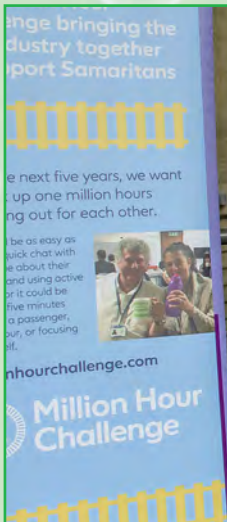




Million Hour Challenge

Bringing the rail industry together to support Samaritans



Have you ever been in severe emotional distress?

Have you ever stepped in to help someone in crisis?

Have you ever wanted to help someone in distress but not known what to do?

Your story can help us find new and better ways of supporting people in distress



Quest

Understanding Experiences

Please consider taking part in an anonymous online survey at: www.thequeststudy.org



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ALAMY.

Welcome

On March 27, we helped launch the five-year Million Hour Challenge project to encourage railway staff to donate their time, energy and skills to help Samaritans in its work to support people in emotional crisis.

Building on our existing partnership with Samaritans, the campaign's aims are very simple: for a total of one million hours to have been volunteered and £2.5 million raised for the charity by our industry during Control Period 6 (April 2019-March 2024).

This will not only help Samaritans as it seeks to cope with increased demand for its vital services, it will also be beneficial for the mental health of all of us in the sector who volunteer our time, not least by encouraging us to talk with each other, and the wider community, about the issues involved.

Mental health is of particular concern in the rail industry, where the rate of suicide in the workforce is 1.6 times higher than the UK average, and 60% of workers have experienced mental health issues. By talking about it more we can reduce the taboo, change our culture and make it acceptable that many of us have mental health issues.

Meanwhile, the tragedy of suicide has an impact not just on rail staff but on the families who have lost loved ones and passengers, too, so the more we can do to save those lives the better.

Ian Prosser
HM Chief Inspector of Railways, ORR Director of Safety, and sponsor of the Million Hour Challenge



Everyone working in rail should be able to feel as if their wellbeing is important and that they can talk about mental health at work with their colleagues. However, 60% of workers have experienced mental health issues and the rate of suicide in our industry's workforce is 1.6 times higher than the UK average.

That's why we're proud to be one of the organisations in the rail industry to support the Million Hour Challenge, which aims to encourage staff to donate their time, energy and skill to help Samaritans. We are playing our part to help the rail industry give one million hours and raise £2.5 million to support people in emotional crisis.

This will build on our work with Samaritans, British Transport Police and the wider rail industry to reduce suicides across the rail network, including adding Samaritans messaging to millions of rail tickets and supporting Network Rail's 'Small talk saves lives' campaign to raise awareness of how members of the public can help to prevent suicides.

Our people are the greatest strength we have, so it's vital we improve mental health and tackle the stigma surrounding it. We need to create a culture of wellbeing where it is normal to keep an eye out for colleagues. Giving our staff opportunities to volunteer with Samaritans could also benefit their physical and mental wellbeing. We want to encourage them to talk about mental health and feel pride from helping others.

Making the railway a safe and supportive place for people is something that can only be achieved through everyone on the network working together. We hope to rally even more support among the rail companies we represent, the 240,000 staff the railway and its supply chain employs, and the extra 100,000 people for whom we want to open up job opportunities by 2027.

Paul Plummer
Chief Executive, Rail Delivery Group



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Beyond the call



Director of Railway Safety and HM Chief Inspector of Railways IAN PROSSER and Network Rail's IAN STEVENS introduce the Million Hour Challenge and delve into the campaign's origins

The rail industry is no stranger to volunteering or fundraising. Many organisations celebrate close relationships with their chosen causes, while also encouraging their staff to partake in other charity and community activities.

Companies are also increasingly offering more formal employee volunteer leave during working hours to support these efforts, and to encourage greater numbers of workers to participate.

Network Rail, for example, allows its staff five days of volunteer leave each year, which resulted in more than 6,700 days being taken in total in 2017-18.

Meanwhile, NR estimates that its employees donate an average of £45,000 to charity per month with a further £1.1 million raised from passengers at stations through bucket collections.

