

Overview – 44th National Walk Hosted by North Herts & Stevenage (Hitchin) Samaritans

On 1 July our branch welcomed around 150 people – from as far afield as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – to walk 5, 13 or 20 miles as part of the 2023 National Walk. Walkers raised money for the branch or charity of their choice, with this event also marking the special 70th anniversary year of Samaritans.

We were blessed by the weather, with early clouds lifting and the temperature remaining ideal for the meticulously planned walks around the local countryside and Hitchin town centre. Our base was the Priory School's brand-new sixth form block, its excellent facilities key to the whole event.

Countless volunteers and friends helped in making this day a success. From baking cakes to donating prizes, from organising the raffles to securing sponsorship, from registering walkers first thing to manning checkpoints throughout the day. Others were marshals, helping people to find their way and cross busy roads safely. Hitchin First Explorer Scouts marked routes with orange ribbons on a night hike through to 4 am before the walk. Council Chair Daniel Allen joined us to give the walkers a send-off, Gayle Harvey provided expert warm-ups, and David Pickett volunteered to be available all day to help with any first-aid requirements.

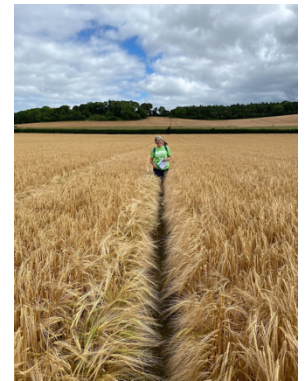
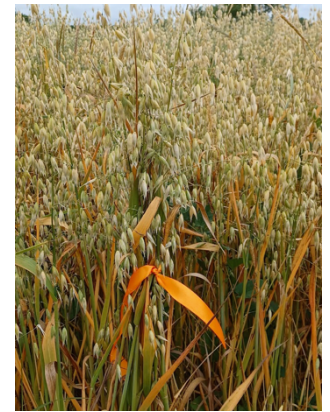
Walkers were welcomed back with tea and cakes, collected their certificates and then rested their feet, while chatting with old and new friends. Nearly 100 people came to help and celebrate in the evening, with freshly cooked pizzas and plenty of other food and drink. Entertainment included raffles and music by local musician David Foster, followed by a truly spectacular performance by the Bedford Rock Choir.

We received donations and support from businesses – artist Sarah Graham, GTR, Offley Endowed Primary School (whose pupils created magnificent posters to cheer the walkers on), Pirton Village Hall, Priory School staff (including one of our own volunteers), Sainsbury's, Satchells, Offley's St Mary Magdalene Church, St Paul's Cathedral, Tesco, TPS Visual Communications and Waitrose. Heartfelt thanks to everyone who supported us in organising and walking on the day. And special thanks to our walk coordinator, Chris 34, without whom this event wouldn't have been possible. The event raised over £6,000 for our branch, and it was a fantastic feelgood day, bringing so many people together to have fun, raise awareness and support our wonderful charity.

Photos of the day below, and visit <https://photos.app.goo.gl/BWwwsAbDJ2mbbUy16> to see many more.



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Some of the lovely feedback received:

Thank you, Chris, for your brilliant organisation and company on the walk

Just wanted to say a huge thank you from myself and Mandy who came down from the Stoke on Trent branch. This was our first National walk and everything about it was excellent from start to finish - including the moisturising socks. Your hospitality was lovely and it was clear how much planning and organisation must have gone in to the whole day.

I would certainly like to pass on the upmost highest positive feedback to North Herts Hitchin Samaritans for hosting the National Walk 2023! The initial reception was so warm and welcoming, the venue was fantastic, the organisation of checking in at the start and at the checkpoints was so efficient, every single person of the National Walk team was so friendly and the entire atmosphere was electric, travelling on my own on a 2 hour journey being the only Samaritan from my branch and being the first time both visiting Hitchin and North Herts and also first time participating in Samaritans National Walk the entire event and co-ordination really was absolutely phenomenal and every volunteer I spoke to made me feel at ease and supported in how the day went. I completed the 13 mile walk with five other Samaritans volunteers from the local area and have attached our photo (I'm at far right), it was a real pleasure to walk with such a lovely bunch of people and as I say the entire event was highly organised and every person who was involved was so helpful, making the entire event one I will never forget.

It was a wonderful day. Thank you to you and all your team.

Thank you for all... brilliant walk... celebration & yummy food, entertainment & location!

Many thanks for such a lovely walk & it was a good feast & celebration afterwards in Priory School.

Thank you so much to you and your team for organising such a brilliant walk yesterday. I enjoyed the 13 mile walk with my daughter and her husband. What was clear was just how many helpers you had on the day, ensuring that the day ran smoothly, and I can't begin to guess how many hours went into the meticulous planning leading up to the big day. We were rewarded with a spectacular walk, wonderful views and the best possible weather for walking - not too hot, no rain and a refreshing breeze. I don't know if I'm writing to the lead organiser; often, there are one or two volunteers who initiate the idea of running the national walk, but it can't work without the support of many others. Your Hitchin branch really did you proud. And, what touched me the most, was a conversation I had with one of your volunteers at our second checkpoint: he told me your branch was also manning the phones on the day.

I send my thanks and best wishes, from a volunteer at Peterborough Samaritans for the last 37 years)

Was a fabulous day... HUGE Thanks to Hitchin, and all involved.

Thank you Hitchin for hosting a wonderful weekend! 🙌🙌🙌 Well done everybody who walked! 🙌🙌 and a special shout out to Basildon branch for letting me tag along with you! And for all the laughs, encouragement and interesting conversations ❤️

Just wanted to say a big thanks to the team at North Herts Samaritans for organising/hosting an awesome walk and evening event on Saturday, I hope you all had a well-earned rest yesterday?!

Thanks to you and all at your branch for hosting such a great event! We all really enjoyed it and your organisation was excellent-those ribbons certainly helped keep us all on track!

Looking forward to next year's walk, wherever it may be!