

**SAMARITANS**  
Ireland

# Together we're saving lives

Ireland and Northern Ireland

Impact Report 2023





# About Samaritans

## Who we are



We are the only 24/7 suicide prevention charity working across Ireland and the UK.



We are in 24 towns and cities across Ireland and Northern Ireland.

## What we do



Our helpline is open day and night, 365 days a year, for anyone struggling to cope.



We work with a range of industries and organisations to increase our reach and impact.



We provide face-to-face support in communities, prisons, at festivals and events.



We provide email and online chat (NI) services for people who prefer not to call.



We provide the tools and training to help people look after themselves and those around them.



We carry out research to understand the issues around self-harm and suicide.



We work with governments to influence positive change.



We campaign to raise awareness and make suicide prevention a priority.

# Welcome from our Executive Director & Regional Directors

**Samaritans marked an incredible 70 years of listening during the year, a celebration not possible without the time and dedication of our amazing volunteers across the country.**

We want to start by thanking each of them for all they do for Samaritans and our callers.

We had so many highlights during the year, but the most remarkable achievement was the opening of three new sites in Carlow, Castlebar, and Clonakilty. These new locations would not have opened without many hours of commitment given by teams of volunteers, who worked alongside staff in Samaritans Ireland and in the UK.

Our 2,000 volunteers across the island of Ireland and staff team of 18 ensure we continue to provide a lifeline to those who need us most, when they need us most.

It is our callers, the people we support, who have always been at the very heart of everything we do and this report showcases the lasting impact we have made both in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Samaritans is committed to building on this work to ensure we achieve our vision that fewer people die by suicide.



**Sarah O'Toole**  
Executive Director



**Jonathan Neville**  
Regional Director  
– Ireland



**Marcella Taylor**  
Regional Director  
– Northern Ireland



# Our people

PHOTO: CLARE KEOGH



**Ife,**  
**Samaritans volunteer**

“ I’m 21-years-old and I joined Samaritans when I was 18.

There’s something very special about being a listening ear, someone who doesn’t pass judgement. As a Samaritan, I provide that for callers so they can work through their problems. It’s a beautiful thing to provide space for someone to work out their issues. You can’t overestimate the value of listening – it’s powerful.

One particularly memorable call was from a woman who was ready to end her life. The call was almost two hours’ long. By the end of it, it became clear that she didn’t want to end her life; she just wanted her situation to end. Her view had changed and she was inclined to choose a different path. I don’t think she’d ever had somebody spend that much time just listening to her. And that’s just what she needed in that moment. I remember feeling, wow, this is really what we’re here for – to be the voice on the other end of the phone in someone’s darkest hour. ”



**Ciaran,**  
**Samaritans volunteer**

“ I could probably fill a book with the reasons why I volunteer for Samaritans, but one thing I always come back to is that suicide is the single biggest killer of men under the age of 45. As a man in that demographic, it petrifies me. Being able to talk to young men on the phone, help them process their thoughts and hopefully reduce their risk of suicide is an immense privilege.

I get so much out of being a volunteer. It’s hard to describe the fulfilment of answering the phone to someone really struggling, and then at the end they say how much better they feel. I can’t think of a better use of my time. I also use the listening skills I’ve learned on a daily basis and have much better relationships with my friends and family because of it. Samaritans has given way more to me than I have to them! ”



Nicola,

Samaritans caller

# Nicola's story

“ Back in 2009, I was 30. I had a fulfilling life and an active social life. I was training for the Dublin City Marathon when I got a serious back injury. It completely stopped my life and changed everything. Within weeks, I was in a deep depression and I began self-harming. I quickly became suicidal. Before that, I had been doing okay, I thought, and then, all of a sudden, I no longer wanted to live. I couldn't make sense of what was going on.

It was around then that I reached out to Samaritans for the first time. I'd always been aware of Samaritans, but I had never thought I'd be someone who needed to contact them. The first time I got in touch, I couldn't phone. I was so ashamed of everything... So, I sent an email to jo@samaritans.ie. Just writing out what was going on in my head was so powerful.

