

**How are the charities we support through our Outward Giving coping during the pandemic? Over the next few weeks a series of blog posts will shed light on their experience.**

## **Citizens Advice Guildford and Guildford Samaritans**



Like many other local charities **Citizens Advice Guildford** has been closed for face-to-face advice since the lockdown began. However, we are still very much open for business as the staff quickly got the team of volunteer advisers set up for working from home. We are able to offer email advice via our website (<https://www.guildfordcab.org.uk/>) or phone advice by calling our adviceline number: 0300 330 9013.

We have been especially busy with enquiries relating to the coronavirus – employment and benefit queries, for instance – but are happy to help with any issues where people need advice. Though we are unable to do extensive case work at present we have been helping about eighty clients a week and the numbers are growing. We are looking at how we might reopen our offices in Haydon Place but anticipate that home working will continue for quite a while. The advisers working for the Macmillan Cancer Support, The Mental Health Project and the ‘Help to Claim’ for Universal Credit are also all home working but are there for our clients.

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**Guildford Samaritans** have been as busy as ever during lockdown in terms of incoming calls and emails, with one in three people contacting us to talk about coronavirus and the impact it is having on them.

Roughly a third of our 150 listening volunteers have been self-isolating, but we have still been able to maintain our rota and stay open almost around the clock with many volunteers doing extra shifts.

Right out at the outset Samaritans was designated an essential service, which allowed us to travel to our branch at 69 Woodbridge Road. We were given an official letter we could show to the police and this proved very helpful as a couple of our volunteers were pulled over late at night.

We have had to make some adjustments to make it safe for volunteers to be at the branch, including tweaking our shift pattern and implementing strict social distancing and hygiene measures.

Unfortunately, we have had to suspend face-to-face visits to the branch as well as all our outreach activity. This includes our regular visits to HMP Coldingley and HMP Send to support our teams of Listeners (prisoners we have trained to provide emotional support to

their fellow inmates), although we have been able to stay in touch with them via phone and writing letters – unsurprisingly, they have been incredibly busy during lockdown. We are hoping that these visits will be able to resume in the not-too-distant future.

The branch's charity shop in Godalming, which provides vital funds to help keep the branch running, had to close throughout the lockdown. Happily, it opened its doors to donations and sales in the middle of June. Our customers and donors are delighted to see the shop reopen and sales and donations have been excellent since then. We were also fortunate to receive government funding under the measures put in place for the retail sector and we are hoping that with that support our income in 2020 will not be too adversely affected.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at Holy Trinity and St Mary's for your recent gift and continued support, which is so appreciated.

*Both contributed in July 2020*