



# SAMARITANS Ireland

**Always here,  
no matter what**

 **A year of listening**

Impact Report 2020

# The year at a glance in Ireland



We responded in the way that suited our callers:



**539,579**  
phone calls

**23,853**  
emails



**468**  
face-to-face contacts  
(pre lockdown)



We listened for over  
**100,000 hours**  
during the first year of  
coronavirus restrictions

(\*March 2020 – March 2021)

Every day Samaritans  
volunteers in Ireland  
respond to around

**1,500**  
calls for help



We spent

**11 minutes**

on the phone to  
each caller,  
on average



Piloted  
**online chat**  
in three  
branches

We kept our  
helpline running

**24/7,**

even as we faced our  
biggest ever challenge with  
the spread of coronavirus

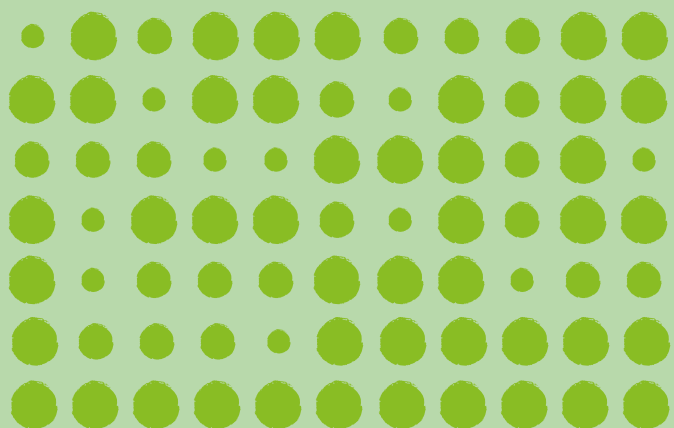


We answered a call  
for help every

**56 seconds**



Thank you for  
supporting our vital work





# Samaritans Ireland Impact Report 2020

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# Welcome

From the Executive Director for Ireland, Regional Director for Republic of Ireland (RoI) and Regional Director for Northern Ireland (NI)

## Working together to offer hope during difficult times

**Coronavirus has undoubtedly been the most serious challenge Samaritans has faced in our 60 years in Ireland, but we know we are needed now more than ever.**

2020 was a year like no other. Not only was it very difficult for our callers, but also for our volunteers.

At the start of the crisis, we had to take decisive action to keep our volunteers safe in branches, while ensuring callers could still get through to someone. We're very proud of how quickly everyone acted.

Together, we managed to keep our helpline services open 24 hours a day – even at the very height of the pandemic when up to 40% of our volunteers had to self-isolate due to a health issue or their age.

This response was only possible thanks to the remarkable commitment of the remaining volunteers and our small staff team. Our volunteers are recognised as key/essential workers. Many signed up for multiple shifts to ensure our service remained open.

We cannot thank our volunteers enough for continuing to be there for our callers. Through their resilience and spirit, they listened for over 100,000 hours during the first year of lockdown (March 2020 – March 2021) from our 21 branches across the island of Ireland.

Loneliness and isolation remained among the top reasons why people reached out for support, as well as mental health, family or relationship issues, bereavement, and illness. Many people had suffered job losses leading to uncertainty for the future. Many who called us had never used our service before.

Behind the scenes, we worked hard to future-proof our services with a new, faster recruitment journey for volunteers.

In response to the coronavirus crisis, we adapted our training so new volunteers could continue learning at home, even when they were unable to travel to their branch.

“ Without their dedication, and sheer hard work, many, many, people would have struggled to find the support they needed when trying to cope with the pressures that came with coronavirus. ”

Overnight, staff began working entirely from home with technical supports created and put in place for the transition.

They quickly adapted to provide online training to groups and organisations whose staff or volunteers were also struggling to deal with the crisis calls they were receiving due to the pandemic.

We extended our services to support Irish Diaspora living in Canada and Australia, many who felt stranded because of travel restrictions due to coronavirus, and the charity ALONE joined the list of organisations to divert calls to us after hours.

A new online chat service was piloted with branches in NI for times when talking on the phone isn't an option.

Work began on producing the first Action Plan for Samaritans in NI, which is ongoing, and we commissioned a piece of work to look into the priorities for suicide prevention in the region by gathering insight from people with lived experience.

Research was carried out into the area of self-harm following an all-Ireland online survey, with several key recommendations published.



In the area of governance, we worked alongside 13 branches to ensure each was compliant with the Charities Regulator's new Charities Governance Code (Rol).

And pre-coronavirus, in advance of the February 2020 General Election in Rol, we launched our 4 Asks 4 a Safer Ireland campaign to encourage all political candidates to show their support for mental health.

This pandemic has challenged us all in different ways, having a significant impact on peoples' mental health. It is likely to play a role in their lives in the months and years to come.

Samaritans has always been a crucial part of the national response to the mental health and wellbeing needs of people in our community, and our work and presence in 2020 was a testament of that.

Our service has never before been such a vital link for those in need of a listening ear.

Unfortunately, we had to immediately suspend face-to-face support in branches and our outreach work in communities, schools, prisons and at festivals, but we hope, in time, we can reach out and support those people in person again.

Every single Samaritan volunteer, staff member, fundraiser, partner and supporter in Ireland played a role in keeping our services running and allowed us to continue working towards our vision that fewer people die by suicide.

Each of them should be proud of what they personally contributed when most needed.

