

Volunteering with Reading Samaritans



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 24 hours a day to provide emotional support** for people who are experiencing feelings of emotional distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide.
- **Reaching out to high risk groups and communities** to reduce the risk of 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.

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

- **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** wherever possible, because we believe that people have the right to find their own solution and telling people what to do takes responsibility away from them.
- **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.

SAMARITANS

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0118 926 6333

office@readingsamaritans.org.uk

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in our work and your kind offer to be considered as a volunteer.

To get some idea of our work, please have a look at this pack. It includes some notes explaining what we do and a statement of our vision, mission and values. You can also find out more by visiting our website at www.readingsamaritans.org.uk

The next step is to come to an Information Meeting at our branch. These are held at least once a month, and take about 1.5 hours. These meetings are informal, and attending one doesn't create any obligation! We will explain some more about what we do, and what is involved in being a Samaritan volunteer. You will also have a chance to ask any questions you may have.

After the Information Meeting, you may choose to complete an application form and apply to attend a Selection Day, during which you will take part in a number of activities designed to find out whether we are right for each other.

On satisfactory completion of this process you will be invited to join a Samaritans Initial Training programme. Every applicant is asked to follow this procedure, no matter what his or her previous experience may be, and to attend **all** sessions of the programme. Programmes are held a limited number of times a year so there may be a gap between completing the application process and the start of the training.

We hope you will pursue this application and we will do our best to help and guide you through each part of it. If at any time you decide not to take your application further please let us know straight away. If you have any queries or wish to discuss anything further please ring the centre with your contact details and ask the selection team to ring you back.

Remember, volunteering can change someone's life... your own!

Samaritans of Reading

What is Samaritans (and what do you do)?

Samaritans provides confidential non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which could lead to suicide. Our volunteers listen to and support callers, who may choose to contact us by phone, email, text message or by visiting our branch. Reading is one of about 200 branches across the UK and Ireland, all of which provide the same service.

What kind of volunteer can I be with Samaritans?

Every aspect of running our Samaritans branch is done by volunteers. There are two types of volunteer:

- **Support Volunteer** – *giving time to help publicise Samaritans in Reading or assisting in recruitment, fundraising, administration, maintenance of the Branch and other key activities that ensure we can continue to provide support to callers.*
- **Listening Volunteer** – *committing time to support those callers requiring emotional support including feelings that may lead to suicide.*

Most of the rest of this document relates to the Listening Volunteer role: if you are interested in a Support role then come to an Information Meeting and ask about what help we need.

What's it like to be a Samaritan?

Samaritans are ordinary people from all walks of life who have chosen to devote part of their spare time to helping other people in distress. They are picked for their human qualities and much of their work is carried out anonymously. Samaritans is not a religious organisation. Members are of many faiths or none.

You have to be able to listen attentively, unhurriedly and at length. You have to learn not to advise, criticise or judge. You have to share pain, often knowing that there is nothing you can do: you can't solve bereavement, cure depression, or produce jobs, accommodation or money, or provide friends or instant happiness.

At all times, you have to ensure that everything a caller has told you and the fact that the caller has contacted Samaritans remains **absolutely confidential** to Samaritans.

On the other hand, you will become a member of a very strong community of volunteers who provide support for each other. There are also optional social activities and the opportunity to learn many new skills.

"I have met some amazing people at Samaritans. They're not people I would normally have met in my day to day life and they're from really different backgrounds but I've made some firm friends. I think I'm more open to people than I was."

Do I have enough time?

This is a really important question, as becoming a Listening Volunteer with Samaritans does require a consistent commitment. However, we have a very flexible system which allows volunteers to do shifts at the times that suit them – you don't need to commit to the same shift each week, for example.

On average you'll need to do about **one shift per week**: some of the shifts will need to be night shifts, starting at 22:15 or 02:15. Most shifts are about three hours, though the night shifts are longer. There are bedrooms available in which volunteers can sleep during the part of the night when they are not on duty.

You will also be expected to attend regular Support Group meetings (every 3 or 4 weeks) and to undertake at least 5 hours per year of on-going training after your initial training is complete.

“Once in a while you get a call that cuts through all the other calls, and makes you realise you are privileged to have been there for that person.”

Will my family be involved?

On the contrary; they will be excluded from this part of your life. **You won't take information about callers home, and you cannot discuss individual callers outside Samaritans.** However, you will be giving a lot of your spare time, so it is vital that your partner/family understands and supports your work with Samaritans.

We do occasionally have social events to which partners/families may come and there is a **Branch Annual General Meeting** at which they would be welcome. Some partners/families like to help by joining as a Support Volunteer.

What support is available?

Samaritans recognises that volunteers could not undertake the type of work we do without proper support. The **confidential nature of our work** means that it is not possible for volunteers to seek support outside of the organisation.