I remember one time in particular, I was out walking near where I live. I was seriously contemplating ending my life. My phone beeped and it was an email back from Samaritans. It was like they pulled me back from the edge. The power of it was phenomenal.

As time went on, I started being able to ring. On the phone, I was just Nicola, a person, talking to a volunteer, another person. There were no labels, just a human connection. They would listen and support me without judging or telling me what to do. Having someone to speak to when I had suicidal thoughts helped me untangle my feelings and think more clearly.

These days, if something comes up in my life, I can talk about it more easily with my friends or family. I'm not scared or ashamed of my feelings like I once was. Compared to how things were, I feel like the future is full of possibility. The future feels like a bonus – I didn't expect to get this far! ”



# Ireland

## Here when you need us: A year of listening



We spent, on average, almost **23 minutes** on the phone to each caller who needed emotional support.



**63,000 hours** of support was delivered by more than **1,500** trained listening volunteers.



We answered more than **1,200 calls and emails** every day.



Almost **150 calls answered from overseas** via the Government of Ireland's Emigrant Support Scheme.



Festival branch volunteers supported almost **80 people** who expressed suicidal feelings at summer festivals.



Our trained Listeners responded to **2,600 face-to-face calls for help in prison.**



We answered a call for help **every minute.**



Over **4,800** calls were diverted from partner organisations when their helplines were closed.



More than **400,000** calls and emails were answered.



# Northern Ireland

## Talk to us, we'll listen: A year of listening



More than **100,000** calls and emails were answered.



We answered more than **300 calls and emails** every day.



**30,000 hours** of support was delivered by more than **600** trained listening volunteers.



We responded to more than **500** online conversations, providing over 500 hours of support.



Festival branch volunteers supported almost **35 people** who expressed suicidal feelings at summer festivals.



Our trained Listeners responded to **43 calls for help in prison**.



We answered a call for help **every 4.5 minutes**.



We spent, on average, almost **21 minutes** on the phone to each caller who needed emotional support.

Mental health/illness, loneliness/isolation, family issues and relationship problems were the most common concerns callers cited.

# Ordinary people doing extraordinary things



**Over 70 years ago**, Samaritans began with one man and one phone. Now we have over 2,000 volunteers across the island of Ireland who are the backbone of the service, ensuring it stays open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Volunteers commit to at least one duty per week, as well as running their branches and supporting thousands of people in a range of settings including prisons, festivals, schools, and communities.

That work is supported by a small team in Samaritans Ireland, who cover IT support, governance, safeguarding, communications, policy, research, partnerships, prison support, training, and income generation.

As an organisation, Samaritans volunteers and staff continuously try to reach those hard-to-reach groups most at risk of suicide through a variety of projects and campaigns.



PHOTO: MICHAEL O'ROURKE

Carlow branch opening

One of the most incredible achievements of 2023 was how volunteers in Galway, Kilkenny and Cork Samaritans spearheaded the opening of three new locations in Castlebar, Carlow and Clonakilty.

The time, effort and determination put in by a core team of volunteers in each branch was amazing as they found and set up the new premises, with support from Samaritans Ireland and Samaritans staff.

Elsewhere, our specially trained festival volunteers attended six events over the summer, targeting at risk groups and supporting those in need.



Volunteers at Dublin Pride



Festival volunteers





More than 100 volunteers and delegates came together for the Samaritans Ireland 2023 Conference in Bangor, Co. Down. The theme of the conference – ‘Building Resilience Together’ – focused on celebrating Samaritans’ 70 years of listening and the 50th Anniversary of Bangor and North Down branch, who organised the conference.

Felicity Varah Harding, daughter of the charity’s founder, Chad Varah, was among the guests at the event, which included a Mayoral reception by the Deputy Mayor of Bangor and North Down (pictured above).

Newry and Dundalk Samaritans also marked a significant milestone and celebrated 50 years of Samaritans work in the area.