Thank you



**Niall Mulligan**  
Executive  
Director for  
Ireland



**Rory Fitzgerald**  
Regional  
Director Rol



**Alan Heron**  
Regional  
Director NI

“ This pandemic has challenged us all in different ways, having a significant impact on peoples' mental health. It is likely to play a role in their lives in the months and years to come. ”

**In 2019, 209 people died by suicide in Northern Ireland**

**In 2018, 437 people died by suicide in the Republic of Ireland**  
(\*latest stat)

**In 2018, there were over 21,500 self-harm presentations to hospitals across Ireland**

# About Samaritans in Ireland

**Samaritans is the only all-Ireland 24-hour emotional support helpline.**

Our volunteers in 21 branches across the country are here day and night, 365 days a year, to listen and give people the space to share how they are really feeling. Unfortunately, our Festival branch was unable to give support due to coronavirus restrictions.

This year, finding the time and space to talk to someone you trust has been more important than ever before. This crisis left people isolated from friends and family, others lost their income, and many feared for the health of themselves and their loved ones.

We're here for those people and anyone who needs someone. Whatever you are facing, a Samaritan will face it with you.

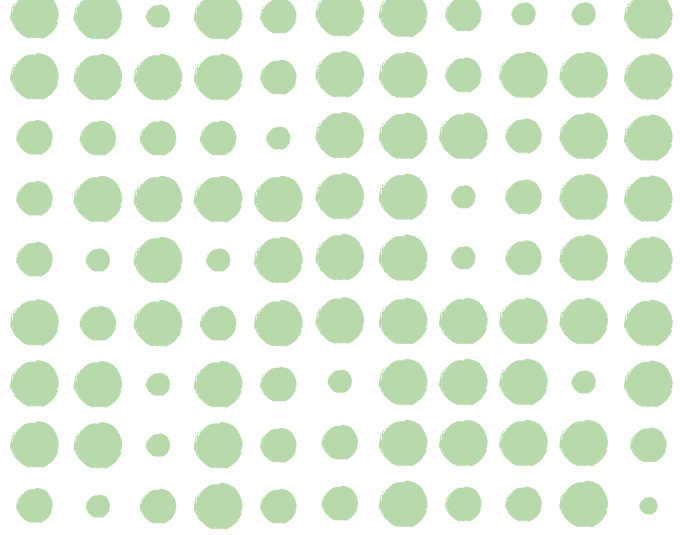
Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy, and Samaritans' vision is that fewer people die by suicide. We believe suicide is preventable. That's why we work tirelessly to reach more people and make suicide prevention a priority.



Mary MacMurrough Murphy, a long serving volunteer of Dublin Samaritans since its formation in 1970, at Dublin's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in March 2020. Mary still volunteers with the branch.

2,300 Samaritans volunteers  
day and night, 365 days a year





# Our priorities

To achieve our vision of fewer people dying by suicide, we have identified four priority areas:

**Service** we will improve the quality and consistency of our service.

**Access** we will improve access to Samaritans' services.

**Influence** we will have stronger and more effective external influence and connections with partners.

**Evidence** we will improve collection and application of evidence.

# Our values

These are Samaritans' shared values, which shape everything we do:

## Listening

Exploring feelings alleviates distress and helps people to reach a better understanding of their situation and the options open to them.

## Confidentiality

If people feel safe, they are more likely to be open about their feelings.

## Non-judgemental

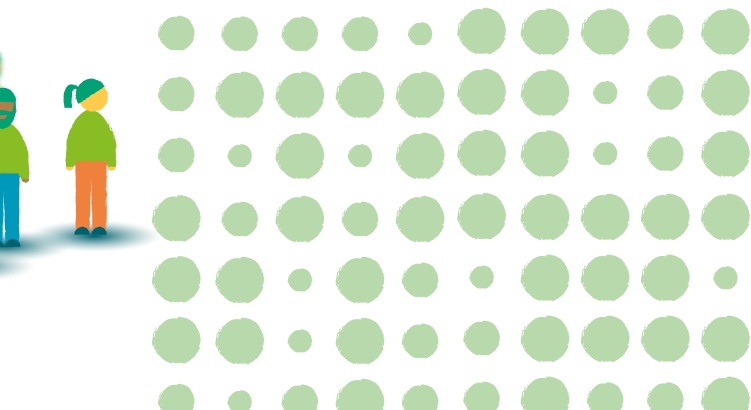
We want people to be able to talk to us without fear of prejudice or rejection.

## People making their own decisions wherever possible

We believe that people have the right to find their own solution and that telling people what to do takes responsibility away from them.

## Human contact

Giving people time, undivided attention and empathy meets a fundamental emotional need and reduces distress and despair.



# The best we can be, for every caller

**We aim to provide a high standard of service every time someone contacts us, however they choose to do so.**

## Coronavirus: how branches adapted to be there 24/7

The speed and strength with which volunteers responded to the coronavirus pandemic to ensure the Samaritans helpline remained open was incredible.

During the initial lockdown in March 2020, there was an immediate focus on making branches safer. Layouts had to change rapidly regarding social-distancing, hygiene, and ventilation guidance to enable us to offer our volunteers as safe a place as possible to continue with listening duties.

Telephones and PCs were moved out of duty rooms and cleaning routines and extra workstations were all put in place. Luckily, our phone system enabled us to put extra lines into branches as needed, and additional handsets and headsets were supplied to branches.

Branches were hugely resourceful in accessing supplies and putting cleaning routines together. Distillers, William Grant & Sons, donated sanitiser which was delivered to several branches around the country.

We were particularly challenged during this period with volunteer numbers because of the lockdown restrictions. About 40% of our volunteers had to step back from duties due either to their own vulnerability and health issues, or those of individuals they lived with. A quarter of volunteers remained on leave in 2021.

