

PE1651/L

Samaritans submission of 4 August 2017

Samaritans in Scotland notes the reference to our service during the meeting of the Public Petitions Committee on 29 June 2017 and the committee's request for our views.

Samaritans is the leading suicide prevention charity in the UK and ROI. There are 19 Samaritans branches across Scotland, from Stornoway to Selkirk. As well as responding to calls, emails, text and letters, the volunteers in our branches talk to people face to face. They also offer emotional support everywhere from schools, workplaces, communities, festivals and events to prisons, hospitals, courts, custody suites, homeless shelters and food banks. This is as well as supporting the public, emergency services and others in communities facing serious trauma.

As such, we responded to more than 5.7 million calls for help in 2016. This is an increase of nearly 300,000 on the previous year and over 300,000 of those were answered in Scotland. Despite this increase, our service remains available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year through the extraordinary commitment of our volunteers.

The issues that those who contact us raise are wide-ranging. Some of the main concerns people express during their contact with us are mental illness, loneliness, physical health and family or relationship problems. Given the confidential and anonymous nature of our calls we cannot definitively state whether an individual is struggling with drug dependency, or any other particular health concern, unless they disclose this. Even then, this may well not be recorded as we don't 'case manage' our contacts with individuals. Given the many millions of times we are contacted, there is no one issue or factor that has contributed to the increase in demand.

Whatever the subject, no matter what the person is going through, Samaritans volunteers continue to be there for anyone who needs us.