Newry and Dundalk Samaritans

Volunteers across the island attended community events and festivals, delivering talks and raising awareness of our service in schools, clubs, workplaces and communities.

Branches also joined local councils and businesses, as well as hundreds of corporate buildings and national landmarks, in lighting up green to show support for Samaritans on December 21st – the Longest Night.

The campaign, on the Winter Solstice, reminds those struggling to cope that we’re there for them during their darkest hours, especially over Christmas.



Armagh’s Palace Demesne on the Longest Night

**Thank you** to everyone who supported us this year. Fundraising events provide Samaritans branches with essential funding to maintain their services and ensure our volunteers are there 24/7.

By partnering with Samaritans Ireland, you support our mission to be here day and night for anyone struggling to cope. Demonstrating this support in your workplace, and to your customers and wider community, can make a real difference and help change lives. To find out more about how you can support our work, please email: [fundraisingireland@samaritans.org](mailto:fundraisingireland@samaritans.org)



# Thank you, Charlie

## Remembering Charlie Bird

We want to pay tribute to our friend and supporter Charlie Bird, who passed away earlier this year.

Over 500 Samaritans volunteers and supporters joined Charlie Bird as he led his inaugural Hand of Friendship Walk with Samaritans in his beloved Wicklow in April 2023.

The former broadcaster, who had been battling Motor Neuron Disease (MND), extended his hand of friendship to us and vowed to raise awareness of our work.

As he led the 5km walk in Avondale Forest Park, volunteers took part in organised walks in Coillte sites across Ireland. It was an incredible day to see so many people support Charlie and Samaritans on the day. Not just in Wicklow, but in spirit across the country.



As well as the walk, Charlie also took part in Brent Pope's Elephant in the Room project, helping design the Charlie Bird/Samaritans elephant by artist Niall O'Loughlin. It was later paraded through Dublin city and took up residency at the Mansion House.

Charlie also attended several events with Dublin Samaritans, including Bloom, Gifted and helped raise awareness on 24/7.

Charlie had been due to lead another Hand of Friendship Walk for Samaritans this year.



PHOTO: FERGAL PHILLIPS



PHOTO: FERGAL PHILLIPS

We are deeply saddened by Charlie's passing. He had showed incredible strength and courage throughout his illness and will be remembered forever as a leading light for charitable organisations across Ireland, including Samaritans, for which his passion was formidable.

Charlie previously said he chose to support Samaritans as he found himself in a dark place following his diagnosis with MND and he wanted people to know that support is available, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for anyone who is struggling to cope.



PHOTO: COLIN KEEGAN

Over the last 18 months of his life Charlie, along with his wife Claire and faithful companion Tiger, was an amazing supporter of Samaritans' work and, more importantly, our volunteers.

Charlie's work and legacy will never be forgotten.

We also want to thank Olwyn and the team at Dublin Samaritans who worked alongside Charlie and Claire and who will also miss their dear friend.





## samaritans.ie

### Samaritans Ireland

4-5 Usher's Court, Usher's Quay, Dublin 8 D08 Y223

T +353 1 671 0071

E [adminireland@samaritans.org](mailto:adminireland@samaritans.org)



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## samaritans.org

### Samaritans Ireland (Northern Ireland)

The Mount Business Centre, 2 Woodstock Link

Belfast BT6 8DD.

T +44 28 9073 0188



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Samaritans Ireland is a charity registered in Ireland (20033668) and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee (450409). Samaritans Ireland's registered office is located at Ground Floor, 4-5 Usher's Court, Usher's Quay, Dublin 8, D08 Y223. CHY number: CHY11880. The directors/trustees of Samaritans Ireland are as follows: E. Farrell, K. Flood, C. Skelly, G. Danton (United Kingdom), É. Ní Mhuircheartaigh, J. Neville, M Taylor (United Kingdom), A McMurray (United Kingdom), M. Horgan, A. Deane, C. Culliton, W. Wilson (United Kingdom).