Despite a decline in listening volunteer numbers, we were still able to continue to offer our service to callers due to the commitment of our remaining volunteers. Many went over and above their usual shift expectation, with some signing up for two to three duties per week to keep branches open.

For those volunteers who had been unable to visit their branch, Directors and their teams put in place a range of supports and systems to keep them engaged.

A new internal communication system and intranet were delivered, and the option of providing email support from home was offered to volunteers. Meanwhile, eLog (which records basic caller data) enabled leaders (senior volunteers) to provide support to volunteers from home.

Modules for the training of new volunteers were moved online, while digital technology for meetings was rolled out across the branch network.

Unfortunately, all face-to-face calls, outreach and fundraising activities – including prisons and Festival branch – had to be postponed for the first time since Samaritans opened its first Irish branch in Belfast in 1961.

This was a great disappointment to volunteers nationwide, but many embraced new technologies to reach others virtually.





Siblings Bernie Keane and Thomas Carbery who were on duty together in Samaritans Waterford branch on Christmas Day.

## Extending our service

While it was difficult to maintain the ongoing level of support expected at times, Samaritans managed to expand its helpline offering over the year.

The onset of the pandemic impacted all helplines in the country. We worked closely with ALONE, the national organisation for older people to age at home, to support its most vulnerable callers who were experiencing suicidal ideation.

ALONE volunteers urged distressed callers to call our freephone number, but if the caller was reluctant to make that call, they had the option of a Dublin branch volunteer ringing them back to talk.

Building on that partnership, Samaritans offered a national response to ALONE to capture any callers to their service outside their opening hours. This now means that a person calling the ALONE helpline outside 8am to 8pm will have the option of being diverted directly into our 24/7 network for support. Over November and December 2020, we took 92 of these calls, supporting callers for a total of 32 hours.

Other changes to the helpline included the introduction of a queue, so when all phone lines to volunteers are busy a caller will join a queue for the next volunteer instead of hearing an engaged tone. This resulted in a drop in snap and misuse of service calls, and a better experience for those needing emotional support.



Volunteers from Waterford & South East branch who walked 42km along the Greenway for Talk to Us. Dee Wallace, Hazel O' Hara and Mike O' Hara.

## Technology

Samaritans is currently piloting a new online chat service, with branches in Ballymena, Bangor and Belfast among those chosen to test it.

The service is the newest means by which callers can access support from a volunteer, reaching those who may find it difficult to speak on the phone.

Volunteers and callers were involved in the design, development and testing from the beginning, with the first pilot services going live in the UK in September 2020. Branches in NI quickly joined, with Belfast commencing regular shifts in October, followed by Ballymena and Bangor. Opening times are currently limited but growing steadily as more volunteers and branches join.

Although still early days, the service is reaching many people in need of support who say they would not contact Samaritans by other means. Evidence also suggests that whilst reaching across the full age range, it is proving effective at connecting with younger callers.

Volunteers involved report that online chat is demanding and rewarding in equal measures and it's becoming apparent that the anonymity it offers callers seems to encourage more

open exploration of difficult feelings including thoughts of suicide and self-harm.

Plans are in place to roll out the service in RoI following the retirement of SMS support in February 2020.

Introducing online chat is an integral part of our There for Everyone programme, so this first stage of its roll out is an important and exciting landmark for Samaritans.

Although delayed by coronavirus, we also started rolling out new branch technology which over the next few years will transform the delivery of our service. New secure branch Chrome devices, linked to the organisations security system, will be used to access the new online chat service and, ultimately the new telephone service.

All of these new services require an upgrade to our branch network which will be taking place in late 2021. This is to ensure our internet availability is as robust and as secure as our current voice traffic.

Updated advice and tips on how to care for your own mental health and others were also published onto the Samaritans website, and we developed our new self-help app which helps people look after their emotional health if they're struggling to cope. It has a daily mood tracker and shares simple techniques to help users improve the way they're feeling.



## Training and volunteer recruitment

In-depth training and ongoing learning are essential for our volunteers to develop their listening skills and resilience to deliver emotional support to those who need us.

We updated the way we train new volunteers, introducing a new Core Development programme online. This course equips new Samaritans with the skills they need to provide emotional support. By providing parts of the training online, it's easier for people to fit their learning into their busy lives, and in turn enabling branches to train more volunteers to meet the increasing demand for our service.

During 2020, we welcomed 352 new volunteers across the 21 branches on the island of Ireland. We are delighted to welcome these volunteers who have started their Samaritans journey with us.

Mentoring those new volunteers in branches also meant further adjustments – with some branches obtaining Perspex moveable screens, cordless headsets, and other safety precautions.

Overall, the response from our branches has been a success, based on feedback from new volunteers as well as from our existing recruitment and training teams.

In response to the coronavirus crisis, we also adapted our training so volunteers could continue learning at home, even when they were unable to travel to their branch. All our Samaritans volunteers and staff can complete our bite-sized digital topics at a time that suits them using our Samaritans Learning App. Every branch was also provided with a Zoom account to facilitate the move to online.

It wasn't an easy year for our branch training teams and we know that internet quality can be a challenge, particularly in rural areas.

However, nearly 1,800 volunteers in Ireland participated in Samaritans' training online during 2020.