In particular, £123,000 was raised by NR staff for its corporate charity Barnardo's, and further support was given to its Employment, Training and Skills services in the form of career advice and pre-employment training.

Since volunteer leave was introduced by NR in 2012, take-up has increased by 73% so that more than 3,800 of its employees now use their allowance, but this still represents less than 10% of its total headcount.

This relatively low uptake did not escape



Samaritans responds to more than five million calls for help a year. @TIMEFORHEROES.



the attentions of either HM Chief Inspector of Railways Ian Prosser or former NR Chief Executive Mark Carne, who both arrived at the same conclusion (before the latter's departure in August 2018) that much more could be done.

Prosser explains: "Lots of companies have volunteer days but they just don't use them, so Mark Carne and I came up with the idea of the Million Hour Challenge in CP6 to support Samaritans, with which we, as an industry, have been successfully working on suicide prevention for several years.

"This has been a very powerful and successful collaboration but they could always do with more help not just for 'listeners', but in fundraising, support services and other areas. We have 300,000 people in this industry, if not more, so this should be quite easy."

For Prosser, Samaritans is a cause that's close to his heart, given his own experience of dealing with the suicide of a loved one. But the decision seemed a natural one for the industry as a whole, because of the number of fatalities that occur on the railways, and the long-

standing relationship that is already in place with the charity.

There was also another important factor at play as rates of mental ill-health and suicide within the rail industry continue to exceed the national average. It is difficult to determine the exact reasons for this, but factors are believed to include employees' potential exposure to stress and trauma from incidents, and the underrepresentation of women (who are statistically much less likely to take their own lives than men).

It is also widely accepted that male-dominated environments such as rail are likely to perpetuate the outdated belief that expressing feelings and demonstrating emotion is a sign of weakness, making it much harder for those in distress to speak up and seek help.

Prosser adds: "The main benefit here is that companies start to get to grips with the idea that mental health is as important as physical health. This sort of volunteering is proven to improve mental health by making us feel better about ourselves and encouraging us to

talk more openly about the issue.

"We have a big incentive to go for as an industry that is not good at dealing with this, and it will have a big cultural impact; the less 'macho' we can make railways the better. Absenteeism from mental health costs this industry over £300 million a year, so this should help to reduce that.

"We hope it will also spread out from the railways through our links with big contractors that work in wider construction, and this might therefore permeate out to their supply chains."



“ There are so many ways in which people in the rail industry are well-placed to help ”

Angela Zair, MHC Project Leader, NR

Samaritans Chief Executive Ruth Sutherland and HM Chief Inspector of Railways Ian Prosser (front row, middle) launch the Million Hour Challenge with other industry representatives at King's Cross on March 27. NETWORK RAIL.

The pan-industry Rail Industry Suicide Stakeholder Group provided the perfect forum for initial discussions where a strong appetite for turning the MHC into reality was established among its members, including Network Rail, the Rail Delivery Group and British Transport Police.

NR's programme manager for suicide prevention Ian Stevens says: "I knew that Ian [Prosser] had already been in touch with Mark Carne, while everyone else I spoke to had also said 'yes, this is something the industry would like to take forward'. We therefore took the concept and tried to shape it because it is a big task to take on for a large and disparate industry.

"We had to ask ourselves how we could galvanise an industry of 300,000 people and manage this in a structured way, which is



In 2017, more than 20,000 people volunteered their time for Samaritans. @TIMEFORHEROES.

► exactly what we'll be doing over the next few years."

Ahead of the campaign's official launch on March 27, the MHC was first trialed by running a series of pilot projects within the first organisations to sign up to the challenge, including NR, ORR, Transport for London and MTR Crossrail.

People who already support and volunteer for Samaritans at its 201 branches nationwide have been asked to join straight away, while a more gradual rollout is now being implemented to minimise the risk of any surges that could overwhelm smaller branches.

NR's MHC Project Leader Angela Zair says: "We want to encourage sustained support from rail employees across the next five years, and our carefully planned rollout approach during the first year will help manage that. The challenge is now open to everyone. Any organisations that want to become partners can get in touch with me and I can help them plan delivery and promotion to their employees.

"We've learned a lot from the pilot schemes and in this way we can share ideas and learning with other organisations. I'll also be working closely with Samaritans and its branches to identify its resource needs over the next 12 months, for example in health and safety.

