

The Samaritans branch in Galway first opened its doors in Woodquay on 10 May 1976 and this year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their presence in the city of the tribes. This occasion was an ideal opportunity to raise awareness of the service Samaritans provide and to involve the local community in an all-day event in the heart of the city. The focus of the day was a Cyclathon hosted in a marquee in Eyre Square with teams representing local businesses, sports clubs, various community and support organisations.

Teams of five competed against each other in a 40-minute time-trial in 10 races throughout the day. Over 350 people of all ages, across all sections of the community took part in the event with the highlight being “The Race of Champions” comprising many former Galway All-Ireland winners.

Guest speakers on the day included Brent Pope, who spoke openly and honestly about the difficulties he experienced in his life and the wonderful support he received from Samaritans. The day culminated in a fantastic light show centred on the sails of the Galway Hooker in Eyre Square. The wonderful success of this event was thanks to the generosity, participation and support of the local community highlighting the regard with which Samaritans are held.

Over the last 40 years Galway Samaritans have provided a quiet presence in the city providing a place for people who are in despair, distress or lonely to turn to for support.

We are fortunate to have two of the founding members still reporting for duties today. Their vision to recognise the need for a support service in their community continues to this day as the current volunteers now plan for the next 40 years with the ongoing refurbishment of our current home at number 14 Nuns’ Island.



## Kilkenny and Carlow

We know from the monthly helpline, email and text call statistics that the need for our service remains high. In 2015 our branch directorate discussed the ongoing pressure on the volunteers and agreed to make a concerted effort to increase our volunteer numbers whilst continuing their focus on volunteer support.

It was clear to us that we needed to adapt to meet the demands of potential volunteers; we needed to provide more opportunities for people to become involved. Recruitment events and training programmes are delivered by our branch volunteers, therefore we were conscious of the additional commitment we needed from both teams to support this initiative.

We provided monthly information events and ran some during the daytime and also at weekends, alternating between counties Carlow and Kilkenny. As soon as we recruited six or more potential volunteers we would schedule the training programme.

We scheduled 10 information and selection events this year and added five additional dates to this schedule when there was an obvious need for this. We have trained 30 new volunteers via six training programmes in the year (with one more training programme is planned before the year is out). This growth would not have been possible but for the amazing commitment of our recruitment and training teams who have gone above and beyond the call of duty. We are so proud of you all!

A net increase of 24 volunteers means that we have been able to add additional duties to our rota; this means we are providing more support to those in distress and in need of someone to listen to them.

## Limerick and Tipperary

In 2016 the prison Listener scheme was successfully established in Limerick Prison. Two training programmes were run consecutively so that, by March, Listeners were available to inmates in both the male and female sections of the prison. With lots of help from the management and staff in Limerick prison, along with the enthusiasm of both the Listener volunteers and branch trainers, the scheme grew from the planning stage to completion at a great pace. The appreciation for the scheme amongst the inmates and their families at the Listener graduation ceremony was wonderful to behold.

The University of Limerick counselling service invited us to look into offering help with their extremely busy counselling service early this year. Recognising students as a high risk group, we started a once a week outreach programme on campus up until summer. We are now in the process of expanding the service whereby students will be trained to offer peer support to fellow students.

Also within the last year the branch held a week of talks (Sam Talks) which were open to the public as part of Limerick Mental Health Awareness Week. The goal of the week is that through a series of public talks, exhibitions, workshops and events, we can raise awareness of mental health in the local community. It also provides a forum to generate discussion, reduce stigma and promote positive mental health and wellbeing. Furthermore, it serves as an opportunity to highlight the range of supports and services that are available within the local community to support our mental health.

Samaritans Limerick & Tipperary have been one of the lead organisations in putting together the local programme for Connecting for Life, Ireland's national strategy to reduce suicide (2015-2020). The branch has helped to facilitate focus groups, gather information for the plan and offered input and actions so that the plan can be successfully implemented over the next few years. In collaborating with the HSE, community and voluntary groups to produce this plan we will be able to measure effectively the goals set, which mirror our own – to alleviate emotional distress and reduce the incidence of suicidal feelings and suicidal behaviour.