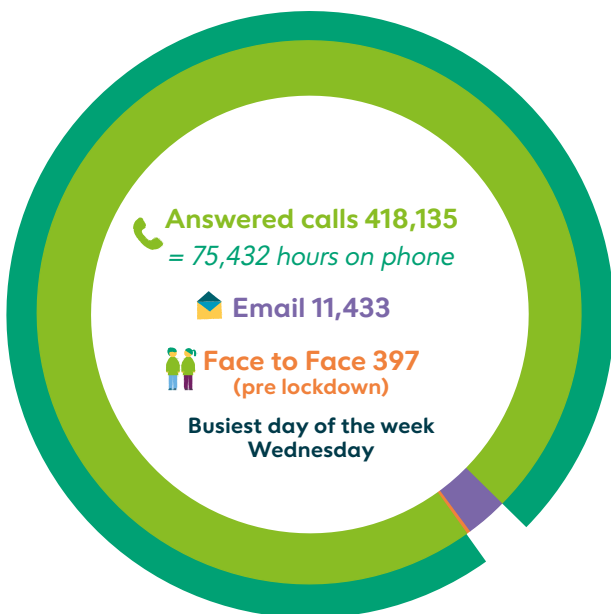
While we know that for many the preference is to return to branches, our training continues to be delivered online until we can do that safely.

# Ordinary people doing extraordinary things

Samaritans volunteers are at the heart of everything we do. This year they stepped up in a national crisis, keeping our services going when the nation needed us the most. Hundreds of volunteers, listening without judgement.

## 2020 stats

### Republic of Ireland



## 2020 stats

### Northern Ireland



6pm to 10pm: busiest time, when over a quarter of calls are answered

When people contact Samaritans for emotional support, they often mention several concerns. In 2020, some of the primary concerns related to mental health or illness, isolation and loneliness, family, relationship problems and coronavirus.



# Impact of coronavirus

“ One of our founder members passed away last May and we lined the streets in a socially distanced tribute. I’m the first Director not to get Erika’s new director talk, and I really miss her. ”

**Catherine Emerson, Galway**

“ Whilst we’re unable to continue with usual fundraising events, we’ve seen amazing generosity from the public, with personal and corporate donations as well as volunteer contacts, friends, family donations – easing the worry of the financial burden. ”

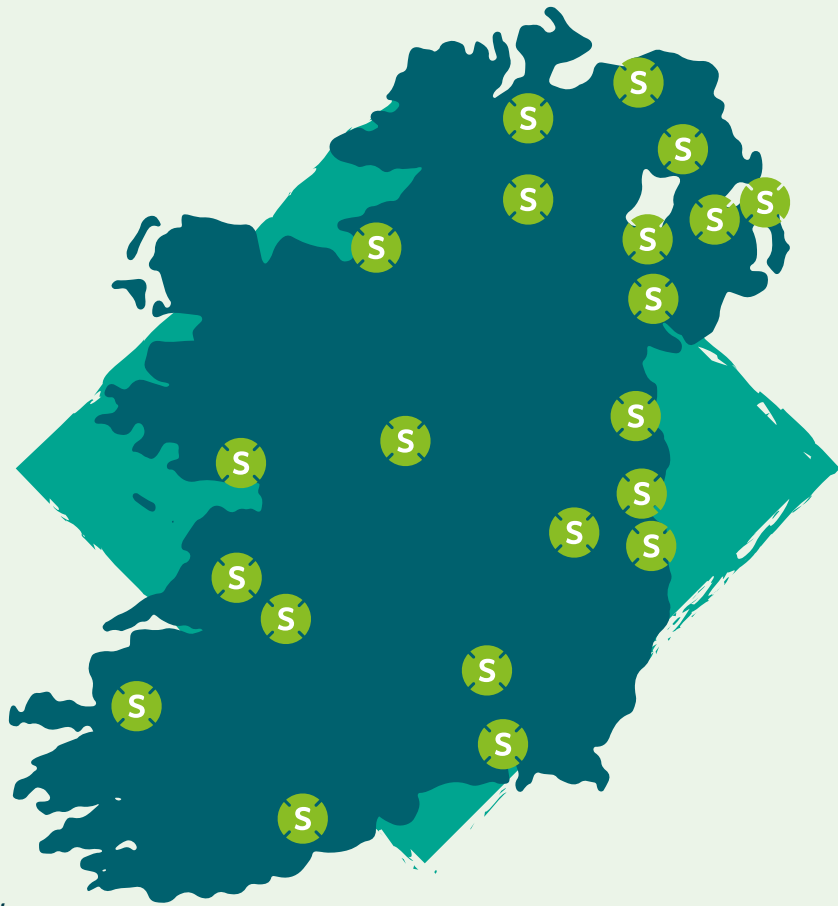
**Sue Cunningham, Belfast**

“ The response of new volunteers has been so encouraging... perhaps we are reaping the benefits of a societal change where Covid restrictions, social distancing and evidence of the selfless work of many people for the good of friends and neighbours has encouraged people to consider giving something back to society. ”

**David McKeown, Coleraine**

“ Unfortunately, all our plans for Irish Festival 2020 had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. We have managed to maintain our team momentum online... We celebrate the support and friendship engendered by being part of Irish Festival. We all miss the opportunity to connect with our callers, especially now when the need for support is even more important. ”

**Theresa Potter, former Festival Branch Director**



“ During the beginning of lockdown we wanted to engage with our volunteers, particularly cocooning ones, and they sent us photos of what they were doing during their days in lockdown – from walks, to growing veg, to beautiful sights, baking bread, jigsaws and their pets. ”

**Sharon Devereux, Waterford**

“ Family is the word that sticks out for me. Since becoming Director, I have been amazed at how our volunteers have come together to support each other and branch activities during the times we find ourselves in. Because of this we learned to adapt quickly, more so with recruitment, fundraising and outreach. ”

**Jonathan Neville, Cork**

## **S** Samaritans branches in Ireland

(Festival branch not shown on the map)



Samaritans volunteers Brian Higgins, former Director Maggie Hayden and Eileen Foley marking Dublin's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary at City Hall, Dublin.