"Most branches are independently managed

by volunteers who cover many of the tasks involved in the opening of their building, but the rail industry has a wealth of people trained in health and safety who can offer advice. There are so many ways in which people in the rail industry are well-placed to help."

Stevens adds: "We haven't gone for a 'big bang' launch, but in the first year we hope to bring in more of the train operating companies, and then some of the large infrastructure contractors. None of this will ever be mandatory for anyone, but there are so many wins for both Samaritans and the industry.

"It's about achieving a critical mass of TOCs and lots of publicity, and then others will hopefully want to join. We also have a website (millionhourchallenge.com) which should make it much easier for people to convert their interest into action."

As well as generating a million hours of voluntary time for Samaritans during CP6, the MHC also aims to raise £2.5m, which will help support the charity's existing activities and its ability to accommodate the influx of volunteers that it's hoping to create.

This includes a commitment made by NR to underwrite the £200 cost associated with training each additional Listening Volunteer to provide confidential emotional support over the phone.

But Stevens is keen to stress that there is a

wide spectrum of ways to participate in MHC, including in the workplace itself, and through actions as simple as asking a colleague how they are feeling, or making them a cup of tea.

"We know that lots more people would like to volunteer for Samaritans, but prior to this there wasn't much you could do to help as they didn't have a structure for allowing large numbers to get involved. The ultimate aim is to get more 'listeners' and hopefully the MHC will act like a ladder, where you get a taste of supporting colleagues and fundraising and then think about moving up to the next level of involvement.

"But the first part of this is about self-help and looking out for colleagues, because there is a growing awareness in the industry that we need to look more at general wellbeing. I've been in this industry for 30 years - it's white male-dominated which hasn't always helped it be seen as a particularly caring industry.

"Talking about mental health will help make it more inclusive, and people can then take these things home with them to destigmatise it and make it more acceptable in society."

Looking ahead, it seems likely that some TOCs and smaller members of the supply chain may need more persuasion than others to sign up as a partner, or to promote MHC to their staff.

That is because it is often tempting for smaller companies in particular to look at providing volunteering leave to their staff as an overhead and an additional cost to their business, when the reality could not be further from the truth.

Stevens is sympathetic to smaller companies, but reminds them that the cost

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The Million Hour Challenge is open to everyone in the industry. Getting involved can be as easy as having a quick chat with a colleague and asking about their weekend, or perhaps even just spending five minutes talking to a passenger, neighbour or focusing on yourself.

You could spend a few hours thinking up some fun ways to raise money in order to get closer to the industry's goal of raising £2.5 million for Samaritans.

Other options include becoming a Million Hour Challenge Champion to bring together your colleagues and set up events to support Samaritans. Or you could join the team that keeps your local branch of Samaritans running all year round.

There is also the possibility of becoming a Listening Volunteer. However, everyone thinking of becoming involved is encouraged to complete two online courses, including an Active Listening Course, to provide the knowledge and confidence to start a conversation with someone who needs to talk.

To join the challenge or to find out more visit: millionhourchallenge.com

60% of rail workers have experienced mental health issues, and the issue costs the industry £316 million a year. @TIMEFORHEROES



of suicide to the rail industry and the lost productivity incurred by absenteeism present a much higher cost in the long run.

The value of saving lives is also impossible to quantify, which surely makes the industry's wholehearted support for MHC a foregone

conclusion.

He says: "Organisations like NR would like to think that everyone would take up their volunteering leave, but TOCs don't always have that structure, so we'd like TOCs to take license of that. Obviously there are operational

issues involved, but the cost to the industry of each suicide is, on average, £255,000 so it makes sense in financial terms, even if it is difficult to reconcile when there's a shortage of staff.

"As an industry we lead on suicide prevention and there is nothing else in the UK on this scale. We'd like to see a decline in suicides but we don't set any targets, although we would expect to see an increase in interventions.

"Just one successful intervention would be enough to validate this scheme but, quite frankly, anything that broadens the message of what Samaritans does has to be good for the industry and society as a whole." ■



With a combined workforce of approximately 300,000, each member of the rail industry would have to complete just 3 hours and 20 minutes of volunteering in Control Period 6 to achieve the Million Hour Challenge. PAUL BIGLAND / RAIL.



