

'O Come All Ye Rail-Ful – industry supports 'Be A Samaritans Christmas Star' campaign

December 1, 2021



The rail industry is supporting Samaritans with its latest Christmas campaign to ensure volunteers are on-hand to provide emotional support throughout the festive season, which can be a particularly difficult time. This Christmas, Samaritans volunteers will respond to more than 250,000 calls for help.

As the nation prepares to travel to spend time with loved ones this festive season, new figures from Samaritans reveal that caller concerns about family have risen for the fifth year in a row.

So far throughout 2021* family worries have made up 34% of emotional support contacts with the charity across the UK and Republic of Ireland – a 26% increase (7 percentage points) over the past five years.** Mental health/illness remains the top overall concern at 46%, with isolation and loneliness ranking third at 28%, and relationship problems at 24%.

As part of the rail industry's suicide prevention programme and Network Rail partnership with the charity, rail companies and staff are being encouraged to nominate and celebrate their own Christmas stars – from those who have saved lives on the railway to those who have raised vital funds for the charity this year. Train operators are also encouraged to promote the campaign across social media and station screens

over the festive month.

One rail industry worker who can call themselves a Samaritans Christmas Star is Bessie, a heavy haul shunt driver for Freightliner. Bessie was the charity's top fundraiser for Samarathon in July this year, walking over 106 miles and raising £5,864 to help Samaritans be there for anyone struggling to cope.

Bessie said: "For every person that sponsored me I wrote their name on a piece of rail ballast and put it in a backpack which I carried everywhere with me. I had 121 pieces and it weighed over 7lbs. I thought it would be a nice message to show how I'll always be there to pick them up and carry them, just as Samaritans does.

"In the rail industry, we can also help Samaritans by looking out for passengers and each other. Christmas time can be a very busy and hard time for some people. I always try to be extra vigilant and talk to people that might need help. But I think we should remember to take time for ourselves too. There's always a pressure to think of others and get everyone the best presents – but we can make a difference in small ways like supporting small businesses or donating to charity."

Bessie is encouraging rail staff to 'Be A Samaritans Christmas Star' this season by making a donation or helping Samaritans volunteers be there for others by fundraising for the charity like her. By donating as little as £5, it will help Samaritans keep its helpline running 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Julie Bentley, Samaritans' CEO, said: "Whilst many look forward to the Christmas period, at Samaritans we know this time of year can actually be a huge challenge for some people. Our amazing volunteers will, as they do every hour of every day, be giving their time this Christmas to anyone who needs support. I think that is a pretty special gift to give. I'm so proud of the work Samaritans does, and I know what a huge difference the service makes to people's lives. So, for anyone who is struggling this Christmas time, Samaritans is here for them, for free, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year."

Louise McNally, Suicide and Trespass Prevention Lead, Network Rail said: "With Christmas just around the corner, it's more important than ever that we continue to look out for each other and ourselves. For anyone going through a tough time, Samaritans and its team of volunteers are on-hand to provide round the clock support through the festive season and beyond."

For more information on how your company can get involved in Samaritans festive campaign, email railcompanies@samaritans.org. To help Samaritans listening volunteers be there for people in their darkest times, visit [Samaritans.org/donate-christmas](https://www.samaritans.org/donate-christmas).

* Figures to November 2021, all figures in the release are taken from Samaritans eLog data, which is collected anonymously

** up from 27% in 2017

Photo credit: Samaritans