

Understanding Our Callers

Samaritans Ireland caller experience research

SAMARITANS
Ireland

Foreword

I'm delighted to share the results of our first-ever caller experience research. What we have found is both heartening and invaluable. We sincerely thank all those who took the time to participate.

Samaritans' volunteers respond to over 470,000 calls a year from people who contact us, often during their darkest moments. Our research found 84% of callers felt we provided a safe space for them, 79% felt genuinely listened to, and 73% reported feeling supported by our service. These satisfaction levels rose to 100% for our daily, weekly and fortnightly callers. I want to thank our volunteers for giving those callers a safe place to be heard.

This research went beyond direct caller experiences and gathered insights from people and professionals who have signposted a caller to us, and individuals who know someone who has reached out to us.

This broad perspective has given us an unprecedented insight into how our service is making a difference and, crucially, how we can make it even better for everyone who needs us.

Sarah O'Toole,
Executive Director, Samaritans Ireland



Through a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research, this project explores:

- Personal accounts of people who called Samaritans (395)
- Accounts from those who have signposted or referred others to Samaritans (126)
- Insights from those who know someone who has called Samaritans (65)
- Volunteer feedback to ensure recommendations would benefit callers.

*This report offers a snapshot of views from 586 survey participants and is not representative of all our callers.

Who we reach

Samaritans' listening network serves communities throughout Ireland. Research showed that many people who called frequently were older, unemployed, single, and from rural areas.

While callers span all ages (18-85+), a substantial portion are between 26-45. We serve individuals in all locations, with 35% in rural, 38% in suburban, and 26% in urban areas. Respondents represented a range of life circumstances, including varied employment statuses and educational backgrounds.



The challenges facing our callers

Samaritans responds to over 1,200 calls daily (including calls, emails, face to face and prison support) addressing various issues. Of the 395 callers who took part, the following represent their challenges:

Mental health concern (50.1%)

Family & relationship (48.4%)

Suicidal thoughts (37.2%)

Mental health crises (37%)

Loneliness (34.7%)

Our research revealed the often-challenging circumstances facing those who reach out:

- Nearly 9 in 10 callers (88.2%) experienced mental health challenges, making Samaritans a crucial lifeline when other services may be unavailable.
- Over one-third of callers (34.7%) identified loneliness and isolation as their reason for contact, highlighting the critical social connection that Samaritans provide when personal support networks are limited or absent.
- More than one-third (37.4%) have experienced abuse in their lives, while a similar number (33.1%) are living with chronic physical ailments that compound their emotional distress.

Our findings underline why Samaritans' non-judgmental listening approach is so vital. Many callers navigate multiple difficulties simultaneously, seeking a safe space where their complete story can be heard without prejudice.

Making a difference when it matters

This study reaffirms Samaritans' profound impact on our callers, with an overwhelming majority reporting a positive experience with our service.

84%

found a safe space to speak freely

79%

felt listened to

73%

felt supported

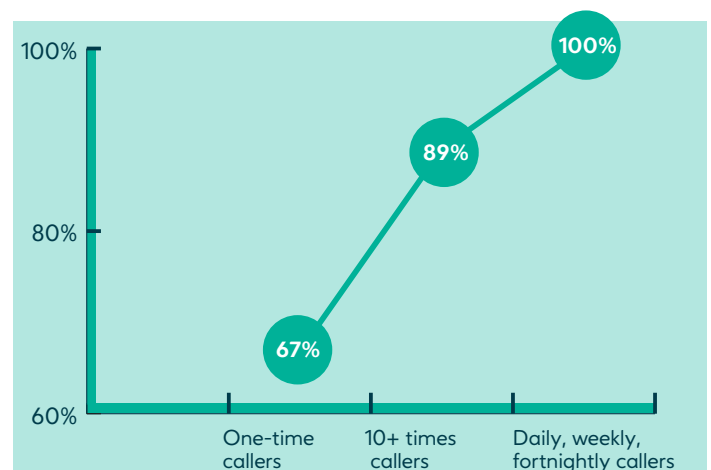
These robust findings reflect the dedication of our volunteers nationwide, who provide emotional support to Ireland's only 24/7 helpline.