“None of this will ever be mandatory for anyone, but there are so many wins for both Samaritans and the industry.”

Ian Stevens, NR's programme manager for suicide prevention

MILLION HOUR CHALLENGE SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS



Confronting the issue

With an estimated one in four of the population experiencing an acute mental health problem each year, PAUL STEPHEN asks some of the organisations supporting the Million Hour Challenge how the rail industry in particular is stepping up its efforts to address the issue

When it comes to the prevalence of mental health issues, the statistics speak for themselves. Despite the often hidden nature of the various conditions, it is believed that up to a quarter of our friends, family and colleagues are affected each year.

The *Thriving at Work* independent review conducted in 2017 confirmed the scale of the economic and human cost of the problem, with poor mental health costing employers between £33 billion and £42bn a year. Meanwhile, some 300,000 people with long-term problems were thought to have left their jobs each year as a consequence of their illnesses - that's the equivalent to the whole population of Newcastle or Belfast.

The impact of poor mental health doesn't end there, touching not only the lives of individuals but also those around them. Then there is the greatest human cost - loss of life through suicide.

Thriving at Work sets out what employers can do to better support all employees, recommending in particular that all employers, regardless of size, should adopt six 'mental health core standards' including developing greater awareness in the workplace, and routinely monitoring employee mental health and wellbeing.

Crucially, the review also acknowledged that rates of poor mental health and suicide are higher for employees in certain industries.

Unfortunately this includes rail, in which 60% of workers have experienced mental ill-



health and the rate of suicide in the workforce is 1.6 times higher than the UK average.

The Million Hour Challenge aims to make huge inroads into both raising awareness of the issue and tackling it, but it should also be seen in the wider context of the huge efforts already being made by industry to provide greater support to colleagues and to identify and prevent mental health problems before they occur.

Playing a leading role is the Office of Rail and Road, which urged the rail industry to go much further than simple legal compliance in managing occupational health as part of its

health programme for 2014-19.

As a public sector organisation, the ORR has also responded positively to *Thriving at Work's* call on the entire civil service to help lead the way with its own staff, in its position as one of the UK's largest employers.

ORR Director of Strategy and Mental Health Wellbeing Champion Dan Brown says: "We have accepted all of the 'mental health core and enhanced standards' that lay the basic foundations for better mental health in the workplace.

"These areas include mental health at work plans, mental health awareness for employees,

line management responsibilities and routine monitoring of staff mental health and wellbeing, but we still have work to do before we can say we are where we want to be."

The ORR is currently developing a mental health strategy backed by internal

communications campaigns, support guides for managers and the training of mental health first aiders across the organisation.

According to Brown, this will give managers a greater understanding of the crucial role they can play and help them to identify additional

opportunities to support employees, while also enabling them to provide more advice and support.

He adds: "We have been working with Mind, Time to Change and St John Ambulance as we learn what more we need to do to support good mental wellbeing. We are changing how we think and act about mental health and encouraging a culture of openness.

"It will be a long and challenging journey as we address sensitive issues, but there is no hiding for responsible employers as we all step up to meet this challenge."

The Rail Accident Investigation Branch



“ We are changing how we think and act about mental health and encouraging a culture of openness. ”

Dan Brown, Director of Strategy, ORR

► (RAIB) takes its responsibilities just as seriously, with much of its work as the UK's independent investigator for incidents and accidents on the railways placing its staff at the sites of accidents.

As well as enduring the harrowing visual impact of these visits, investigators will also routinely interview those involved and meet with bereaved families as they try and come to terms with what has happened.

Chief Inspector of RAIB Simon French says that his organisation is painfully aware of how deeply affected its staff and those from other agencies can be when they become involved in a tragedy or traumatic near miss.

This is why RAIB has introduced a comprehensive trauma risk management system designed to secure the welfare of people exposed to such events.

He explains: "Train drivers, mobile operations staff, guards and station assistants are just some of those who sometimes witness terrible events, or are required to manage the aftermath. We also recognise that exposure to the scene and the resultant human misery is not without risk to RAIB's teams of inspectors and support staff.

