

## Report for Tamworth Borough Council from Tamworth Samaritans

### April 2024 – September 2024

#### Summary

##### Current number of volunteers

We have 93 volunteers in total (at the last report it was 94), of whom 68 are listening volunteers who do day and night shifts, 12 do daytime shifts, 6 are New Samaritans being mentored and then there are a further 7 who are support volunteers. At any one time we will have volunteers on holiday, ill or taking a period of leave from the branch. On that basis we usually have around 65 active listening volunteers at any given time.

##### During this time volunteers supported callers in the following ways:

- Hours on the phone: 1,387
- Phone calls: 4,736
- E-mails responded to: 389

We have a target set nationally to try to ensure that 20% of our volunteers' hours on the phone are during what is termed 'twilight' hours (10pm-2am) and 10% during overnight hours (2am-6am). In September, we reached the target of 20%, and 9.2% of hours on the phone were overnight, giving us an area of focus.

#### General Update

It has been a very busy six months for Tamworth Samaritans. There have been some national Samaritans developments which we have been required to respond to.

In 2022/2023 Samaritans conducted a Children's Review. This looked at our approaches with under 18s and identified that awareness and use of Samaritans by this age group is high. As a result, the organisation identified that all volunteers should re-do their DBS check to include the child barring list. This meant that our Branch Safer Recruitment Administrators have worked tirelessly to ensure all volunteers have been rechecked to fulfil the new criteria.

Central Samaritans have additionally commissioned a new platform that hosts calls to the service because the existing platform, Link, is being decommissioned at the end of 2024. This has meant some focused work by our IT support volunteer and our Trustee for Premises and Resources to

ensure that we have switched to the new Gamma broadband ready for the move to the new Listening Centre in November. We have been focused on ensuring volunteers are prepared for this change. The new technology will hopefully reduce the number of dropped calls and will mean that volunteers with hearing aids may find sound quality and compatibility with their devices much better.

Whenever a new Branch Director or Co-Directors begins their term, they are required to complete a Quality Review process. This is completed in collaboration with mentors provided by Central Samaritans and our process was undertaken in the months leading up to July, when it was concluded. All branch members had an opportunity to feed into this review, and then the Branch Leadership team (BLT) agreed on a set of objectives for the team for the duration of the Branch Co-Directors' term (to December 2026).

Through this process strengths were identified as the collaboration of the BLT, morale, communication, development of outreach, training and mentoring, and the quality of our shift leaders. Actions identified were:

- To expand financial planning and budgeting
- Increase the level of service during the hours of most need
- Reintroduce ongoing mentoring
- Review volunteer retention
- Develop a continuity plan
- Develop the management of physical and electronic data
- Develop a robust handover process

Work is underway on these actions and progress is reviewed at bi-monthly Trustee meetings. For instance, we have already reviewed the rota and made some changes to try to address the hours of need objective, and we have recruited a data protection officer to assist with data management.

Ongoing mentoring is a process by which we peer review each other in branch. This used to be done prior to the pandemic and our Deputy Director for mentoring has worked hard to bring this back into branch. This is part of our Quality Strategy to ensure that we are continually reviewing our practice. Mentors have been identified and briefed and mentored shifts begin in November, beginning with the BLT.

In the review, we were able to take into account our volunteer voice survey results. In May, central Samaritans invited all volunteers to complete a survey and the results were announced in June

which allowed us to review these in time for our quality review. 78% of our volunteers (equating to 73 volunteers) completed the survey and we are extremely proud of our results. We scored above the Samaritans average in all areas apart from one, and above the sector benchmark in all. As a snapshot, 100% of our volunteers said that they are proud to volunteer at Samaritans, and 99% said they intended to be with Samaritans in 12 months' time. An area for improvement was identified around opportunities for feedback, which we hope will be improved with the reintroduction of ongoing mentoring.

We were able to celebrate our volunteer voice results at a branch meeting in June, at the Globe Inn in Tamworth. This was the first time since before the pandemic that there had been an in-person branch meeting and over half of our volunteers attended, including our Patron Jo1! We hope to continue to offer regular branch meetings to celebrate our volunteers and ensure all are informed and updated on developments.

