

SAMARITANS

Weston Super Mare
& North Somerset



Annual report 2020–21

Director's Report

The year of the pandemic. At the beginning of March 2020, we had 52 volunteers active on the rota (the highest number since I became Director). After the lockdown on 23rd March, just 25 volunteers were still able to come into the branch to take calls and do email. Despite this, due to the effort and commitment of those who remained and the continuing support of those volunteers who had to stay at home, we provided a reliable and undiminished service.

For reasons of Covid security, in early April, we moved the operations room from its accessible location on the ground floor (where it had been for just nine months) to the most inaccessible space in the building – the large training and meeting room on the second floor. This arrangement remained in place for the remainder of the (financial) year. (It ended this April.) Volunteers who found the stairs difficult to negotiate, climbed them determinedly for twelve months in order to do their shifts. We reached a peak of 42 active volunteers in November, but the increased levels of infection later in the year meant that, by the end of March, we were back to 36. (At the time of writing, we have 50, back to pre-Covid levels, with more new Samaritans currently being trained.)

The branch opened for more hours in 2020/21 than in the previous year, despite everything. This was only achieved because of the multiple shifts that many volunteers did, week after week, to keep the rota filled. We took no shifts off the rota and relatively few shifts were closed. Throughout these difficult times, despite varying levels of infection and the different phases of lockdown, our volunteers' commitment was (and continues to be) absolutely exceptional – so exceptional that, in December, the branch won one of the "Lockdown Community Champion of Weston Super Mare" awards.

The Service

So, the service did much more than merely survive in the difficult times of 2020/21. It thrived. In 2019/20, we were open for 2,837 hours. In 20/21, we were open for 3,044 hours – an overall increase of 7%, despite our diminished resources. The number of calls answered also increased from 13,135 to 13,271. Once again, calls also got longer (nationally by approximately 9%). We also responded to 867 emails during the year (fewer than in the previous year). There were no face to face callers, though. This service was suspended by Samaritans nationally because of the pandemic and remains suspended today.

Fundraising

From a fundraising and financial point of view, this was also a very successful year for the branch. No face to face fundraising could take place, but we had some very generous donations, did very well from grant funding (particularly from the funding made available to Samaritan branches by the Pears Foundation) and raised £7,000 plus from the Samarathon (the challenge to run, walk or otherwise cover 26.2 miles during the course of July). Phil deals with this in more detail in his Treasurer's report, so I will not expand further here. I must thank Lucy once again though, whose grant applications have once more proved extremely fruitful as well as John for his oversight of our fundraising operations (not to mention our marketing).

Branch Activities

Ann, ably assisted by Jo and Marion, kept a weather eye on **caller support** needs, including providing valuable quality assurance for the email service.

Despite the practical difficulties inevitably caused by the pandemic, Millie kept our **recruitment** moving forward very positively with 20 new Samaritans beginning core training during the year, recruited via the new and not entirely unproblematic 'Branch Management Tool', and all interviewed on Zoom. Many thanks to Millie's team of interviewers.

The hugely committed Ruby with a now well-established and skilful **training** team comprising Tracey, George, Jo, Jan (and myself), made a smooth if not particularly welcome transition to online training, running three complete courses for new Samaritans during the year which, despite the inevitable difficulties involved in this form of training, ran with great success both from a technical and a practical point of view.

Amy (**volunteer support**) maintained contact with volunteers who were self-isolating or on sabbatical, keeping them in touch with the branch and ensuring their smooth return when the time was right. Holly (who has now become a support volunteer because of Covid 19 related issues and is stepping down as a Trustee) was only able to come into the branch very exceptionally, but was still able to support Simon, our now ex-shop manager, during the sad closure of the **shop** and was always present with her support and advice when needed.

Jodie remains a brilliant **Branch Secretary** ensuring the proper organisation of meetings and branch affairs, dealing with the move to online meetings with her usual unflappability and ensuring good branch administration. Phil, our **Treasurer**, oversaw the ever increasing health of our finances throughout the year, providing regular updates on our financial progress and careful oversight of our spending. Rachell re-joined the Branch Leadership Team (did she ever really leave?) continuing her work in maintaining Samaritan IT accounts and **systems**, keeping the rota management system up to date and flawlessly managing the complex administration of the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks for new and existing volunteers. She was also endlessly patient in dealing with the problems that can arise for volunteers when logging on to the various different IT systems we now use (particularly in the early days of their career as Samaritans).

Outreach work (led by Mac) was unfortunately limited to what could be done virtually, as no personal contact activities were possible through the entire year.

Luke who was our DD for **Ongoing Training** left the branch in January, very regrettably because of the pressure of his (paid) work. Face to face ongoing training was suspended for obvious reasons, although there were plenty of modules available online. We wish Luke all the best for the future and hope he may return one day.

Finally, I should mention Eddy just once more (our ex IT lead now departed to Exeter branch), who made a comeback (actually several comebacks) to advise and offer practical assistance on cabling our latest accessible operations room.