"Our system involves training some of our people to help detect early signs of traumatic stress problems, provide early informal support and facilitate formal help for those who need it. While most people who experience a potentially traumatic event will not go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, the aim of the process is to provide an early indication of individuals who may be vulnerable to developing it."

On the specific issue of suicide, he adds: "Although each suicide is a personal tragedy, the ripples of harm spread beyond the individuals concerned and affect the mental wellbeing of families and also those who deal with the aftermath. It is for this reason that we are so strongly supportive of the rail industry's Million Hour Challenge in support of Samaritans."

RSSB (formerly the Rail Safety and Standards Board) also shares many of these sentiments, and has identified the Million Hour Challenge as an opportunity to further tune into the national movement to promote better mental wellbeing within the UK.

According to RSSB it already encourages employee volunteering, and will be carefully tracking its contribution to the MHC.

RSSB has been at the vanguard of research and analysis into improving mental health in UK rail, and in 2018 managed a research project - 'Understanding the conditions for successful mental health training' for managers - on behalf of the cross-industry

It takes courage for some people to come forward, but they are now coming.

Nisa Carey, Head of Safety and Wellbeing, BTP



The scene of the Sandilands crash near Croydon on November 9 2016. Tram 2551 was derailed at 45mph and travelled 25 metres on its side, leading to the death of seven passengers. The incident also provided a first test for BTP's Trauma Risk Management peer support service that aims to minimise the impact of traumatic stress on its officers.
 INVICTA KENT MEDIA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK.

Health and Wellbeing Economics Group.

Forming part of RSSB's R&D programme which is funded by the Department for Transport and supported by RSSB's members, it found that better line manager training could reduce lost working time by up to 30% by making better support available to staff and giving them the right treatment to return to work.

Rail companies are now working with RSSB to develop practical options for line manager training. Meanwhile, through its System Safety and Health Directorate, it is also supporting a successful rail industry health and wellbeing programme that features mental health as a key theme. As part of this initiative RSSB is helping members to enhance capability in areas including line manager training in mental health, trauma guidance, research into abuse to railway staff and reducing mental health stigma.

RSSB recognises that as well as conducting

research, it should play a leading role in the implementation of a broader health and wellbeing programme.

Therefore, as well as being one of the first organisations to sign up for MHC, RSSB is also a member of the Time to Change mental health campaign that was launched in 2007 to reduce stigma and discrimination.

RSSB has also won grant funding from the Department for Work and Pensions to set up an employment support service to provide even greater help to keep people with mental health conditions in work.

Darryl Hopper, RSSB's principal health and wellbeing specialist, adds: "As a railway company we want to play our role in this positive societal change and the Million Hour Challenge is a significant part of our internal drive to support mental wellbeing.

"There is a particular challenge to the railway from suicide, and to play a part in reducing its occurrence and ethically manage

its tragic aftermath really resonates with us. Behind the statistics are individual lives, families and friends as well as those railway workers who become directly involved and are deeply affected."

Last but not least, mental wellbeing is also a key agenda for the British Transport Police as almost all its officers and staff work in stressful, traumatic situations, and are exposed directly and indirectly in their daily work on the railways dealing with suicides, fatalities and other critical incidents.

These can range from assaults and injuries sustained during arrests to major incidents where BTP officers have often been first responders, including the fatal tram crash at Sandilands in November 2016, the Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017, and the terrorist attacks at London Bridge (June 2017), Westminster (March 2017) and Manchester Arena (May 2017).

BTP launched its Wellbeing Strategy and

Framework in April 2016, of which a key part is its Trauma Support Programme to try and minimise the potentially negative impact of traumatic stress and to proactively prevent the progression of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in BTP employees.

The TSP is centrally governed and led by the BTP Safety and Occupational Health Department.

One of the key areas is a peer support system called Trauma Risk Management (TRiM), which is an early intervention system initially developed for military personnel who have been exposed to suicide, deaths and other situations involving high levels of emotional stress in the course of their deployments.

BTP has invested more than £50,000 in training 72 TRiM practitioners who are able to provide peer support to colleagues, monitor trauma-exposed staff and, if needed, help them to access professional support.

TRiM practitioners are based nationally and

around the clock so that one can be on-site immediately, if needed.