## Celebrating 50 years of listening

Just a week before lockdown began, Dublin Samaritans managed to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Dublin City Hall. A special presentation was made to founding and active volunteer Mary MacMurrough Murphy, who gave a history of how the branch initially started.

Speakers included Dublin Lord Mayor Cllr Tom Brabazon, Dublin GAA star Philly McMahon, Broadcaster Mary Kennedy, then Chair of Samaritans Jenni McCartney, and writer and journalist Michael Harding.

This was a particularly poignant event given the challenges presented by coronavirus and how volunteers rose to them to keep the service going 24/7.

The Mayor of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Alderman Mark Fielding, marked the 50th anniversary of Coleraine Branch with a special (socially distant) presentation. The Mayor reflected on 50 years of Samaritans in the local area and expressed his thanks to Samaritans volunteers who have provided a listening ear and emotional support throughout the community.

Elsewhere, in Kilkenny Carlow branch, volunteers and several well-known faces from around the city made a series of short videos congratulating the branch on its 25th years of listening. The videos, uploaded onto its social media platforms during the week of its birthday, featured Kilkenny hurling manager Brian Cody, The Mayor of Kilkenny Cllr John Cooney, and local radio host and TV chef Edward Hayden.

## President Higgins

President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, also paid tribute to Samaritans volunteers for their profound and positive impact on many lives.

In a special New Years' message of thanks recorded for the volunteers, staff and supporters of Samaritans Ireland, President Higgins said the service is invaluable, impacting on the lives of so many in such a positive manner.

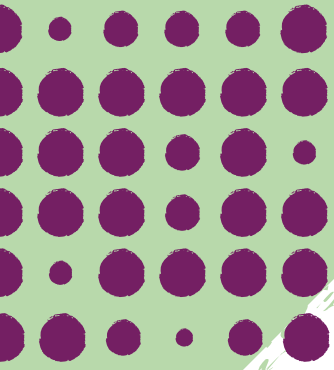
"The service is a lifeline, providing a beacon of hope for the many who may be experiencing, or have ever experienced, deep emotional distress or suicidal ideation," he said.

"By providing this crucial service, you are offering an experience of a kinder, more compassionate society. We all owe so much to the work of Samaritans, a voluntary organisation that is so cherished within our society."

President Higgins paid special tribute to the Dublin branch for marking its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

## Always there when you need to talk

Our helpline services are free, and we make sure everyone who needs us, knows about us. Beyond our branches, we're present in the places and at the times we can help the most.



Kilkenny Carlow branch support volunteers John Joe Ryan, Teresa Brennan and Colette Shannon.

## Reaching out and working together

We continue to support more people every year through our helpline services. In 2020, our 2,300 volunteers responded to more than half a million calls for help by telephone, emails and in the post.

At the start of 2020, our volunteers also provided face-to-face support on almost 500 occasions in branches or in their local community.

## Prisons

Like every other service in Samaritans, the Listener scheme was impacted by the challenging year of 2020 and coronavirus.

Irish prisons shut down to all outside services and visitors in March and were yet to reopen one year on.

Despite this, all 15 Listener schemes in the Irish Prison Service (IPS) in the RoI continued to operate, at reduced capacity, and our 67 Listeners handled a total of 778 contacts, offering almost 400 hours of emotional support to fellow inmates in need. The bulk of these contacts dealt with issues regarding family, mental health and feelings of isolation and loneliness.

We also saw a 400% increase in calls to the Samaritans helpline from inmates, rising from just over 3,000 in 2019 to just over 12,000 in 2020. Calls mainly related to increased stress levels, worry for family, isolation, and general worries about coronavirus.

The introduction of in-cell telephony in three prisons has contributed somewhat to the increase.

However, prisoners also had less access to Listeners due to internal restrictions and safety measures within the prisons, meaning they have used their access to Samaritans as an alternative for support.

While the volunteers who support the Listeners were unable to physically access the prisons, they continued their commitment to their teams inside offering support through cards, letters and telephone calls.

In NI, Listeners in two prisons handled 56 contacts offering 43 hours of support to their fellow prisoners.

Volunteers also answered 13,882 calls to the Samaritans helpline from the UK prison population.

While the year had started well with 10 new prisoners volunteering to become Listeners at HMP Maghaberry, training came to a standstill in March due to the restrictions placed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service on outside agencies.

Branch Prison Support Teams have continued through Zoom, Webex and telephone to offer support to both prisoners and staff when possible.

Volunteers also attend monthly meetings with Prisoner Support Officers and remain ready and eager to commence visits and training when restrictions are lifted.





Róisín Doherty, of Derry Samaritans, delivering training at the GAA Athletic Grounds, Armagh.

## Training and partnerships

Deepening the understanding of Samaritans' service in the community has led to requests from organisations to assist in the upskilling of staff and/or volunteers who are supporting people struggling to cope for various reasons like debt stress, emergency responders or carers.

The need expressed by many of these organisations centres on awareness building, listening skills and self-care.

**Workplace training and awareness** is delivered to multiple corporate, voluntary, and State agencies to meet our vision of reducing the risk of suicide.

One of the largest partners we have is the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE), which has a membership base of many agencies including Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), Citizens Information and Local Employment Services drawn from across the country.

