**Kings Lynn Samaritans essential information and FAQs**

Being a volunteer can be difficult at times, and it’s not for everyone. Before you apply, we want to make sure that being a listening volunteer is right for you.

**Some of the things you may hear as a listening volunteer will be difficult.**

People contact us when they’re feeling desperate, angry, grieving or in pain. Some of them are feeling suicidal.

Some things people tell us can be particularly tough to hear. But you can always take time out and talk it through with another volunteer. When you become a volunteer you join a community of people all facing the same challenges.

**Samaritans can’t tell people who contact us what to do.**

Our role as listening volunteers is to listen. You may really want to tell people what to do, or what not to do, but you can’t.

Not giving advice can be difficult at times, but just being there for people, offering a human presence, is hugely important.

**Volunteers may have to listen to someone take their own life.**

If someone has made the decision to end their life, you have to accept that. All you can do is be there for them as long as they need you.

The majority of people who contact us aren’t suicidal, but very occasionally you might have someone who is not only suicidal but intending to go through with it. Our training will help prepare you for these kinds of situations – and the people around you at Samaritans will talk things through as much as you need.

**Samaritans have to be able to listen to others without judgement.**

You have to support callers even if they’re doing things you don’t approve of.

It’s really important that people are able to contact us without feeling that we’ll make judgements about them. Our training will help you to offer support without judging people.

**Volunteers must be able to cope with feeling deeply uncomfortable**.

You sometimes have to hear about difficult things that have happened to someone. You'll also often never know what happens to someone after they've been in contact.

The people who contact us are going through a tough time, and very often that’s because bad things have happened to them. But we don’t have the option of putting the phone down or walking away. We have to be willing to hear about these things.

But if things ever do get on top of you, you can take a break. And you can ask another volunteer for support. You’ll be surrounded by people who know exactly what you’re going through.

**If you are still happy to proceed with your application, then below is more information about what Samaritans do to help our callers.**

Further information about Samaritans

Dr Chad Varah, a rector in London, was the founder of Samaritans in 1953. As a young curate he had conducted a funeral of a 14 year old girl who took her own life and wanted to start a ‘999 for potential suicides’.

It was the media who actually coined the name Samaritans after the parable of the Good Samaritan - but despite that, Samaritans has never been a religious organisation. We are non-establishment.

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

**We do that by listening to our callers.**

As Samaritans we are all committed to the values of:

**• Listening -** because exploring feelings alleviates distress and helps people to reach a better understanding of their situation and the options open to them.

**• Confidentiality -** because if people feel safe, they are more likely to be open about their feelings.

**• People making their own decisions -** we believe that people have the right to find their own solution and telling people what to do takes responsibility away from them. We never tell people not to take their own life if that is what they want to do.

**• Being non-judgemental** - because we want people to be able to talk to us without fear of prejudice or rejection.

**• Human contact -** because giving people time, undivided attention and empathy meets a fundamental emotional need and reduces distress and despair.

People can contact the Samaritans by phone, email, letter or by visiting their local branch.

**Why what we do matters:**

**•** Every 6 seconds, someone makes contact with Samaritans.

• Tragically, for some, suicide can seem like the only option. In 2017, 6,213 people in the UK and Republic of Ireland took their own life.

• Suicide is the biggest killer of men under 50. Men are at higher risk than women and make up three-quarters of all deaths by suicide.

• Suicide is also, tragically, the biggest killer of young people aged 20-34.

We are ordinary people from different backgrounds, with one common goal – to be there for our callers. We give our callers our time and attention freely – we are not paid to do it. Volunteers do everything that is needed to keep these branches going. We fundraise, publicise our services, do the administration, train new volunteers and reach out to local communities – as well as supporting those who need us by phone, email, letter and in person.

We undergo an intensive training programme, teaching volunteers to:

• Give their whole attention to the person they’re supporting

• Check they’ve understood by summarising what‘s been said

**•** Communicate warmth and calm through their tone of voice, writing or body language

• Appreciate how the person feels, rather than how the volunteer would feel in their situation

• Ask gentle, open questions to help people explore their thoughts and feelings in more depth.

**If you are still happy to proceed with your application, then below an FAQ specifically for Kings Lynn Samaritans about what comes next.**

**Kings Lynn Samaritans FAQ**

**1. I’m not sure I want to take calls – can I help out in any other way?**

Absolutely! We are always looking for support volunteers to help our branch run smoothly by helping with administration, outreach, publicity, fundraising and more. Support volunteers still need to have criminal record checks and basic training, but do not need to take calls. If you want to become a support volunteer let us know by emailing volunteering@kingslynnsamaritans.org.uk

**2. I want to take calls and be a listening volunteer. What happens next?**

Along with this information you will have been sent an Application Form specific for Kings Lynn Samaritans. Once you have completed this form you will be put in the queue for an interview.

The interview will be between you and two experienced Samaritans, who will chat to you about why you want to be a Samaritan and the sorts of skills and experience you have that might help. We will offer you a slot as soon as we can. This may be in person Covid 19 allowing. Alternatively, this will be conducted virtually.

The Application Form asks for two references. We will collect these references, which should be from people who know you personally (but not immediate family/spouses).

If you are successful at interview then you will be offered a space on a training course. All available dates will be offered to those successful at interview. We will also conduct an Advanced DBS check to make sure we are aware of any criminal record you might have.