After an incident, employees can opt to enter what is known as the TRiM pathway, which begins with a Trauma Incident Briefing within 72 hours to help defuse post-incident issues. After 72 hours employees can voluntarily attend an initial TRiM session when and if further support is required.

If signs and symptoms of PTSD are detected, an individual will then be fast-tracked through Occupational Health to access appropriate clinical treatment, and will have regular reviews with TRiM practitioners.

BTP's head of safety and wellbeing Nisa Carey says: "The first time this was used was at Sandilands. It's often difficult to document all the individuals involved but within 72 hours of that we'd conducted 279 Trauma Incident Briefings, after which staff can ask to go on the TRiM pathway.

"We had a total of 35 cases of PTSD (in approximately 5,500 staff) in 2018. I would say that's quite low because we have so many people exposed to trauma, but it does show evidence that using TRiM as an early intervention is an effective system.

"When I started here in 2015 there was quite a macho culture, but that is changing and members of staff will now approach us [in Occupational Health] because they recognise its value. You can't force an individual to do anything and it takes courage for some people to come forward, but they are now coming."

Apart from the TRiM process, BTP has developed other initiatives such as a mental health support guide for employees and their families, which includes information on the range of services on offer.

Additional support services including a confidential telephone counselling service.

Online resources are also available through an employee assistance programme called BTP Assist. This is aimed at dealing not just with traumatic events in the line of duty, but also stress and anxiety from other life events including pregnancy, and divorce or separation.

Carey adds: "We will soon be launching our first 16 mental first aiders. They are intentionally not called counsellors because the job title helps to destigmatise mental health. We're creating more and more add-ons and creating a more accepting culture, which I think BTP does really well.

"Some organisations will rely on the NHS, but doctors are not always best qualified to diagnose PTSD and will sign people off work when they need to be on a clinical pathway. My principle is to try and bring people back to work. I think the TRiM system and early intervention is great, and I encourage other organisations to do the same." ■

Time to help save others

Samaritans Chief Executive **RUTH SUTHERLAND** explains how the Million Hour Challenge will help to further cement the lifesaving partnership the charity has enjoyed with the rail industry for almost ten years

SAMARITANS AT A GLANCE

- 201 branches
- More than 20,000 volunteers
- Open 24 hours a day and 365 days a year
- 1700 trained listeners across 141 prisons
- 5.4 million calls for help answered each year
- Responds to call for help every six seconds



JACK BOSKETT/RAIL.

In 2010 Samaritans began working with Network Rail with the aim of preventing suicides and supporting passengers and staff affected by them.

Since the launch of the partnership, several thousand rail staff have been trained in suicide prevention that has resulted in over 400 reported lifesaving interventions; it's believed that many more have gone unreported.

This has led to a large number of major awards being won in recognition of the strength of the partnership and the effectiveness of the training being provided, while also generating a steady stream of new

recruits for Samaritans who were eager to build on their first taste of suicide prevention.

The partnership is now set to run even deeper following the launch of the Million Hour Challenge (MHC).

Samaritans Chief Executive Ruth Sutherland says: "The partnership has been cutting edge over the last few years because of the way the rail industry has really embraced its contribution to suicide prevention. Over the last nine years it has grown from an initiative to a comprehensive programme, and now European operators quite often come to the UK to see what we're doing.

"Lots of companies, including Network Rail, let staff get involved in volunteering and we've had a steady trickle of volunteers from the rail industry since 2010, but uptake is still quite low. That means that providers like us are either not providing attractive enough opportunities or not making them viable, so now we need to be more creative.

"Volunteering hasn't kept up with how flexible people's lives have become, so that's what we want to try out and that's where the MHC could help us."

At the MHC launch event at King's Cross, on March 27, Sutherland described it as a

're-imagining of corporate volunteering' as the campaign seeks to secure a total of one million hours in voluntary time and £2.5 million in donations from the rail industry by the end

Control Period 6 in March 2024.

Samaritans relies on volunteers to ensure that its 201 branches nationwide remain operational and so that more than five million



“ People who volunteer through work are happier, healthier and likely to be more engaged with their employer - it gives coming to work an even greater purpose. ”

Ruth Sutherland, Chief Executive, Samaritans

phone calls from people in distress can be answered each year.

