

In our series “Everyday Neighbours” we share and celebrate some of the daily acts of quiet, unobtrusive service that our parishioners undertake during the week, putting our faith into practice for the benefit of our neighbour. Here Ginnie Gregory tells us why she volunteers with the Samaritans.

## Being a Samaritan in Guildford



You may have been rushing into the train station on a Monday morning and seen the volunteers handing out leaflets and talking to the commuters, or perhaps you walked past the Samaritan Centre as you went down Woodbridge Road, or maybe there has been a time in your life where things felt so bad you contacted the Samaritans.

The Guildford branch is open almost 24 hours a day with door callers welcomed to the Centre until about 9pm. In the last quarter we answered 4,601 calls, sent 1,137 emails and 1,976 texts and had about 60 visits from callers.

We endeavour to have a real presence in the town, supporting new students at the university and prisoners in the local prisons, and providing general outreach at a number of schools.

The Guildford volunteers are just the most wonderful group of people: young, older, experienced, new, friendly and deeply kind.

I have been a Samaritan for a while, initially in Cambridge about 25 years ago and now for the last few years in Guildford. Many things have changed – for example, all the ways in which callers can now contact us (which is brilliant) – but in essence Samaritans hasn't changed at all. We are there to listen and provide emotional support to anyone in distress, struggling to cope or at risk of suicide. It is a confidential, non-judgemental service that anyone can access. Each time we send a text or pick up the phone, that one caller is the most important and precious person to us.

Being a Samaritan has taught me so many things and I continue to learn all the time. I remember all those years ago in Cambridge thinking that really 'listening' was not a passive thing, but involved concentration, reflection and empathy. In my day-to-day life this has helped enormously in the way I listen to other people, giving space and time and listening to what is not being said as well.

We have a very good system of 'offloading' after we have had a duty, which is very important in order to keep looking after our volunteers. However, I do reflect on how I feel about being a Samaritan. Overwhelmingly I feel very privileged to be in a position to support and hear from people going through often the toughest times in their lives. We may be the first person they have been able to talk to about an issue so hard for them that it is almost impossible for them to find any words. There is also a profound sense of isolation and loneliness that is a really sad backdrop to many people's lives. Sometimes very demanding social issues and complex mental health problems seem so overwhelming for people, that

just getting through each day is an unbelievable struggle. As we all know issues around depression and poor mental health can affect us all.

I have a sense, as I leave the branch after a duty, that just by having the time to listen and by being the 'other person' whilst someone may struggling with suicidal feelings has made a difference, even a small difference and that may just be enough.

If you have ever thought of volunteering or would simply like to know a little more about the Samaritans, please don't hesitate to contact me or the Guildford branch directly (<https://www.samaritans.org/branches/guildford/>).

*Ginnie Gregory*  
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