The journey to feeling heard

The research found callers who were more familiar with the service had an improved experience. This shows the strength of our volunteer-led approach.

While 67.5% of one-time callers felt listened to, a higher percentage (89%) of those who called ten or more times reported feeling listened to. Remarkably, 100% of daily, weekly, and fortnightly reported feeling listened to.

These confirm Samaritans' dedicated volunteers build meaningful connections that deepen over time, with trust developing through each interaction.



How people contact us

Calling the freephone helpline 116 123 was the preferred contact, with nearly 9 in 10 people choosing to hear a human voice.

Email and services which operated pre-Covid - including face-to-face or text support - served a smaller but essential group.

Some 96% of people found our service accessible when they need it most.

“ I could be 10pm at night when you might not be able to get yourself to any service, you might not be able to understand what's happening. Those dark days. You need to be able to access somebody in those moments. So, I think there's no comparison to any other service, no service offers what they offer. ” Caller

Looking forward, callers suggested more digital offerings, with between 14% and 19% expressing an interest in text messaging, video calls, webchat features, and app-based support.

Excellence in emotional support

Callers consistently praised our volunteers' exceptional listening skills, genuine empathy, and non-judgmental approach. Many valued how volunteers gave them unhurried time to explore their feelings.

“ I wouldn't probably be standing here today only for them. ”
Caller

“ The lady was so patient and stayed talking and listening to me until I started to see I didn't need to self-harm again. I will forever be grateful for her understanding and empathy. ”
Caller

Samaritans' wider impact

The research confirms Samaritans' vital role in Ireland's mental health landscape, with healthcare professionals expressing strong confidence in our service:

“ Samaritans are a service I personally, and we as a mental health organisation, trust and have confidence in. We signpost our service users to you with the assurance that they will be met with a dedicated, patient, empathic, and skilled volunteer. ”
Mental health professional

It reinforced Samaritans' reputation as a trusted, effective service delivered by committed volunteers who make a real difference when it matters most. Samaritans also provides crucial peace of mind for families supporting loved ones through crisis.

“ I was supporting my partner who was going through an acute mental health episode. I felt incredibly unsupported and made contact with the Samaritans service seeking support for myself when I was struggling with the weight of the support I was providing. ”
Family member

While overall satisfaction was high, we identified specific caller groups who sometimes required additional support approaches. Callers discussing financial difficulties, bullying/harassment situations, or self-harm reported slightly lower satisfaction rates.

These findings present valuable opportunities to strengthen our service, reinforcing our unwavering commitment to supporting all individuals, regardless of their circumstances or background.

Making a difference when it matters most

Samaritans plays a vital role in supporting people through crisis and emotional distress. The research found callers who were more familiar with the service had an improved experience.

Key Insights:

- 79% of all callers feel genuinely listened to
- This rises dramatically to 89% among those who've called ten or more times
- Samaritans provides a crucial national safety net, offering immediate emotional support when other services are unavailable or inaccessible.

These insights will drive targeted improvements in first-time caller experiences, specialised support training, and more precise communication about our service.

“It was literally like a hand came out and dragged me back... It was phenomenal, really phenomenal.”
Caller

Our commitment: Building on these insights to ensure every person continues to receive exceptional support in their moment of need, regardless of whether it's their first call or their fiftieth.

If you've been affected by this report, call Samaritans on freephone **1116 123** or email jo@samaritans.ie



Enhancing support: Three key focus areas for Samaritans Ireland

Research findings were reviewed by a panel of volunteers and staff, identifying three critical areas where Samaritans can enhance its service:

➤ First-Time caller experience:

1

Development of resources explaining what callers can expect, addressing any perceived gap between expectation and experience.

➤ Specialised support training:

2

Information sessions for volunteers on supporting callers with specific challenges, including financial difficulties, bullying, and self-harm.

➤ Improved awareness:

3

Engagement with professionals and organisations who refer people to Samaritans to improve awareness of Samaritans services, alongside a multimedia campaign emphasising the power of active listening.

These targeted improvements will build on our already strong foundation.

Acknowledgements

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