

Calls to Samaritans are now free

- ✘ Calls to Samaritans, the UK's leading suicide reduction charity, are now free of charge.

The new free-to-call number **116123** will enable more people who may be struggling to cope to access the vital service, which provides round the clock support, every single day of the year.

Commenting on the launch of the new free number, Ruth Sutherland, Samaritans' CEO, said: "It has long been an aspiration for Samaritans to make our helpline number free to callers, so this is a really positive step in improving access to our life-saving support. We know that call charges can be a barrier to accessing our service, potentially preventing some people from contacting Samaritans when they need us most."

People in the lowest social economic groups, living in the most deprived areas, are ten times more likely to die by suicide than those from more affluent areas, so the financial implications of accessing help can be significant.

Although Samaritans does not charge for its support services, which are run by the charity's 21,000 dedicated volunteers across the country, until now people contacting its helpline have had to pay for the cost of the call.

The change is thanks to support from the Big Lottery Fund and Vodafone, and the co-operation of the major telecommunications companies.

Peter Ainsworth, Big Lottery Fund UK Chair, said: "We are delighted to have helped bring about this important development, which will make Samaritans' service available to all. This is a great example of what partnership working can

achieve by ensuring this hugely valuable charity's helpline will be free of charge to all callers."

Last year Samaritans' 21,000 volunteers responded to 5.3 million calls for help, by phone, email, text and face to face.

Ruth Sutherland added: "Everyone has moments in their life where they struggle to cope and for some this can lead to feeling hopeless and losing sight of being able to work through their problems. We know that talking can really help people to see a way through and we would encourage anyone who is struggling to call Samaritans. We are here round the clock, every single day of the year, to listen and offer confidential support when things are getting to you."

Samaritans' new free helpline number is 116 123. Calls to this helpline number do not appear on phone bills.

You can also contact the local branch in Edinburgh at 25 Torphichen Street EH3 8HX T 0131 221 9999 or by calling at the door between 9:00am – 10:00pm.