

Swindon & District Samaritans Branch Newsletter

Autumn 2020

New Beginnings...



“Hello everyone – I’m Susie and became our branch’s volunteer director on 1 April 2020.

I have been a Samaritans listening volunteer since 2014, providing emotional support to those who are struggling to cope, and have helped to develop the branch’s presence in the local area including the recruitment of many of the branch’s current volunteers.

Living in Lechlade, I have 4 sons and work within my family landscaping business.

I am delighted to have been appointed as director of Swindon & District branch. I look forward to building on all the brilliant work from recent years and continuing to support the wider community and reach more people in their time of need.

I’m taking over the reins from volunteer, Darren Tee, who has been Swindon & District branch’s volunteer director since 2017. Darren says: “It has been a true privilege to oversee the Swindon & District branch for the last 3 years. During my time

as director we have been there for more than 40,000 callers ensuring that those in their time of need have someone to turn to, a friendly voice to share their darkest moments with and to help carry that heavy burden. It seems that there may be difficult times for many of us over the coming months - Samaritans volunteers will always be there selflessly for those in need. The branch led by Susie will be in safe hands.”

Your Branch...

Swindon & District Samaritans is run by local volunteers all of whom provide the same confidential listening service to our callers – whether it’s by phone, email or by visiting our branch in Curtis Street, Swindon in non-COVID times. Our branch is your branch too.

Listening volunteers regularly commit their time to those needing emotional support including anyone who is feeling distressed or who may be deciding to take their own lives.

“Listening to someone who is perhaps distressed, worried, frightened and / or suicidal and who doesn’t know where to turn, is perhaps the most valuable thing we can do for a fellow human being”

Our branch has been operating for nearly 60 years, meaning we have a wealth of local understanding that enables us to reach out locally to everyone who needs us. We encourage people to talk about their feelings and emotional wellbeing – when they want to and in any way they feel most comfortable with.

We have over 90 listening volunteers who live and work across our area – from Faringdon and Cricklade to Marlborough, Devizes and Pewsey and all the surrounding areas in between. They are ordinary people, representative of our local

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community, but they do an extraordinary thing. To touch another person's life when it really matters, by helping them directly just by listening, without interrupting and not telling people what to do, is a rare gift.

Again in non-COVID times, we are also active in the community and regularly visit Erlestoke Prison as well as local events like Swindon & Wiltshire Pride. Our volunteers are also available to deliver presentations about our work and emotional health to schools, workplaces, clubs and organisations. Our vision is that fewer people die by suicide - that's why we do what we do.

Reaching Out ...

This is our first external newsletter as we receive such lovely community support and want to keep you all up to date with your local Samaritans branch. We're keen for your full, frank and fearless feedback – so please do email our listening and publicity volunteer with your views including whether you're happy to receive further quarterly updates, to Maggie: samspublicity@btconnect.com

All things Samaritans ...

Every six seconds, Samaritans answer a call for help. That's over 5 million calls for help received a year but, sadly, 5,316 people died by suicide in England in 2019 – that's an average of 15 people per day.

Nationally, Samaritans continue to not only be there for the moment of crisis but also look to take action to help prevent the crisis – to reach out to more people and to make suicide prevention a priority.

Our national website: www.samaritans.org provides insights into our wider work to help make a difference to anyone struggling to cope.

This includes research such as the recent launch of Real People, Real Stories following men's mental health during lockdown as well as understanding and challenging the way we think about suicide.

We've also provided practical tips to look after ourselves during the coronavirus pandemic plus Samaritans and the NHS launched a new confidential support line for frontline health, care, emergency and key workers who put their physical and mental health under pressure as they formed the frontline against coronavirus. Samaritans has partnered with Shout, Mind, Hospice UK and The Royal Foundation to offer round the clock, one to one emotional support to those on the frontline to help ensure they get the right support with their mental health, now and in the future.

Looking to the future...

Given the constraints of the pandemic, Swindon & District Samaritans are now able to recruit and train all of our new Samaritan listening volunteers online, using on line video conferencing.

We now have a new straightforward process to become a listening volunteer before starting our in-depth training. If you are interested in finding out more, please check out www.samaritans.org or contact Sally, listening volunteer and responsible for our recruitment:

samsrecruitment@btconnect.com

Sally says: "Anyone has it in them to be a Samaritan. You don't need previous experience or have qualifications but we do need people to be non judgemental and accepting of others.