The Closure of the Shop

After a brief reopening in July 2020, the Trustees in conjunction with the branch leadership team reluctantly took the decision to close the shop. The reason for this was that, in this new Covid world, we need a larger accessible operations room than that included in the refurbishments of 2019. We did investigate the possibility of putting in a lift to the first floor, but this proved unaffordable, and possibly impractical.

So, the only feasible solution was to use the shop space, which does at least allow three people to occupy the room and still be socially distanced. Very fortunately, the plan to make this change coincided with the very generous Pears' Foundation Grant (£1 million in total) to Samaritans. We successfully bid against this grant and the entire cost of the work involved was funded from this source. We moved into the new space in April this year and the new arrangements are working well.

National Developments

The new 'Online chat' service has begun to roll out across branches, although currently the roll out is paused. We are hoping to get involved once things start moving again.

Safeguarding, though, has been the main driver behind recent national developments in the Samaritan service. The Safeguarding policy itself changed in November 2020 to classify all children, whatever their age as being unable to make independent decisions about their safeguarding needs. (Previously teenagers could be treated differently.) The term 'vulnerable adult' was replaced by the term 'adult at risk' in line with the Care Act (2014). This had the effect of bringing the policy more closely into line with current safeguarding legislation. More changes are on the way – very significant ones – in terms of the delivery of our email service, the structures for providing caller support and safeguarding services, safeguarding training, and, perhaps most radically, the implementation of a 'listening in' function (carried out by volunteers) to provide oversight and quality assurance of telephone calls. A 'Concerns Line' was implemented in July this year enabling volunteers who have unresolved issues about safeguarding in the branch to make direct contact with Samaritans Central Office.

Most of these changes are still in the very early stages. Recruitment is continuing to the new centralised email and caller support/safeguarding 'hubs'. There has also been a recent change to our caller email service (involving a second check on all outgoing email).

The new Director will be in better position to report on how these developments have impacted on the branch at the next year's AGM, which I fervently hope will be a face to face meeting. (Recruitment for my replacement will begin in early October.)

Finally

My thanks to all our volunteers, supporters, funders and the many people who took an interest in the branch over the course of the year. I think we can be very proud of what we achieved. The mutual support, solidarity and commitment to the service among branch members, in very difficult times, has been quite exceptional.

Andy 646
Director

Treasurer's Report

Income for the year was £76,478, and expenditure for the year totalled £48,639 (including £18,550 spent on building alterations), giving a surplus for the year of £27,839, which is added to the unrestricted reserve funds. £31,839 relating to unrestricted reserves and negative £4,000 regarding restricted reserves.

Donations and legacies totalled £54,043, which included a grant from the Pears Foundation of £18,550, a very generous anonymous donation of £10,000, £5,080 from the Bramble Trust, £2,239 from the Co-op, £1,891 from the Somerset Crematorium and £1,468 from Thatchers Cider, as well as number of smaller, and much appreciated, gifts from a variety of PCCs, companies and individuals. As in previous years, many volunteers donated back their travel expenses which allowed the charity to recover Gift Aid.

Fundraising activities and Grants raised a further £21,587, thanks partly to a £10,000 grant from North Somerset DC, and helped by the sterling work of our Samarathon team who managed to raise an incredible £7,150 for their efforts in July 2020 (the second highest collection figure across all Samaritan branches).

The charity shop, opened in July 2019, was sadly closed in August 2020 because of Coronavirus. The Branch Leadership Team (BLT) may look to re-open the shop at some time in the future when circumstances improve.

The bank balances as at 31 March 2021 stood at £105,629.

Financial accounts are produced every month. The BLT reviews the latest report at each of its bi-monthly meetings, to ensure that both income and expenditure are closely scrutinised.

Phil 721

Samaritans of Weston Super Mare
and North Somerset CIO

Statement of Financial Activities
For the year ended 31 March 2021

	Unrestricted fund £	Restricted fund £	31.3.21 Total Funds £	31.3.20 Total Funds £
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM				
Donations and legacies	35,493	18,550	54,043	14,046
Fundraising activities and grants	21,587	-	21,587	21,305
Shop income	848	-	848	14,463
Total	57,928	18,550	76,478	49,814
EXPENDITURE ON				
Raising funds	395	-	395	5,927
Shop expenditure	5,892	-	5,892	12,396
Charitable activities	19,802	4,000	23,802	22,560
Building improvements	-	18,550	18,550	137,395
Total	26,089	22,550	48,639	178,278
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)	31,839	(4,000)	27,839	(128,464)
Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds	31,839	(4,000)	27,839	(128,464)
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS				
Total funds brought forward	63,663	16,267	79,930	208,394
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	<u>95,502</u>	<u>12,267</u>	<u>107,769</u>	<u>79,930</u>

We're here to listen

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116 123

Email

jo@samaritans.org

Web

samaritans.org

Visit us

**137a High Street
Weston Super Mare
BS23 1HN**

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