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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Alternative for 24-hour emotional phone support in Perth now available**

Western Australia's oldest emotional telephone support service has linked across time-zones with Tasmania and New Zealand to enhance its 24-hour coverage.

Perth, Wellington and Launceston have all been operating for around 50 years independently, and have now been united and share each other's calls.

Samaritans differs from other similar service providers so far as its frontline support service is provided entirely by highly trained volunteers, not by employees.

Its focus is on the provision of volunteer-based, confidential, non-religious, and non-judgemental phone support, to those in crisis or need of emotional support.

General Manager, Sarah Hartnup says that a meeting between the directors at a Samaritans conference in the UK during 2010 started the conversation about the benefits of an integrated approach where locations would still focus on providing their region with telephone support service, but then leverage time zone differences to provide back-up for other regions.

"We discovered that we all struggle with the identical biggest problem, and that is providing a 24/7 service dependent on volunteers," Ms Hartnup said.

"Over the last 18 months we started to work specifically on "Project Unite", and I am delighted to announce we are now sharing calls across the three different locations in different time zones; we are effectively providing 24-hour coverage with very little down-time," she said.

Ms Hartnup says that being volunteer-based and allowing the caller to remain anonymous means they offer a point of difference to other services, and that some of their callers often used a mixture of different support services as they require.

She says that their highest priority will always remain ensuring that service users receive the same caring responses wherever their call is picked up.

Samaritans (Perth) presently takes just over 2,000 calls per month; they have around 100 volunteers, as does Wellington, with Launceston having around 35.

They are based in Subiaco and have ongoing requirements for volunteers.

If you or someone you know is in crisis or needs to talk, call 135247.

## **ENDS**

For further information, interviews or photo shoot:

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