Planned training sessions were suspended at the start of the pandemic, but as it became clear restrictions would last longer than anticipated we developed virtual training over Zoom in conjunction with the INOUE.

One of the benefits of training pre-coronavirus was its interactive nature, sharing experiences and learning. To replicate this online, we restricted the number of attendees to four for each session and this has proved to be very successful and the feedback extremely positive.

The impact of the pandemic on everyone has led to more distressed calls to organisations and we are now responding to requests from organisations to offer our support and expertise.

Samaritans remains the official mental health partner of the **Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)**, which aims to encourage people who are going through a difficult time to seek help, while also tackling the stigma associated with mental health problems.

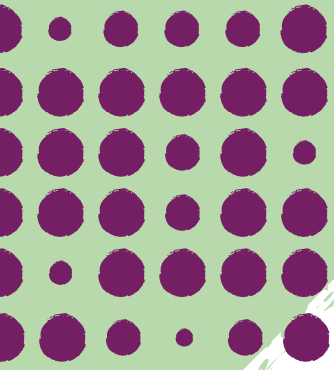
In doing so, both organisations hope that people will access the round the clock support provided by Samaritans. The relationship between GAA clubs across all 32 counties and our branches ensure the message of 'Talk to Us' is highlighted in the community and encourages people to talk about what affects them.

A small number of active listening skills workshops were delivered pre-coronavirus, including to members of Ulster GAA in the Athletic Grounds in Armagh. Tralee branch also attended a GAA/ Trinity College seminar promoting (amongst other things) the importance of mental health, social connectedness and purpose in life.

Six different helplines in the ROI currently divert into Samaritans when their lines close after hours. Aware, LGBT, Family Carers, Niteline, GROW and most recently, ALONE, are part of the **Direct Dial Inwards (DDI)** project which was established in 2012 in conjunction with Samaritans Signposting policy.

The project involves a technical divert whereby callers to our partner agencies, when those agencies





Samaritans Ireland Executive Director Niall Mulligan with Calor Ireland CEO Duncan Osborne at the launch of the charity partnership.

are closed, are invited to stay on the line should that caller wish to speak with Samaritans. This was to offer a more cohesive response to a person in distress and act as a safety net for that caller.

During 2020, our volunteers answered 1,371 dialogue calls from these agencies, offering 311 listening hours to people who may otherwise not have had someone to talk to.

Samaritans, in partnership with the **Government of Ireland through the Emigrant Support Programme**, provides 24-hour freephone access to the Samaritans helpline in Ireland for Irish people in a number of countries abroad.

The purpose of this project is to provide access to a culturally sensitive emotional support resource for the Irish abroad who are in distress, struggling to cope and who are in need of emotional support.

Members of the diaspora are signposted to Samaritans through the relevant Irish Embassy, or Irish community organisation, in that particular country. All calls to this number are connected to a Samaritan volunteer in Ireland via a technical divert and are free of charge to the caller.

The service was launched in 2018 on a pilot basis initially in the United Arab Emirates, China, Hong Kong and Poland. Following this pilot, the service was extended to Canada and Australia over Christmas. Although language is not a barrier to services in these cases, the distance from home, and the limitations imposed by the current

restrictions in place, mean that many people are feeling increased loneliness and isolation.

Samaritans was delighted to be chosen as the first charity partner of **Calor** following an extensive application process facilitated by Business in the Community Ireland.

The partnership with the fuel supplier, which will be in place until July 2022, includes staff fundraising as well as a corporate donation. The first fundraising initiative was 'Your 24', which challenged staff to come up with sponsored activities based on the number 24. Staff were really engaged and raised almost €6,000, which was then double matched by the company.

More importantly, the partnership aims to raise awareness of our service with those at risk. For example, self-employed tradesmen are a particularly vulnerable group in terms of mental health and Calor works closely with heating installers and other small businesses across Ireland.

Through our partnership, we also aim to help Calor staff become active listeners or support volunteers and promote the support services available through Samaritans.



Samaritans awareness advertising at Dublin Pearse train station throughout lockdown.

## Building awareness

Throughout the year several high profile awareness campaigns highlighted Samaritans and our services to potential callers across the country.

We were supported by Iarnród Éireann with the allocation of media space at various locations during coronavirus restrictions. The campaigns, which ran across all key advertising formats including station digital and traditional roadside billboards, were to the value of over €300,000.

Dublin Samaritans teamed up with Dublin Bus in July to mark Talk to Us, the charity's national awareness day, with a specially commissioned Dublin Bus carrying the Samaritans messaging and helpline details.

In NI, Samaritans messaging was carried on an outdoor and bus campaign across Belfast and other parts of the region, including roadside billboards throughout the city.

Elsewhere our Christmas campaign targeted visitors to 50 shopping centres across Ireland when restrictions eased, with our number appearing on 75 bus sightlines across Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

Our branches in Belfast, Drogheda and Cork were among those working with authorities to upgrade or replace Samaritans crisis signage along waterways and railways.

Meanwhile original permanent station crisis signs were replaced by Iarnród Éireann in the Dublin area as they were beginning to age and show wear.

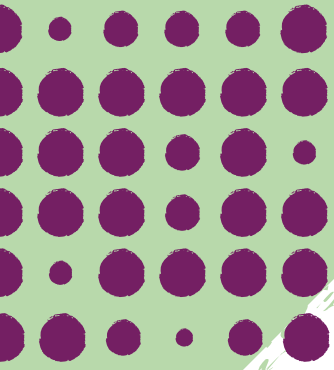
Awareness posters, leaflets, cards and signage were also distributed around the country following requests from schools, companies, construction sites and local communities – with specially commissioned signage created for the side of trucks owned by civil engineering firm Maveric Contractors.