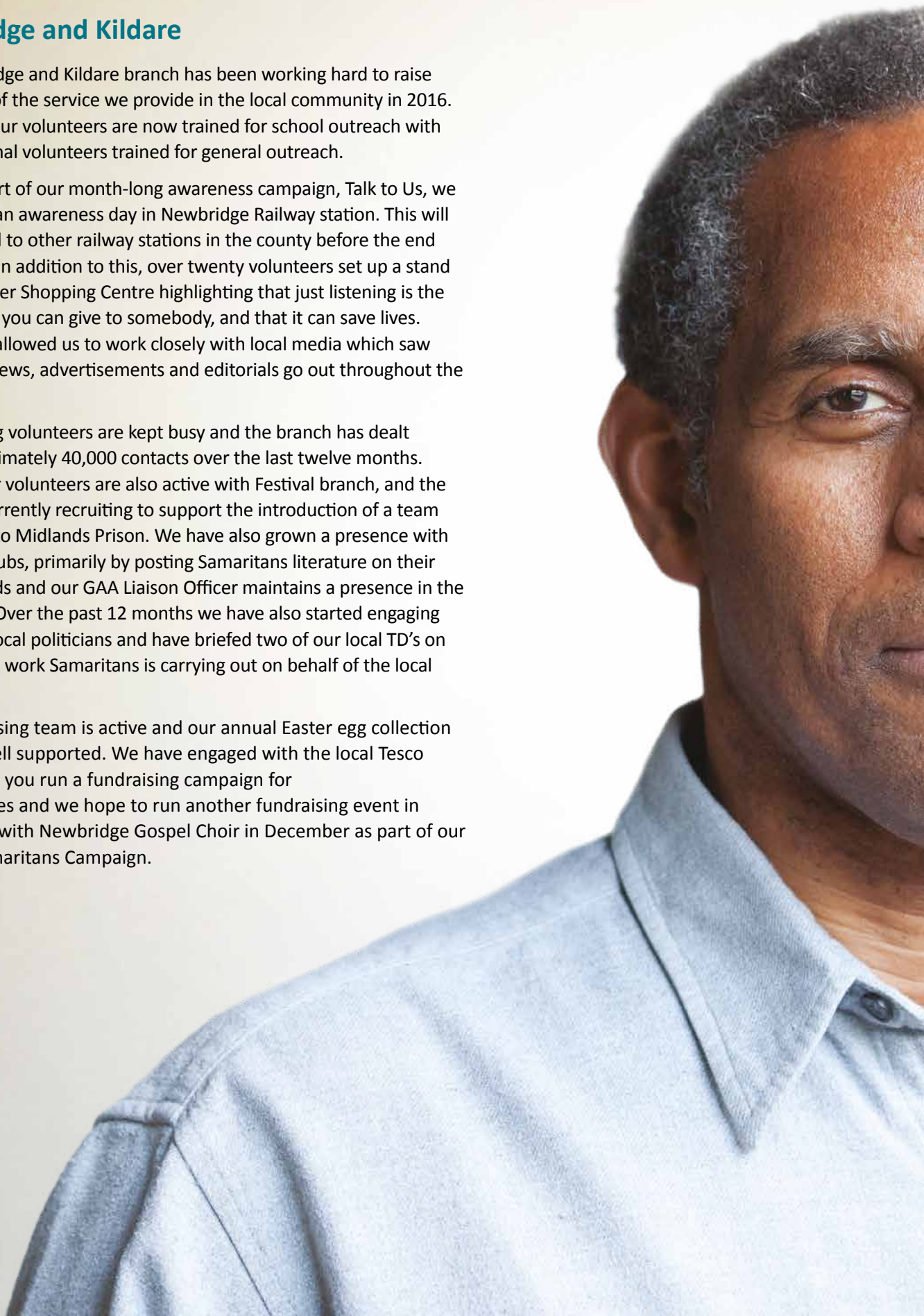
## Newbridge and Kildare

The Newbridge and Kildare branch has been working hard to raise awareness of the service we provide in the local community in 2016. A team of four volunteers are now trained for school outreach with two additional volunteers trained for general outreach.

In July as part of our month-long awareness campaign, Talk to Us, we carried out an awareness day in Newbridge Railway station. This will be extended to other railway stations in the county before the end of the year. In addition to this, over twenty volunteers set up a stand in Whitewater Shopping Centre highlighting that just listening is the greatest gift you can give to somebody, and that it can save lives. 'Talk to Us' allowed us to work closely with local media which saw radio interviews, advertisements and editorials go out throughout the month.

Our listening volunteers are kept busy and the branch has dealt with approximately 40,000 contacts over the last twelve months. Three of our volunteers are also active with Festival branch, and the branch is currently recruiting to support the introduction of a team of listeners to Midlands Prison. We have also grown a presence with local GAA clubs, primarily by posting Samaritans literature on their notice boards and our GAA Liaison Officer maintains a presence in the local clubs. Over the past 12 months we have also started engaging more with local politicians and have briefed two of our local TD's on the valuable work Samaritans is carrying out on behalf of the local community.

Our fundraising team is active and our annual Easter egg collection was very well supported. We have engaged with the local Tesco store where you run a fundraising campaign for local charities and we hope to run another fundraising event in association with Newbridge Gospel Choir in December as part of our Sing for Samaritans Campaign.