It doesn't matter if you've gone through tough times. What really matters is that you want to help people – all kinds of people from all walks of life.

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Please get in touch if this sounds like you and start your journey to help make a real difference to someone's future."

Recently we have seen our latest trainees enter the branch after a full initial training period, all conducted virtually. The next phase of training includes being mentored by experienced Samaritans as our new listening volunteers look towards supporting our callers.

Bob is responsible for our branch training as well as being a listening volunteer: "we provide high quality training to help prepare you which, typically, takes a few months before you start volunteering and, along with the mentoring, gives you the skills and confidence to help anyone who is struggling to cope and to manage difficult conversations."

We Welcome Your Support

Our Shop...

... is a valuable source of income for us as well as providing a valuable presence within our local community but there are many challenges with re-opening the shop in the current climate. Our space is extremely limited in accepting, isolating and storing donated goods as well as providing enough space for everyone to maintain the appropriate distances. Sadly, this means that our shop will remain closed for the time being but we are hopeful we may be able to reopen in Spring 2021. Watch this space!

Fundraising...

...our branch is totally run and led by volunteers, which helps to keep our running costs low. However, we are largely dependent on our shop in Curtis Street and on local fundraising events but we have closed our shop and local events have,

understandably, been cancelled during the current pandemic.

The good news is that planning for events has continued as we look to the future so we can be sure we can continue to take calls from people struggling to cope now and in the future.

Terrific events like the Swindon Jazz and Soul Festival have already been re-scheduled to 10 April 2021, and our annual quiz night and wine tasting will be re-booked with details to follow.

In the meantime there are ways you can continue to support us.

* Our **first ever Samaritans on line Christmas raffle is live!** You can choose to support our branch from the drop down list and can log on via:

<https://www.samaritans.org/support-us/other-ways-support-us/raffle/>

Please enter for a chance of winning the top prize of £5,000.

* The third Monday in January, thought to be Blue Monday, is being turned into **Brew Monday** to encourage everyone to reach out to people. Feeling alone with your problems can have a big impact on mental health. Reaching out to others can be the start of feeling less alone. If you're interested in how to support Brew Monday in January, please email Sam:

fundraiserswindonsamaritans@btconnect.com

We couldn't do what we do without you ... thank you...

We are grateful to Swindon Borough Council, the Wiltshire Community Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund for their grants to support us during the pandemic and to the Devizes Lions for their donation along with many of you

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who have collecting boxes and tins which provide much welcome financial support.

If you haven't got a box or tin and would like one – please get in touch:

fundraiserswindonsamaritans@btconnect.com



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Our grateful thanks also go to our amazing Samarathoners who ran, walked and jogged a marathon in July as well as to 12 year old Saxon who ran an incredible 100km in memory of his friend, Evie

This July, Swindon & District Samaritans celebrated our annual awareness month "Talk to Us" which recognises Samaritans' 24 hour availability for those who need a safe place to talk. With 201 branches across the UK and Ireland, we make sure there's always someone there for anyone who needs someone to talk to.

Many thanks also go to Swindon Borough Council and Affleck Engineering for their support with lighting up Greenbridge Roundabout, in Swindon,

on the 21st July:



Shining a Light...

A classic Eurovision "did you know" ... that Katrina and the Waves 1997 winning song, Love Shine a Light, was composed by the group's regular songwriter, Kimberley Rew. This was following a request from the brother of the group's drummer, Alex Cooper, for an anthem for Samaritans in recognition of our branch's 30th anniversary - Alex's brother was a listening volunteer with our branch.

Strange Times...

Without a doubt, these are strange and can be unsettling times and it is now, more than ever, important for us all to feel connected and for us to reach out to those who may need extra support.

Your branch continues to be there for anyone who is struggling to cope. We remain open to respond to calls and emails thanks to our amazing listening volunteers.

Samaritans ...if anyone you know needs support ... we're always here:

T: [116 123](tel:116123) - this number is free to call from both landlines and mobiles, including pay as you go. There's no need to have any call or credit allowance to call 116 123

E: jo@samaritans.org

Call any time, day or night

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