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In this financial year we provided support with over
19,900 phone calls
5,400 hours on the phone
450 online chats

Director's message

We are pleased to share the North Herts & Stevenage Samaritans Annual Review for 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

This year has been one of **growth and achievement**, made possible by the dedication of our volunteers. Whether supporting callers, mentoring, fundraising, or working behind the scenes, every volunteer has helped ensure we are here for anyone who needs **someone to listen**.

We welcomed new **Listening Volunteers**, expanded our leadership team, and opened our third Listening Station. This was made possible through the fundraising legacy of Sarah Graham and her Samaritans project, enabling us to **support more callers**.

A highlight of the year was welcoming David Matthews, the Listening Walker, before he joined the Eastern Regional Conference as keynote speaker. The conference saw **record attendance** from our branch and provided a valuable opportunity to learn and connect with volunteers across the region.

We also continued to raise awareness of Samaritans through outreach, fundraising, and partnership work. We are grateful to our supporters, donors, trustees, and volunteers whose commitment **makes our work possible**.

As we look ahead, we **remain dedicated** to ensuring that anyone struggling to cope knows they are not alone and that someone is always here to listen.

Thank you for being part of another successful year for North Herts & Stevenage Samaritans.

Jo Coxon and Wendy Roberts, Co-branch Directors and Chair of Trustee, North Herts & Stevenage Samaritans

North Herts & Stevenage Samaritans is a charitable incorporated organisation registered in England & Wales (charity number 1173578)
 Our registered office is 5 Nuns Close, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1EP

Whatever
 you're facing
 We're here
 to listen

Call free day or night on
116 123
 Email
 jo@samaritans.org

SAMARITANS

Community Outreach

Volunteers attended a variety of local events to **raise awareness** of Samaritans, promoting wellbeing, and encouraging people to seek support, while **strengthening relationships** with the local community.

RAILWAY PARTNERSHIP

The branch continued working with Network Rail at local stations, supporting campaigns such as Brew Monday and Small Talk Saves Lives to promote **suicide prevention** and supportive conversations.

HEALTHCARE AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Monthly sessions at Lister Hospital and partnerships with local charities, employers, and wellbeing groups helped strengthen community links and extend outreach.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Volunteers played an **invaluable role** in community outreach, with **new members** bringing fresh ideas and helping maintain a strong local presence.

GRANTS

We are especially grateful to Hertfordshire County Council for their **£10k grant** towards our **Outreach work** across North Herts and Stevenage

PRIORITIES FOR NEXT YEAR

- Build new partnerships with community groups and employers.
- Increase volunteer participation in outreach.
- Support national and local awareness campaigns.
- Improve measurement of outreach impact.



Training

This year, we welcomed **16 new volunteers**. CORE training which consists of seven weeks of **intensive training**, including online modules and independent study. Following a period of mentored shifts, volunteers return for three weeks of Embedding training, where they reflect on their experiences, discuss calls they have taken, and further develop their confidence and listening skills.

For **existing volunteers**, we delivered Ongoing Mentoring and Policies and Procedures. These sessions help volunteers **maintain and develop their skills**, ensuring they feel confident supporting callers and each other.

Mentors

We currently have **48 mentors**, comprising both Key Mentors and volunteers. During 2025–26, 19 volunteers either completed or are currently undertaking the mentoring process to become **Full Listening Volunteers**. We also introduced the new **Freelancing Probationers** (FP) Development Coordinator role. This role provides structured support to new FPs until they become Full Listening Volunteers. Mentoring remains one of the most **rewarding** opportunities available to Samaritans volunteers.

Leaders

Our Leaders team provides **vital support** to listening volunteers through advice, guidance and offloads, helping them manage **difficult situations** while supporting their emotional wellbeing. We have developed Offload Leader and Emergency Leader roles and encourage volunteers to undertake **Leader training**, helping build relationships across the branch while identifying emerging themes and support needs through offloads. Emergency Leaders provide additional support and act as **decision-makers** when urgent or complex situations arise, ensuring these are managed in line with Samaritans' policies and procedures.

Role as Trustee and Deputy Director

This year saw the introduction of a Deputy Director role for Trustee and listening volunteer **Colin Woods**, creating a stronger link between the Board of Trustees and the branch. Colin has helped **improve** communication between governance and day-to-day branch operations, ensuring trustees have a better understanding of operational challenges while volunteers have **greater visibility** of decision-making, helping to create a shared understanding of our collective responsibility to deliver the **best possible service**.

Prisons

People in prison are at a significantly **higher risk** of suicide. For over 30 years, Samaritans has partnered with the prison service to support vulnerable prisoners through the **Listener Scheme**, a peer-support programme where trained prisoners provide confidential emotional support to those who are struggling or feeling suicidal.

Our prison team, made up of volunteers from the Hitchin and Cambridge branches, supports the scheme at **HMP Littlehey**. We recruit, train and mentor Listeners, promote the service among prisoners and staff, and work closely with the prison's **Safer Custody team** to ensure the scheme remains effective and sustainable.

Over the past 12 months, we have recruited and trained **14 new Listeners**, all of whom successfully completed their probation period and continue to receive ongoing development and support.



Social Committee

What a year it's been for the Social Committee! The Sams Social Hub WhatsApp group has grown to **81 members**, and the events keep coming thick and fast.

On the events front, we've kept things varied, with pub quizzes being the backbone, and the standout being our win at The Half Moon, where we walked away with **6 bottles of wine** (a result now spoken of in slightly legendary terms).