### Training and Recruitment

We have a team of volunteers who lead on recruitment for us. There has recently been a further round undertaken which has led to six new volunteers joining us this autumn who are about to begin their journey in the duty room with their mentors.

We are very lucky to still have a waiting list of volunteers wishing to join Tamworth Samaritans. We are reintroducing information sessions this November. Before Covid these were a standard part of our recruitment campaign and help us to convey Samaritans key policies and explain the commitment level ahead of interview.

We have also had three new Support volunteers join the team. Support volunteers help us to sustain branch operations. The new Support volunteers have taken roles in the DBS team, finance team and as a data protection officer.

### Local Partnerships

We consider our three key partnerships to be with Tamworth Borough Council, Tamworth Railway Station, and HMP Swinfen Hall.

We continue to have a regular presence at Tamworth Railway Station and we understand from our colleagues in Central Samaritans that the station is a priority location in the Train Operating Companies Joint Suicide Prevention Plans for 2024/25. A team of volunteers had a presence on Samaritans Awareness Day (24<sup>th</sup> July – the date chosen as it is 24/7 and therefore representative of

the service's hours of operation). During these events, we talk to passers by and hand out listening tip guides and pocket cards with the 116 123 phone number on. Even helping visitors find relevant platforms and purchase tickets opens up conversations.

On National Suicide Prevention Day, 10<sup>th</sup> September, we handed out leaflets, posters, and information in the area surrounding the train station. We are looking forward to attending the station on 1<sup>st</sup> November for the Passenger Safety Day. Our Trustee for Partnerships continues to drop into the station once a week to chat to staff and recently gave targeted support to a staff member who had experienced the terrifying experience of witnessing a death by suicide.

Our support of HMP Swinfen Hall continues; we have been supporting the prison for over 25 years! We train prisoners to become Listeners and support them in their role. There have been 14 listeners over the reporting period, and we are planning to train more listeners this winter.

### Outreach and Awareness

We were delighted to be invited to the Tamworth Borough Council's Volunteer week event on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, where three of our volunteers attended the Town Hall to talk to passers by about volunteering opportunity. It was great to network with other organisations and speak to our neighbours!

On 12<sup>th</sup> June, two of our volunteers attended a 'Wellness Wednesday' event in the Commonwealth Wellness Centre, hosted by Tamworth Community Together CIC. It was great to be able to support this new initiative.

In July, two of our volunteers attended the Glascote Community Event in St Peter's Church, where they had a number of connective conversations and spoke to members of the public about our service, which was really well received. We are planning to continue having representation at these Community Events, hosted by Tamworth Community Together CIC.

The same month, three volunteers attended a volunteer recruitment event at Lichfield Cathedral. This event attracted potential volunteers from across the wider local area. We managed to recruit a much-needed finance team volunteer at this event, from Tamworth. These events, whilst focused on volunteer recruitment, are still a great opportunity to promote awareness of Tamworth Samaritans, particularly in areas where they don't necessarily realise we are their local branch.

In September, three of our team attended the 'We Love Tamworth' event at the Castle Grounds. The team were really proud to represent Samaritans at such an iconic venue and had lots of really meaningful conversations with members of the public.

We have had a new Trustee for Fundraising and Publicity come into post who has been looking at developing a strategy for 2024/25. One of the pieces of work he's looked at so far is our volunteer base. About 30% of our volunteers are from Tamworth and the surrounding areas, with many from Lichfield, areas towards Burton, Sutton Coldfield, Swadlincote and surrounding areas. They will be working with the Trustee for Partnerships and the Deputy Director for Outreach to continue to plan our approach to outreach and awareness activities.

We want to take this opportunity to say thank you once again for the continued support of Tamworth Borough Council, both in financial terms and in keeping us apprised of events and opportunities. It costs us around £35k a year to sustain our branch and so we are so very grateful for the funding you are able to provide. Please do let us know if there is anything we can do that may be helpful.

**Shannen Sawyer and Megan Hubbard**

**Branch Co-Directors**



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