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Samaritans Southcoast Earns Three-Year Accreditation from International Council for Helplines

988 Hotline serves Bristol and Norfolk Counties

Westport, MA - March 19, 2025—Samaritans Southcoast is proud to announce that it has been awarded a three-year accreditation from the International Council for Helplines (ICH). This accreditation recognizes the organization's excellence in crisis helpline operations and affirms its commitment to providing high-quality suicide prevention services to individuals in need throughout Massachusetts.

The ICH accreditation process evaluates organizations across key areas, including Governance and Leadership, Fiscal and Administrative Management, Training, Program Supervision, and Suicide Prevention and Intervention. To achieve accreditation, organizations must demonstrate compliance with ICH's rigorous standards. Accreditation reflects Samaritans Southcoast's adherence to best crisis response and organizational management practices.

The evaluation process included a comprehensive review of Samaritans Southcoast's documentation and in-depth interviews with staff, volunteers, and stakeholders. The accreditation examiners assessed the organization's ability to effectively manage crisis helpline operations and provide critical support to individuals experiencing distress.

Accrediting emotional support helpline programs is a key component of ICH's mission. Organizations that complete the accreditation process assure their community, funders, and those they serve that they uphold high-quality services, best practices, and ethical standards. Upon joining ICH, organizations undergo an initial accreditation evaluation and site visit, with subsequent site visits occurring every three to five years. ICH staff work collaboratively with helpline programs to assist with the process and ensure compliance with best practices.

Founded in 1983, Samaritans Southcoast is dedicated to reducing and preventing suicide, raising awareness about suicide prevention, eliminating stigma, and supporting those affected by suicide loss. The organization is one of five 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline centers answering calls in Massachusetts. It primarily serves Bristol and Norfolk Counties while providing backup support for Barnstable, Dukes, Nantucket, Plymouth, and Worcester Counties.

In the past year, Samaritans Southcoast has responded to more than 39,000 calls and maintained an answer rate of 91%. Our services are free to anyone of any age in need of a caring, compassionate, non-judgmental, and confidential crisis counselor, specially trained to listen 90% of the time and talk

10%, safety plan for callers with suicide ideation, provide callbacks to callers as part of safety plans, provide warm handoff transfers to Mobile Crisis Intervention (MCI) and the Behavioral Health Helpline (BHHL), and intervene in suicidal crisis. In the past year, an emergency crisis intervention, in which staff calls rescue for a caller at imminent risk of suicide, occurred for 20 callers. 98% of callers' needs are met through the supportive encounter of the phone call, warm handoffs to MCI, or transfers to the BHHL or Substance Use Helpline. Our crisis counselors field inbound calls from the BHHL, 988 subnetworks, and centers out of state. Crisis counselors conduct follow-up calls for callers who received a warm transfer to MCI and the BHHL and for callers who collaborate with our crisis counselors on a plan to keep themselves safe outside of the time spent on the hotline.

Over the years, Samaritans Southcoast has grown significantly. Once a small center with between 20 - 40 volunteers operating 15 hours a day and answering 14,000 calls annually, the organization now operates 24/7 with a team of 77 paid employees, interns, and volunteers, answering more than 38,000 calls in 2024. Beyond crisis helpline services, Samaritans Southcoast also provides Kare Calls to seniors to alleviate loneliness and hosts Safe Place, a twice-monthly support group for individuals who have lost a loved one to suicide.

"This accreditation reflects the hard work and dedication of our entire team, including our crisis counselors, supervisors, volunteers, and community partners," said Darcy H. Lee, Executive Director of Samaritans Southcoast. "We are committed to providing compassionate, lifesaving support to those in crisis, and this recognition from the International Council for Helplines affirms that we are meeting the highest standards of excellence."

Board President Jocelyn Oliveira also shared her thoughts on this significant achievement:

"Receiving this accreditation underscores the dedication and expertise of Samaritans Southcoast in providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services," said Oliveira, President of the Board of Directors. "This recognition reassures our community and partners that we deliver the highest quality emotional support and crisis response to those who need it most."

ICH, formerly CONTACT USA, has led helpline accreditation for over 50 years and is the only membership organization dedicated to establishing best practice standards for emotional support helplines. The ICH Accreditation Examiners are leaders in their respective fields and use a collaborative approach to guide organizations through the accreditation process, ensuring adherence to industry-leading standards.

For more information about Samaritans Southcoast and its services, visit www.samaritanssoco.org or call the 24/7 helpline at 988.

About Samaritans Southcoast

Samaritans Southcoast is a nonprofit organization dedicated to suicide prevention and crisis support. Through its 24/7 988 helpline, Kare Calls for seniors, and Safe Place support groups for suicide loss survivors, Samaritans Southcoast provides compassionate care to individuals facing emotional distress. As a designated 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline center, the organization is vital in supporting communities throughout Massachusetts.

For more information about **Samaritans Southcoast**, visit [Crisis Hotline | Home | Samaritans Southcoast \(samaritanssoco.org\)](http://www.samaritanssoco.org).

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offers 24/7 judgment-free support for mental health, substance use, and more. Text, call, or chat 988.

Our Mission

The mission of Samaritans Southcoast is to reduce and prevent future suicides from occurring, to bring attention to the causes of suicide, to eliminate the stigma of suicide, and to support the survivors of suicide victims.

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