**3. What happens at training?**

Training takes place over several weeks, with training sessions each week. These may be conducted in person or virtually via Zoom. In between these training sessions there are also online modules that trainees must complete.

You must attend every single training session. If you are not able to attend a session in a course – whether it is for work, a holiday or an emergency – we will need to discuss how you can access the learning for that session. It could mean that you will need to be rebooked onto a later training course.

We are not currently able to host face-to-face training sessions.

If you have successfully completed the training, you will be assigned a mentor in the branch and begin to listen to and take real calls with the support and guidance of a mentor. There are also further training sessions that take place every few weeks for several months. Only once your mentor, trainers and you are confident you can take calls independently will you complete training and become a fully-fledged Samaritan.

**4. Can I be a Samaritan if I have a criminal record?**

It depends on the nature of your record: the safety and security of our callers and volunteers is paramount so if you have a very serious criminal record then it may not be possible for you to train with King’s Lynn Samaritans.

However, these are taken on a case-by-case basis and every decision depends on the circumstances. If you wish to discuss this further please do email us.

**5. I have/have had mental health issues/thoughts of suicide/bereavement by suicide. Can I be a**

**Samaritan?**

Again, this depends on the nature of your individual circumstances. We care deeply about the wellbeing of our volunteers, as well as our callers, and need to make sure you would be safe and healthy enough to volunteer. Volunteers are exposed to a lot of very difficult and emotional topics, and if your own circumstances mean this would be too upsetting for you then it might be better for your own wellbeing that you do not volunteer at this time.

However, it may be that things change and progress and you feel that in the future you are ready to apply again. If you wish to discuss this further please do email us.

**6. If I become a Samaritan, what would I need to do?**

Being a Samaritan is a significant time commitment. All Kings Lynn Samaritans are required to do one shift per week, with a night shift usually every four-six weeks.

Shifts last for three hour currently (this can change depending on the Branch requirements). But to make sure shift change-overs happen smoothly, volunteers should expect to arrive 20-15 minutes before their shift starts. Remember you also need to factor in time to travel to the branch – so a three-hour shift may take up considerably more time.

All volunteers are expected to do night duties every four-six weeks. Night duties take place between 10pm and 7am. If you are not able to commit to night duties then we might not able to process your application.

COVID-19 – please note that Samaritans shifts must take place in person in the branch and cannot be done remotely. If you are shielding or will be unable to come into the branch to take calls, we will defer your training until those circumstances change.

Keeping Kings Lynn Samaritans running takes a lot of work beyond helping callers. Volunteers are encouraged to help out wherever they can. Additional roles include administration, training, outreach, communications, fundraising, working in prisons and branch maintenance. We all need to work together to keep our branch open to help callers.

**7. How does the rota work?**

In your Application Form and again when you finish initial training, you can tell us when you are generally available to volunteer. For example, if you have a job during the weekdays you can tell us that you are only available to volunteer on weekday evenings and at weekends. We have found that people who are employed in shift work or who regularly work irregular hours might find it difficult to commit to a steady availability. If you are unable to commit to a steady availability we unfortunately we might not be able to progress with your application.

**8. What about holidays?**

Volunteers can, of course, take holidays! Just remember to make a note of this on your Directory page.

The wellbeing of our volunteers is really important and sometimes things happen that mean volunteers need to take a longer break – maybe health or family issues, or a particularly stressful period at work. There is a dedicated Volunteer Care team who can help you decide how long away you need and arrange it with the rota team if necessary.

**9. Where is Kings Lynn Samaritans?**

We are based at our branch at 26 Queen Street, Kings Lynn. There is limited parking available at the rear of the Centre which backs onto Baker Street Car Park in Kings Lynn. We also have 2 parking permits for the Council Car Park to assist volunteers with parking.

**10. What happens during a shift?**

There are always at least two Samaritans on duty at any time. You are in the Duty Room together so you are never alone. At your station you take telephone calls – though you can turn the phones off in between calls if you need a break! Some volunteers also reply to emails from callers as well as taking telephone calls.

COVID-19 – during the COVID-19 pandemic we have worked hard to ensure volunteers can be safe while volunteering. Social distancing measures are in place, along with strict cleaning and hygiene processes.

If something happens that you are not sure how to handle, your fellow Samaritan will be able to help you. There is also a Leader on duty at their home, who is there to support you by telephone if you need anything at all.

At the end of your shift you call the Leader to tell them all about the calls you have had. This is your opportunity to talk about anything that is worrying or upsetting you about the calls and to get any support you might need.

**11. Can I tell people I’m a Samaritan?**

A long time ago, if you were a Samaritan you had to keep it a secret, even from your closest friends and family. That is not the case now and many volunteers rely on their friends’, family’s and sometimes employer’s support and understanding during training and volunteering. However, it is absolutely forbidden to tell anyone outside of Samaritans anything about the calls you take or hear about. Keeping our calls confidential is absolutely essential so even if your family or friends ask about your calls you cannot talk about them.

While you do not need to keep your status as a Samaritan a secret, many volunteers do not choose to publish this information on their social media or tell acquaintances about their volunteering. This is because people may not fully understand what Samaritans is and some volunteers prefer to keep their volunteering and personal life separate.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact us.