Support is extensive and includes the following:

- i) Following initial training all new volunteers will do their first duties jointly with an experienced volunteer who will be their mentor.
- ii) At all times in the centre there are at least 2 volunteers on duty. You will never be on duty on your own. A Samaritan volunteer is expected to support his / her co-volunteers during a duty.

“Walking through the gate is a great leveller – all are equal, supportive, and supported by each other, so that we can support our callers.”

- iii) Whilst on duty, in addition to the support you receive from your co-volunteers you will always have available to you, by phone, the advice and support of an experienced volunteer (**"Leader on call"**) even during the night.
- iv) Your Support Group is designed to offer on-going support for you as a Samaritan volunteer and as an individual. At the Support Group meetings you will have a chance to talk over difficult calls and share experiences. In this way, you will learn from others and they from you. The **Support Group** also acts as a two-way communications system which keeps you informed of what's going on in the Branch and gives you a chance to have a say and to feel part of the Branch.

I've had some problems of my own – will you still accept me?

Lots of people have had some sort of trouble in the course of their lives. Your own experience of distress is likely to have enlarged your sense of empathy and compassion for others. This could be valuable in helping you to understand the plight of our callers. However, it may also have left you too vulnerable to take on the burden of other people's troubles. If you have had a major personal crisis **in the last 12 months**, we may ask you to defer your application. But do not be put off applying if you feel that your own troubles are well behind you.

"Listening to someone who is perhaps depressed, worried, frightened and / or suicidal and who doesn't know where to turn to, is perhaps the most valuable thing we can do for a fellow human being."

What qualifications do I need?

No formal qualifications are necessary. **We need ordinary, caring, friendly people** over the age of 18 who are able to listen in an active way and who are not afraid of distress or embarrassed by grief and tears. We need people who feel comfortable in sharing their feelings, because we need you to express your feelings to other Samaritan volunteers so that we can look after you in your work with us.

Social position and your job don't matter at all. Neither do your beliefs provided you accept that you will not be able to share them with our callers.

It is essential that you can be contacted by phone.

Do you turn some people down?

Yes. We may feel that you are too close to troubles of your own. Samaritan work might touch on a raw nerve or open an old wound, to your detriment. Or it might be that your talents are of a more practical type or your personality more forceful and active than we seek in Samaritan listeners. If this is the case, some other form of voluntary work might fit you more comfortably, or you may wish to consider a Support Volunteer role.

What's in it for me?

Well, you won't benefit financially (though out of pocket expenses are payable). But you will get to meet some really interesting people – both volunteers and callers – and you will probably learn some very valuable skills. You will have the feeling of being able to do something to help someone else: many of our volunteers report that this is the most rewarding thing they have ever done.

What happens next?

The next step is to attend an Information Meeting, followed (if you are still interested) by a Selection Day. If you are successful at this point you will be asked to supply two personal references before moving on to a Samaritans Initial Training (SIT) programme. You will also be asked to undergo a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check.

The SIT programme consists of about nine 2.5 hour training sessions held at weekends and evenings. A significant part of each session consists of Skills Practice, in which you will participate in simulated calls with your trainers taking the role of caller. This is harder than listening to lots of lectures and taking notes, but this way you can face, with us, the challenges of the job you've volunteered to do.

Dates of Training classes will be notified to you before Selection so that if you are successful at Selection you will have plenty of advance notice. You are required to attend all of the sessions. However, if there is a date which is impossible for you to attend, we may be able to make alternative arrangements. Enjoyment is an important element of the classes: most Samaritans have fond memories of their training!

"When I listen to a caller's problems and fears it makes me think of my own life from a different perspective. It helps me forget about my own little problems and helps me to see what's good in my life.

"Before I joined Samaritans I was a bit worried about what it would be like answering the phone, but the training was really thorough and although I was still a bit nervous on my first shift, my group were very supportive and I feel more confident now."

Contacting Samaritans



For more information about Samaritans and volunteering, visit the national website at <http://www.samaritans.org>

For specific information about Reading Samaritans, including dates for Information Meetings and how to find us, visit <http://www.readingsamaritans.org.uk>

To make contact with the Reading branch, phone **0118 926 6333** (note that this is also our emergency phone line for callers, and you may be diverted to another branch if we are busy).

You can also email us at recruit@readingsamaritans.org.uk or office@readingsamaritans.org.uk (general enquiries).

Our postal address is: 59a Cholmeley Road, Reading RG1 3NB

If you, or someone you know, would like to talk in confidence about an issue you are facing, our emergency contact details are:

Phone:	08457 90 90 90
Email:	jo@samaritans.org
Visit:	59a Cholmeley Road, Reading RG1 3NB (no appointment needed)
Post:	Chris, P.O. Box 9090, Stirling, FK8 2SA