As well as supporting the vital work of the unique charity, Sutherland believes the benefits of MHC will be mutual as an increase in volunteers helps to reduce the stigma of mental health issues in the rail industry.

Furthermore, the campaign is backed by research that shows volunteering can help people's general physical wellbeing, improve mental health, create a better work/life balance and generate satisfaction from helping others.

She adds: "The MHC is another way for us to be cutting edge by re-imagining

CASE STUDIES

Working with Samaritans needn't be a huge time commitment or just one more thing to cram into already busy lives. Five existing volunteers share their experiences and offer a glimpse of what can be expected

PAUL JOHNSON

Aged 54, Paul is a framework manager in business change for Network Rail and lives in Reigate. "My reason to join Samaritans was an urge to give something back to society, but with a full time job and two young kids I needed something that could fit around my family life. I just happened to walk past a Samaritans poster in Reigate and then went along to an open evening in March 2018.

"I trained as a 'listener' over the summer and started to take calls on my own in September. You have to do a minimum of 15 hours a month but I can generally do my shifts whenever it fits. It can also be quite hard going sometimes, but you get plenty of training and support.



leader at the end of each shift so you don't take it home with you. I always thought I was quite good at listening, but I've now realised that I wasn't, which has helped my relationships with my wife and kids. "My message to others would be to follow your gut instinct. If this is something that is tugging away at you inside then look into it. Don't think about why you can't do it –

"You get lots of practice but it is very different when you've got a distressed person on the other end of the line. Samaritans trains you so you are prepared for anything, and you soon learn to feel confident and capable.

"You're never left on your own and you have a mentor to start with, and then an opportunity to talk things over with a shift

not everyone can be a listener but there are lots of other options.

"You'll benefit as a person. You'll develop new skills and it's quite a sociable thing and a good way to meet people. People think it's all doom and gloom but it really isn't. There's a decent social side and we quite often go out for a few beers together."



TONY BRINDLEY

Tony is 56 years old and works in customer service for MTR Crossrail. He grew up in Stoke on Trent and has volunteered for Samaritans since completing a Managing Suicidal Contacts course run by them for platform staff last May.

Last December he completed a three-day 'Walk the Line' in aid of Samaritans, and is pictured here (far right) with control room staff at Ealing Broadway.

"I walked the Elizabeth Line by starting at Reading and finishing at my own station in Romford, which was 88 miles in total. I raised just under £3,800 after a few colleagues set up an online fundraising page for me.

"I've been working on the railways for 18 years. In that time there have been 14 fatalities at my station and I've personally been involved in seven interventions that have saved lives. I'm not a superhero for fundraising, I'm just supporting the superheroes at Havering Samaritans and the great work they do there and all over the UK.

"As far as I was concerned, I was just going for a stroll, and I could never do enough for Samaritans. Whenever there's been an incident at Romford its volunteers have been there within days, giving support to rail customers. I always keep a Samaritans card and I encourage all new members of staff to do the same. You never know how a suicide attempt is going to turn out."

DAVINA

Born in Tanzania, Davina moved to the UK aged seven and has lived in Hounslow and then near to Slough ever since. Now 53 years old, she is married and has three children all over the age of 18.

Davina has volunteered for Samaritans for more than four and a half years, and is deputy director of the charity's Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead branch, as well as an outreach volunteer with Network Rail.

"I also had a friend from university who was bipolar and had taken her own life, which has stayed with me throughout my life. Another friend of mine had joined the Ealing branch of Samaritans, and said that being a Samaritan could be useful to me having been through that experience.

"I decided to do the training and soon found the work very fulfilling. I liked being on the phone answering calls, but also answering emails and texts. I felt

like I was helping and did that for two years.

"I was then asked if I'd like to do some outreach work, so I had three jobs – outreach, listening volunteer and deputy director of my local branch – in addition to caring for my 85-year-old father-in-law. As an outreach volunteer I'm helping out in the community where we cover railway stations where there may have previously been a suicide on the railway.

"My outreach work can be tough but we have training to deal with it. People who witness a suicide on the railway can't always talk about it with family, friends or colleagues but talking to a Samaritan instead means they can get it off their chest.

"It's a fantastic feeling and I always feel like I'm really helping out. I love volunteering because I find it so rewarding, and I joke that my halo gets polished every time I help someone."



