Million Hour Challenge

Bringing the rail industry together to support Samaritans
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 benefit 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 skills 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

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

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

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3 Time to help save others
   Samaritans Chief Executive RUTH SUTHERLAND outlines some of the volunteering opportunities on offer from the Million Hour Challenge.
Beyond the call

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.

There was also another important factor at play 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 mental ill-health and suicide within the rail industry, and the long-standing relationship that is already in place with the charity.

There was also another important factor at play – 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 include the 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 percolate out to their supply chains.”

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

Angela Zair, MHC Project Leader, NR

Ian Prosser explains: “Lots of companies have

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 make this in a structured way, which is

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

On the next five years, we want to lock up one million hours of looking out for each other.

The Million Hour Challenge brings the rail industry together to support Samaritans

Over the past five years, we want to clock up one million hours of looking out for each other.

This will be in support of Coronavirus

This is the campaign to look after each other.

Million Hour Challenge
In 2017, more than 20,000 people volunteered their time for Samaritans.

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: millionourchallenge.com

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

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

Stevens is sympathetic to smaller companies, but reminds them that the cost of suicide to the rail industry and the lost productivity incurred by absenteeism present a much higher cost in the long run.

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.

“As 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 a 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 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 forgone 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 licence 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.”

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

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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.”

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.

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.

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The Rail Accident Investigation Branch

Million Hour Challenge

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.

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The Rail Accident Investigation Branch
It takes courage for some people to come forward, but they are now coming.

Nisa Carey, Head of Safety and Wellbeing, BTP

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 £10 million rail industry health and wellbeing programme that features mental health as one of its four core areas.

RSSB is helping members to enhance capability in areas including line manager training in response to incidents that may result in research 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.

HR 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. Darrell 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 it is helping its members 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’s 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 stressful or traumatic events. 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 confidential telephone counselling service. Online resources are also available through an employee assistance programme called BTP Assist. This is aimed at dealing with not just 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 is really important.

“But some organisations will rely on the NHS, but there is always that fear of being diagnosed with PTSD and will sign people off work when they need to be on a clinical pathway. My health, trauma and bullying recovery group is just to work. I think the TRM system and early intervention is great, and I encourage other organisations to do the same.”
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 of voluntary time and £2.5 million in donations from the rail industry by the end of 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 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 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 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

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**11 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
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 Network Rail and lives in Reigate.

Aged 54, Paul is a framework studies student and has volunteered for Samaritans since completing a MTR Crossrail. He grew up in Stoke on Trent 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.

“An outreach volunteer isn’t necessarily answering calls all the time but you get plenty of training and support. You get a lot of practice but it’s 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 will 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 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 take it in. Don’t think about why you can’t do it – 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.”

DAVINA

Born in Tanzania, Davina moved the UK aged seven and has lived in Hounslow and then near to Slough ever since. Now 53 years old, she is a single parent 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 or three 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 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 hols get 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 NK is very supportive and offers five volunteer leave days per year which I take to support various Samaritans activities.

“My fellow Samaritans are 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 my 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.

“I’ve 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.

“It 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 JIA

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 a formal interview, to support or fundraising.

“I see Samaritans as a way of working and enjoy admin tasks, so it was fun when I volunteered. Someone benefits from my help so it’s a win-win!”

The key attraction of MHC is that rail employees can be involved in a number of ways (see case studies) by becoming a ‘Listener’, or by providing a number of other important functions 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 experience as that can 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 different roles and different roles are our people will have different skills, so we are skilled as interpersonally. For example answering the phone someone has to raise the money to be paid for the heat and light around there and provide the technical support, so we’re looking for support volunteers as well as more listeners.”

RONALD delivering for 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 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

Million Hour Challenge
Don’t Keep it all bottled up.

Adrian

When life is tough, we’re here to listen

SAMARITANS
Call us free 24/7 on 116 123
samaritans.org

A registered charity