Advertising and advertorials were also taken in regional newspapers, magazines and internal staff publications to reach those who may need support during the coronavirus crisis.

Samaritans Ireland and branch Twitter and Facebook pages were used to increase awareness of our service and recruit volunteers.

A number of successful campaigns were carried out specifically in NI by the Bangor branch to make adults and young people aware of the support we give and how to contact us. These were funded by Ulster Garden Villages and the Community Fund. Ardmore Advertising of Holywood, Co Down, provided advice and management of the campaigns for free.

Another social media initiative which benefitted the region during the year included a Christmas fundraising appeal by The Rick O'Shea Book Club, which raised over €10,000 for Samaritans Ireland.



Devonshire Bridge, Dungarvan, Waterford.

Landmarks across Ireland were illuminated for **Samaritans' Longest Night** on Monday 21 December.

We use the winter solstice to remind callers and anyone in need that we will be there for them during their darkest hours, especially over Christmas.

Dublin Airport Control Tower, The Rock of Cashel, Blackrock Castle (Cork), Kilkenny Castle, Enniskillen Castle, Hill of the O'Neill (Dungannon), Devonshire

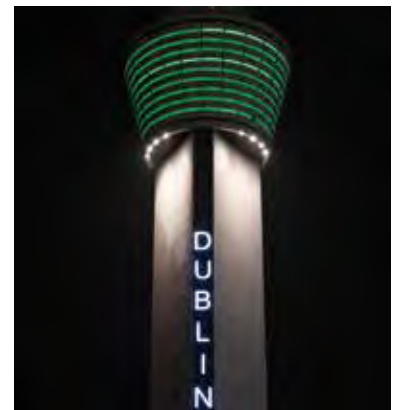
Bridge (Dungarvan), universities and colleges, and several city and county council offices were among the many landmarks and buildings lit up in green.

In Belfast, the beacon at Millennium Island Bridge was lit for the third time in 20 years in honour of volunteers and callers.

It was amazing to see so many national landmarks support our Christmas campaign and spread the message that we're here 24/7.



Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service marking the Longest Night



Dublin Airport Control Tower



Cork City Hall



Creamery House, Castlecomer



# Doing all we can to prevent suicide

**We forge links with other organisations to find and reach the people who need us most today. And we position ourselves at the heart of policymaking to make change for a hopeful tomorrow.**

In advance of General Election (RoI February 2020), Samaritans launched our 4 Asks 4 a Safer Ireland campaign and encouraged all candidates to show their support for mental health.

Our four keys asks were:

- 1. Men:** The development of a national, well-resourced plan to reach and support men at a high risk of suicide. We need evidence-based services which are built on an understanding of how best to reach men, providing support in ways they actually want, and supporting them to deal with the full range of issues they face.
- 2. Self-Harm:** Equal and appropriate levels of care for everyone who self-harms regardless of their geographical location to support them to help identify and address the reasons for their distress, and to find alternative coping mechanisms.
- 3. Loneliness:** Interventions focused on promoting social connections at an individual, familial, community, and societal level should be supported and developed to reduce loneliness across Ireland. Focus should be given to the quality of the social contact as well as the quantity.
- 4. Online Safety:** Harmful content relating to suicide and self-harm is far too easily accessible online. Minimise harmful online content relating to suicide and self-harm and maximise online opportunities to support and help people at risk of suicide and self-harm.

We also produced five videos related to the key asks and launched them on social media leading up to the election. The key asks were widely supported by candidates across each political party and have continued as the framework for our research and policy priorities.

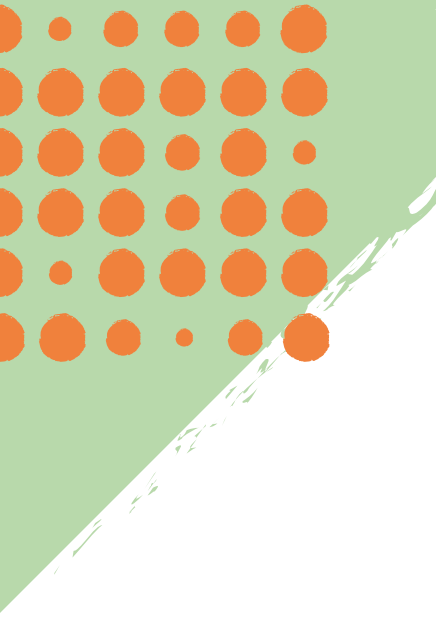
As the coronavirus crisis stretched into the summer, new vulnerable groups and priorities were identified. Samaritans Ireland paper – Key Priorities for Preventing Suicide During the Covid-19 Pandemic – outlines previous and emerging priorities for Government to support the country's mental health and wellbeing during the recovery process. It was shared with key government officials and committees in autumn 2020.

We started work on producing the first **Northern Ireland Action Plan** and commissioned a team led by Prof Siobhan O'Neill at Ulster University to help shape our strategy.

This involved a rigorous review of research and evidence with some of the leading academics on suicide in NI. This provided crucial insights into our Action Plan development. The report lays out the key issues, areas of concern and recommendations for action that will improve our understanding of this issue and proactively work to help reduce the rate of suicide in NI.

We also commissioned a report that looked into the priorities for suicide prevention in NI by gathering insight from people with lived experience.





Alan Heron, Samaritans NI Regional Director with Siobhan O'Neill, Interim NI Mental Health Champion and Cool FM Breakfast Show host Pete Snodden, marking World Mental Health Day.