ALAN DURHAM

Alan is 57 years old and lives in Basingstoke. He works for Network Rail's Western Route and has volunteered for Samaritans for two and a half years.

In addition to being a 'listener', Alan is an active fundraiser, supports Samaritans engagement events and is his local branch's Network Rail coordinator.

"I have a nine to five job, which can make volunteering for Samaritans quite challenging, but NR is very supportive and offers five volunteer leave days per year which I take to support various Samaritans activities.

"My fellow Samaritans are also very supportive and helpful if I don't have time to do my shifts. Sometimes I am available at short notice to provide cover for other people, and that's when I can make up any time I may have missed.

"Working in the rail industry, suicide is unfortunately part of the job. I'd always been intrigued by Samaritans and admired its work ever since seeing adverts on the London

Underground.

"The training to become a listening volunteer was a little daunting, however, the support from other volunteers and the training team has been absolutely brilliant. I was a little apprehensive when I first started to take calls but the amazing support has made volunteering an absolute pleasure, and I consider Samaritans to be my second family.

"Obviously volunteering does have some impact on my personal life, but I am easily able to do one or two listening shifts a week as well as undertaking leader duties, or assisting with training of new volunteers.

"I have certainly become a better listener and my patience and appreciation of others' points of view has increased. This has helped me in other aspects of my life, including work and my social life.

"I would urge anybody to consider becoming a volunteer, either as a listener or a support volunteer. Being a listening volunteer may not be for everybody but it is a very rewarding and it's a deeply satisfying role."

MAUREEN ZIA

Maureen is a 28-year-old apprentice sewing machinist and began volunteering at Samaritans' Preston branch in 2016. She supports training, recruitment and prison teams while also managing the office's general ad hoc duties.

"I went through Samaritans training to be a listening volunteer, but during my mentoring phase we agreed that this wasn't the right path for me. The Preston team looked at other ways I could support the branch and suggested that I started with recruitment administration.

"I contact potential volunteers without delay and provide all the paperwork for information events. I also chase up references



and ensure things run as smoothly as possible from the day a volunteer contacts us to when all the paperwork is complete.

"I'm an integral part of Preston Samaritans and I'm taking on more and more tasks as the role evolves. I've always wanted to do charity work and I want to give something back to my local community.

"I see Samaritans as being part of a family, and I feel honoured to be part of such a distinguished organisation. I enjoy working and enjoy admin tasks, so I have fun when I volunteer. Someone benefits from my help so it's a win-win!"

> corporate volunteering. Someone calls Samaritans every six seconds, so there is increasing demand and we need volunteers from all backgrounds.

"We know that our current way of volunteering is quite demanding, so we have set about overhauling this. The MHC will be an experiment in how to attract people while providing a 'staircase' opportunity for people to get involved, and then to encourage others to come forward.

"It will allow Samaritans to make an even bigger impact in suicide prevention, as well as bringing the benefits of volunteering to many more people in new and imaginative ways. But we're hoping that everyone will be a winner because we will benefit from a new source of volunteers and the rail industry should get happier staff.

"When you give to others, it makes you feel good. People who volunteer through work are happier, healthier and likely to be more engaged with their employer – it gives coming to work an even greater purpose."

“ The partnership has been cutting edge over the last few years because of the way the rail industry has really embraced its contribution to suicide prevention.”



Ruth Sutherland, Chief Executive, Samaritans

The key attraction of MHC is that rail employees can get involved in a number of ways (see case studies) by becoming a 'listener', or by providing a number of other important functions for the charity, such as administrative support or fundraising.

To begin with, everyone is encouraged to complete two online learning courses, including an active listening course which aims to provide the knowledge and confidence to start a conversation with someone who needs to talk.

She concludes: "We are looking for diversity as well as volume so that we can keep up with demand. We offer a 24/7 service and it is often difficult to get people to work during the night, but people in rail are used to shift work and providing a constant service.

"There are lots of skills and different roles we're looking to fill and we know that lots of people will have technical skills as well as interpersonal. For everyone answering the phone someone has to raise the money to pay for the heat and light around them and to provide the technical support, so we're looking for support volunteers as well as more listeners." ■

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