There's been a changing of the guard too. We said goodbye to **Tom**, one of our social secretaries, who's headed off to Liverpool - but we've since recruited **Konrad** to fill the gap, who would (modestly) describe it as an upgrade.

The undoubted highlight of the year was our **Christmas party at AnX bar**. Emily and Dani - AKA the Chuckle Brothers - ran a brilliant quiz, several unsuspecting volunteers found themselves wrapped up as Christmas presents, and James produced what can only be described as the most magical sausage rolls known to man.

There's plenty more planned for the year ahead, including a Stag / Hen do and Gilly's notorious Summer party. But as ever, it's often the small stuff - a daft comment in the group chat, a spontaneous plan - that makes this social side of Hitchin so special. **Keep them coming.**



Recruitment

This year, we continued to **improve our recruitment process** by working to a clear annual calendar, making planning easier for prospective volunteers and those supporting them.

Our information evenings are now well established, providing practical information while giving attendees a **genuine insight** into volunteering with Samaritans. Their purpose remains unchanged: to help people understand the commitment involved, ask questions, and decide whether volunteering is right for them.

We were delighted to welcome a **diverse group** of new volunteers from a wide range of ages, backgrounds and life experiences. This diversity strengthens our branch, as each volunteer brings unique perspectives and skills.

Looking ahead, we aim to increase our visibility within the local community through local publications, volunteer fairs and other outreach opportunities. By raising awareness of who we are and what we do, we hope to encourage **more people** to consider volunteering with Samaritans.

In Memory

In the 12 months to 31st March 2026, **Carolyn 173** sadly passed away. Carolyn selflessly gave her time as a volunteer for **over 20 years** and will be remembered fondly by many co-Samaritans.



Rota team

Over the past year, we have added a lot more **flexibility and resilience** to our rota through the introduction of 3 person shifts. This has been facilitated through transforming the downstairs office into a **third listening station** in December. Since January we have slowly been increasing the number of **3 person shifts** on offer on each rota while we adjust to the new way of working.

A three person shift reduces the need to close shifts due to illness or last minute absence, and offers **more shift options** for our volunteers. Additionally, for newer volunteers it allows them to meet a wider range of other Samaritans on shift.

Online chat shifts are now offered at **two different times**: 6-9pm and 7.30-10.30pm in response to feedback that a single chat time wasn't compatible with some volunteer's schedules. We have also added a **6-9pm listening shift** on Mondays and Friday upstairs, to offer more options to those who work during the day. Overnight shifts timings were altered several times throughout the year to match the hours of **highest need**, and we will continue to iterate this over the next year as regional night rotas are introduced.

Financial summary

The cost of providing our service amounts to approximately £101.00 per day. With the exception of income from investments, no income is received other than from voluntary donations from the public and local organisations, and local government grants.

Cost of providing services:

Premises cost	£11,616
Contribution to Central charity	£2,650
Other costs	£22,430
Total operating costs	£36,865

The branch received income from:

Donations	£11,736
Grants	£11,376
Interest income	£3,462

Total operating income	£26,574
Deficit from operations	£10,122*

*General reserves still exceed one year's normal expenditure

Fundraising donations and collections

Fundraising has remained **challenging** this year as the **cost of living** continues to affect individuals, charities and businesses. Despite this, we are incredibly grateful for the **generosity** of our supporters and for the continuing impact of Sarah Graham's inspiring **Samarivans campaign**, which has helped us continue delivering our **vital services**.



Volunteers held collections **across the region** throughout the year, including at Stevenage Football Club, Hitchin Christmas Market, Brew Monday station events, supermarkets and local railway stations. Together, these events and collections raised funds towards the **running costs** of the branch. We are also grateful to the **Community Champions** and **local businesses** who helped make these collections possible.

In addition, we received donations from organisations and individuals, including generous support from Hitchin Rotary Club, Waitrose & Partners, Sandon's Cowshed Jazz Club, the John Laing Trust and Lakeside Food Group. We also **thank everyone who supports us** through JustGiving, Enthuse, easyfundraising, standing orders and payroll giving.

In general, we are seeing an **increased use** of charity platforms for donations and envisage this will continue to be an important way for us to **raise money** for the branch.

To do this, you can use Easyfundraising, www.easyfundraising.org.uk.

Web users have also donated via searching online for North Herts & Stevenage Samaritans.

Thanks to everyone for your loyal support, which has enabled our branch to remain fully operational

Our supporters

- Mostly Comedy
- Biggleswade Station Book Library
- The Three Horseshoes, Willian
- Sarah Graham - Samarivans
- North Herts Council
- Priory Rotary Club
- Hitchin Rotary Club
- Toni & Guy, Hitchin
- Lawrie Alderman – Cowshed Jazz Club
- All Saints Church, St Paul's Walden
- Trinity Church, Knebworth
- Charities Trust
- Benevity-Tenable
- Beth Merrill
- Costco
- Waitrose, Hitchin

And everyone else who has helped our branch, we are so grateful to each and every one of you.

Providers of 'in-kind' services

- TPS Visual Communications, Letchworth

Thank you! ★★

How to donate

If you would like to help us, you can donate:

By bank transfer

Account name:

North Herts & Stevenage Samaritans

Account number: 63678547

Sort code: 20-05-73

Please quote your name as reference.

By cheque

Please make your cheque payable to 'North Herts & Stevenage Samaritans' and send it to our branch address: 5 Nuns Close, Hitchin, SG5 1EP.

Our vision

Our vision is that fewer people die by suicide by **reducing the risk factors**, ensure people are supported, less likely to act on suicidal feelings and hopefully reduce development of suicidal thoughts.