The four key themes identified in this report are:

1. societal perceptions of suicide rates, services and reasons underlying suicidal behaviours;
2. issues for improvement within current mental health and suicide prevention services;
3. development of suicide prevention initiatives outside current mental health and suicide prevention services;
4. perceived barriers to development of suicide prevention initiatives.

Those with lived experience have a unique and valuable perspective that is crucial in the design and delivery of effective policies and services. This report has strengthened our commitment to involve their voice in service development with their experience helping to shape our new Action Plan, which will be published in 2021.

Encouraging sensitive reporting around suicide through **working with the media** is an important strand in our suicide prevention work.

Following on from the release of our new Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide and additional resources, a new Suicide in the Media online training course for journalists was launched. This e-learning tool offers practical tips and advice on covering suicide in an informed way and helps participants to understand the research and guidance informing best practice in this area.

We deliver these to journalists, journalism students, elected representatives, clergy and to committees on suicide prevention and mental health NI. Advisories and support have also been issued to media in the RoI following a high-profile suicide or a tragic event, such as a murder-suicide, which has generated significant publicity.

Samaritans Ireland has been instrumental in the development of new Health Service Executive (HSE) guidelines for services delivering suicide prevention services.

The **National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP)** guidelines – Best Practice Guidance for Suicide Prevention Services: Working together for high quality services – aim to support organisations to deliver evidence-based services and is an important step in assuring quality in the provision of suicide prevention services.

Samaritans Ireland supported and contributed to the project since its inception, including participation in all engagement events, being a member of the project advisory group, becoming a learning site for testing of the draft guidance document and are currently participating in the phased implementation of the project.

The development of the guidance is set out under Goal 5 of Connecting for Life: Ireland’s National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020 (extended to 2024), which aims to ensure safe and high-quality services for people vulnerable to suicide.

# Understanding suicide

We're at the forefront of research into suicide, and we work hard to measure the impact of our services. Because the more we know, the better we can help people to avoid crisis point.

## Building the evidence base

Research is vital in understanding how we can do more to support people's emotional wellbeing and get better at preventing at-risk groups from reaching crisis point.

We undertook research on **self-harm** through a lived-experience online survey of 132 individuals across Ireland. The report made several recommendations following key findings from the survey:

- **Stigma:** A number of participants volunteered examples of feeling judged, feeling concerned about confidentiality and being mistreated. To ensure individuals feel supported to reach out for help, the stigma associated with self-harm needs to be better understood and subsequently addressed within the public and health professional settings.
- **Services:** The variation, availability, and efficacy of services must be reviewed to ensure everyone who self-harms can be entered into a care pathway that meets their individual needs – this includes ensuring GPs, A&Es, and schools/universities all have the skills and resources to respond effectively to every person they see.
- **Funding:** While everyone is different, some common reasons why people may self-harm are to express emotional distress or difficult feelings, or to feel more in control of their lives. Coronavirus introduced rapid changes to supports and services. There must be continued financial support to ensure helplines, such as ours, are on a sustainable footing through and after the pandemic so we can continue to be there for anyone who is struggling to cope.

- **Research:** Survey findings indicated that individuals who are at increased rates of self-harm are also those who are less likely to seek support – ie, young people, LGBTQ+ people and people from lower income households. Responses also indicated that if help is sought, it may not always be fit for purpose.

**Data analytics** research carried out by Ulster University on behalf of Samaritans demonstrated how analysis of anonymous caller behaviour can be used to ensure calls from those most in need can be better managed by Samaritans, and a better understanding of how such behaviours evolve over time can be used to improve service provision.

Caller behaviour relates to the usage of the helpline (ie, calls made/call attempts, call duration, and caller-tenure) and is entirely anonymised and not based on content of individual conversations.

These learnings were applied during coronavirus in the weeks immediately after restrictions were introduced. We saw that while call volume was not increasing, some calls were longer in duration and there was continued evidence of government policies impacting the behaviours of callers to the helpline.

Between March and December 2020, Samaritans gained **insights from our volunteers** to see how callers to the helpline have been feeling. A total of 1,439 volunteers responded to surveys, including 100 in Ireland. This has provided us with insight into how the coronavirus pandemic is affecting people who access our services and their concerns.



Belfast branch volunteers raising awareness at Lanyon Place Train Station.

The most common caller concerns are:

- **Mental illness and coping:** Mental ill-health has been the most common concern among callers during the nine months since social restrictions began. We've seen an increase in concerns about mental health among callers compared to the same time last year.
- **Isolation and loneliness:** An increasing number of callers say the long-term impacts of isolation have left them feeling less able to cope as the pandemic goes on. Samaritans' helpline remains an important source of meaningful human connection for some callers.
- **Family:** Family concerns have mostly related to being separated from loved ones, or rifts caused by living in close quarters for an extended time.
- **Economic impact:** Since the restrictions began, many of our callers have been worried about losing their job or income. Some people have already lost their jobs or incomes because of the ongoing restrictions and the early impacts of recession.

# SAMARITANS

Contact Samaritans free –  
day or night, 365 days a year

Call free on

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Samaritans Ireland is a charity registered in the Republic of Ireland (20033668) and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee (450409). Samaritans Ireland's registered office is located at 4-5 Usher's Court, Usher's Quay, Dublin 8, D08Y223. CHY number: CHY11880. The directors/trustees of Samaritans Ireland are as follows: J Finch (United Kingdom), B Rojack, D O'Críodan, C Skelly, D Murray, K Flood, P James (United Kingdom), C O'Shea, D Walsh (United Kingdom), A Woodworth.