

GTR expands suicide prevention support, offering training to key partners to mark World Suicide Prevention Day 2021

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- This World Suicide Prevention Day, GTR is reminding the public that a simple question can be all it takes to stop suicidal thoughts
- The company's online training course shares vital rules to safely approach someone who appears vulnerable
- By expanding the industry-leading training to key partners, GTR is offering guidance on how to make a safe intervention on the railway
- The Southern, Thameslink and Great Northern rail operator has an internal trauma support network, made up of trained colleagues who can offer support following an incident
- GTR's Suicide Prevention Manager shares the dos and don'ts for safely approaching a vulnerable person

Today on World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD), Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) – the UK's biggest rail

franchise which operates Southern, Thameslink and **Great Northern** services – is extending its suicide prevention training to key partners to increase the number of frequent travellers able to identify vulnerable people on its network.

Supporting the WSPD message of ‘creating hope through action’, the rail operator is offering industry partners – including the Rail Pastor network, community rail partners and Members of Parliament – the chance to undertake its online training course.

The training has given GTR staff the confidence to approach potentially vulnerable people using the railway, which in turn has seen the company double the number of interventions made from 233 in 2018, to 508 in 2020. So far this year, there have been more than 160 interventions. With key partners now being offered the same training, there will be even more people equipped with skills to help people in need on the railway.

The training includes simple steps on how to intervene and help individuals to safety – because suicide can be preventable. As part of GTR’s commitment to ‘create hope through action’ for this year’s WSPD campaign, it has pledged that all employees will complete the training by the end of 2022.

Working closely with partners including Samaritans, Network Rail and the British Transport Police, GTR continually works to support people across its network and has a dedicated Suicide Prevention Manager, whose job is to prevent incidents on the railway.

Laura Campbell, GTR’s Suicide Prevention Manager, said: “This year has been incredibly tough on people’s mental health, which is why it’s so important to equip people with tools to be able to help those in need. Sometimes all it takes to break someone’s suicidal thoughts is a simple question, such as asking for directions. By educating our partners on simple steps to identify and help someone who may be vulnerable, we can work together to save lives – because one life lost is one too many.

“At GTR, all of our colleagues are trained to spot the signs and know how to step in, but this year we’re offering this free training to other businesses and partners in the rail industry. By opening up the training programme, we hope to ensure that there is always someone on the platform looking out for people in need.”

Minister for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety, Nadine Dorries, welcomes the training. She said: “Preventing suicide is possible with the right support at the right time for those experiencing a suicidal crisis. This training makes a real difference by helping staff identify vulnerable people at train stations so they can intervene when support is needed. I would encourage everyone who can to take part in suicide prevention awareness training and play a role in supporting those around you.

“And I urge anyone who is struggling to cope to reach out – there is support available for you and people who can help,” she added.

Stephen McPartland MP added: “I am proud to be raising awareness of this important issue on World Suicide Prevention Day. With the online training course now available to key partners, it means we can work alongside GTR to look out for vulnerable people on the railway – and beyond – to help save more

lives.”

One of the community partners undertaking the training are Rail Pastors, trained volunteers who patrol railway networks looking out for those who may need support. Paul Lewis is a Rail Pastor on GTR’s network. He says, “We go out three times a month at different times in the day and have so far carried out more than 200 patrols. We’re there to be a listening, caring presence and our intention is to make a difference. You don’t know what’s going through people’s minds and just having a chat can break someone’s chain of thought and potentially save their life.”

GTR is also supporting Samaritans’ latest campaign Small Talk Saves Lives, which relaunched in August, in partnership with Network Rail and British Transport Police. The awareness campaign reminds the public they already have all the experience they need to help save a life and aims to empower them to act to prevent suicide both on the railways and in other public settings.

Olivia Cayley, Head of Rail Programme at Samaritans, comments: “We’re so thankful to GTR for their support in spreading this important message and training more of their partners which could make such a difference. It’s so important we look out for one another now more than ever because suicide is preventable.

“Our latest *Small Talk Saves Lives* campaign encourages everyone to trust their instincts if they see someone who needs help and try and start a conversation. Whether that’s on a journey home from work or someone you pass in the street – a little small talk such as ‘what’s the time?’ could be all it takes to interrupt someone’s suicidal thoughts and set them on the journey to recovery. Let’s start a conversation and work together to prevent suicide.”

Laura Campbell, GTR’s Suicide Prevention Manager, shares the vital Dos and Don’ts to follow when approaching a vulnerable person:

DO

- Phone 999 immediately if you are very concerned about someone’s behaviour at a station
- Let a member of staff or fellow passenger know if you are going to approach the individual
- Approach carefully and slowly, from the side if possible
- Try to start a conversation – whatever comes naturally, it could be as simple as: “I see you are a bit upset, my name’s John, where are you trying to get to today?”
- Try to move them to a safe place and find somewhere quiet to talk: You could use, “it’s a bit noisy here” or “would you like some tea?”
- Ask open questions: these are helpful as they encourage people to talk through their problems instead of saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’
- Ask how they feel: Being invited to say how they’re feeling could be a big relief – and you may find out more about what they’re really worried about

DON’T

- Put yourself between the person and the tracks
- Go on the tracks under any circumstances
- Give advice
- If the individual doesn't want help, try not to put any pressure on them. Stay nearby and do not leave them on their own.

GTR's extension of network support follows last year's '[Affirmation Art' campaign](#), which saw clusters of positive affirmations emblazoned across some of its busiest stations to raise awareness of the company's ongoing focus on reducing suicide on the railway.

Since the start of the pandemic, according to a report by mind, 'more than half of adults (50%) and over two thirds of young people have said their mental health got worse during lockdown...many without previous experience of mental health problems...have seen their mental health and wellbeing decline'

- https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/5929/the-mental-health-emergency_a4_final.pdf

• Some 1,603 suicides occurred between April and July 2020, around three-quarters of which were male. This is down 18% from the same period in 2019 and 12.7% below the average for the previous five years, according to analysis of provisional data by the Office for National Statistics ([ONS](#))

Photo credit: Govia Thameslink Railway