

## **Volunteering with Bristol Samaritans**

**37 St Nicholas Street, Bristol. BS1 1TP.**

# **WITH SAMARITANS**

**Tel: Bristol (0117) 927 9387**

**Bristol Samaritans have around 190 dedicated volunteers of all ages, interests and backgrounds. But we always need more volunteers to help keep our telephone lines open providing emotional support to those in the local community who may want it.**

**Who We Are.** Samaritans were started in London in 1953 by the Rev. Chad Varah and are the oldest telephone helpline service in the country. Although an ordained Priest, Chad Varah set up Samaritans specifically as a non-religious charity of which there are now 201 autonomous branches in the UK and Republic of Ireland. Bristol branch opened in 1964 and is based in the city centre at 37 St Nicholas Street, Bristol, BS1 1TP (*just off Corn Street*).

**What We Do.** Samaritans are available 24 hours a day to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those that may lead to suicide. Our Volunteers provide a free service and believe being listened to, in confidence, and accepted without prejudice or being judged, can alleviate these feelings. We also believe everyone has the right to make fundamental decisions about their own life, including the decision to die by suicide if they so wish.

**The Volunteers We Are Looking For.** Anyone 18 years old or over can be a Samaritan listening volunteer providing they care about other human beings, are good "active" listeners and are prepared to work within the Samaritan principles of confidentiality and being non-judgemental whatever the issues involved. Our volunteers do not give Callers advice or material support of any kind. We also need non-listening volunteers to assist with various administration and fund raising activities vital to keep the branch running successfully. Cost should not be a deterrent to join us as fair expenses can be claimed. Visit our website [www.samaritans.org/bristol](http://www.samaritans.org/bristol) for more information.

**The Application Process.** Potential Volunteers are requested to come to our Centre at 37 St Nicholas Street on the first Monday of the month (no booking is necessary) and attend an informal Information Evening starting at 7:15 pm until 9:00 pm. We will explain what we do and you can ask questions without any obligation at this stage. If you then decide to join us you will be given an application form, which should be returned to the branch once completed. You will be asked to give the names of two references and once these are received, invited to attend a Selection Day, usually held on a Sunday. During this day we explain in more detail what we do, have a one to one talk with you and run simple activities to see if you are the sort of person we are looking for. Those who are successful will then be invited to attend our initial training. Criminal Record checks may be carried out on volunteers who join us to protect Callers, some of whom may be vulnerable.

**Training given to new Volunteers.** For volunteers selected for listener training we provide 9 initial training modules of 3 hours each over a six-week period. This is followed by a further 4 modules over a six month probationary period during which the volunteer answers calls on our emergency lines. Listening volunteers must also complete a minimum of 5 hours ongoing training every year.

**Time Contribution Expected from Volunteers.** New listening volunteers are supported by experienced volunteers and are asked to do regular listening duties of approximately four hours each - up to one duty a week depending on the time of day you do them. It is particularly important we cover duties at night and volunteers will generally be expected to do one night duty every quarter.

**Some Facts and Figures.** There were 5.3 million contacts made to Samaritans in the UK and Republic of Ireland in 2007 and during 2006 there were 5985 people who took their own life (one person every 88 minutes). This suggests more than 70 of these were in the area covered by Bristol Samaritans who received 45,386 contacts in 2008 from Callers. The vast majority of these contacts were by telephone but 1841 were by Email and Face-to-Face visits to our Centre in Bristol. We also support Horfield men's prison and Eastwood Park women's prison by training inmates as "Listeners" to work with other prisoners who need emotional support whilst serving their sentence.

**Interested in joining Bristol Samaritans? Then please phone Bristol 927 9387 now!**