## Sligo

While our focus is very much on the callers to our branch, we have used last year's publicity to reach out more in our local community. Newspapers, radio and social media provided us with a superb platform to raise the awareness of our branch in Sligo. We followed up on this awareness by presenting positive mental health talks to the new inductees to third level colleges and to the final year nursing students in Saint Angela's nursing college. The talks focused on areas like stress management, positive well-being and the role that the Sligo Samaritans provides to the community.

The Sligo GAA are driving the health and wellbeing message directly into the community and two of our volunteers have joined their Sligo Committee. In turn, the GAA has been very active in promoting our partnership and our services. They dedicated a full page on this year's County final program to the role of Samaritans in Sligo and our links to the GAA. It is intended that we will get directly involved with the 26 local teams and the wider community.

We are very proud of our branch and this year we have extended its use by hosting the Sligo meetings for Connecting for Life.

This gave us the opportunity to meet all the local groups in the area directly and indirectly involved with mental health and suicide prevention. This has also followed our theme for 2015 of reaching out to all our community and creating a greater awareness of our existence and services.

Among so many of the outreach activities, we continue to be involved with the Lough Gill 10K swim. Each of the 60 kayakers wore the hi-vis Samaritans vests and are very strongly promoted during the whole event.



## Tralee and Kerry

Kerry and Tralee Samaritans has been very busy over the last 12 months promoting our services. The Stephanie O'Sullivan 'Cycle Against Suicide' charity cycle took place in June and we ensured that Kerry and Tralee Samaritans had a presence at this and to ensure that the wider community were aware of our service.

In July, a group of our volunteers were in Killarney to take part in the 'Ring of Kerry Charity Cycle' to raise funds for the branch. With groups taking part in both events, we think it's safe to say we have a fit bunch of volunteers!

The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Irish Association of Suicidology took place on from 6–7 October, which we were in attendance for. The conference was attended by professionals working within the field of suicide prevention, with our own Cindy O'Shea presenting on our helpline. We were proud to be able to attend and continue to spread awareness of the service provided by Samaritans and to meet others working to reduce suicide.

## Waterford and South East

In the school year 2015/2016 we have continued Samaritans outreach programme to second level schools in County Wexford and South Tipperary working with Dublin based Theatre Company Smashing Times. The group perform a monologue called Testimonies about mental health with an emphasis on suicide. A team comprising of Samaritans volunteers and a psychologist support the theatre company during the performance and for a questions and answers session after the drama piece.

A total of 14 workshops were held in 12 schools through November 2015 to February and March 2016 and were attended by 1,068 students.

The total cost of these performances was €11,080. The sponsors were Sisters of Mercy Solidarity Trust Fund, Clonmel Rotary Club, Clonmel Suicide Awareness Workers and Super Valu Carrick on Suir. The branch covered €2,000 of the cost.

Since the 2011/2012 school year we have run 72 workshops in 52 schools in the South East and raised €56,565 to cover the cost of same which have been attended by 5,748 students.

**The feedback from the students was very positive and here's just some of their comments:**

*'To be aware that alcohol can cause serious mood changes'*

*'Ask for help if you feel lonely or depressed'*

*'I learned to tell a responsible adult about a problem with a friend rather than putting the responsibility on myself'*

*'It's okay not to feel okay'*

**Finally, a comment from a teacher:**

*'Thank you and your team for a very useful and well-presented input on Thursday last. The feedback from the students was very positive'*



# Map of branches




**Someone to talk to** – people contact us when things are getting to them. They don't have to be suicidal.

**We're always here** – round the clock, every single day of the year.

**People can be themselves** – whoever they are, however they feel, whatever life's done to them.

**We're a charity** – it's the public's kind donations that help fund our service.

 **Visit us** – at any of our branches

**Athlone** 3 Court Devenish, Athlone, Co Westmeath

**Cork** Coach Street, Cork

**Drogheda** 3 Leyland Place, Stockwell Street, Drogheda

**Dublin** 112 Marlborough Street, Dublin 1

**East Coast** Paramount Arcade, 53 Main St, Arklow, Co Wicklow

**Ennis** Sunville, Kilrush Road, Ennis, Co Clare

**Galway** 14 Nun's Island, Galway

**Kilkenny** 2 Abbeybridge, Deanstreet, Kilkenny

**Limerick** 20 Barrington Street, Limerick

**Newbridge** 3 McElwaine Terrace, Newbridge, Co Kildare

**Sligo** 3 The Mall, Sligo

**Tralee** 43-44 Moyderwell, Tralee, Co Kerry

**Waterford** 16 Beau Street, Waterford

**See our website for individual opening hours**

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