



# UL ENGAGE

## Community Briefing

2017 No. 6

### Rethinking The Samaritans

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Jaxon Sommers



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK  
OLLSCOIL LUMNIGH

**UL Engage**

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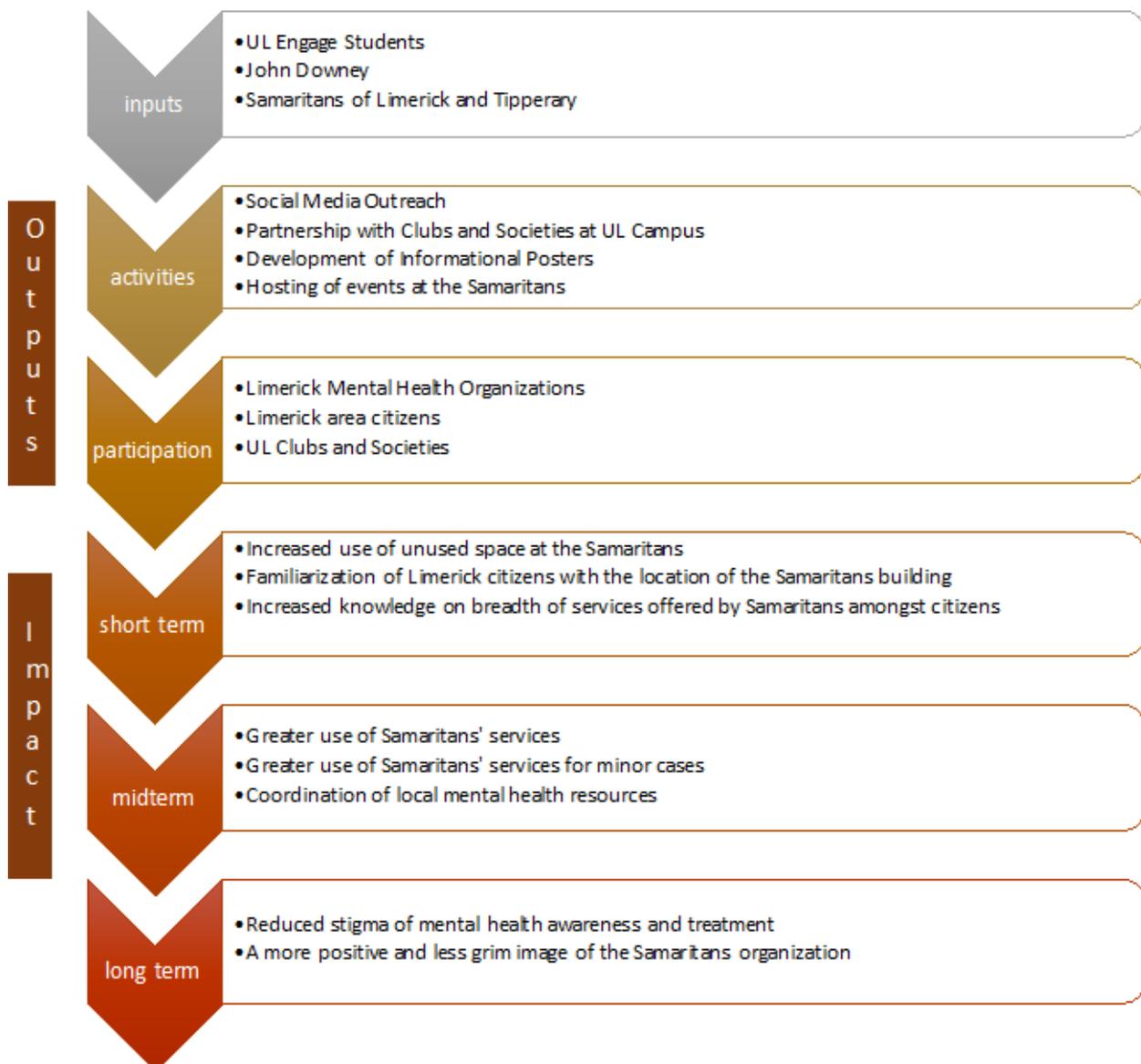
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Promoting University Community Collaboration



# THE BRIEF

Our assignment was to work with the Limerick Samaritans to “explore the use of the venue to raise awareness of the organization and offer an entertaining venue for people to meet”. What John Downey, the director of the Limerick/Tipperary branch of the Samaritans, wanted from us was to try and utilize the room they had to change the public perception and stigma that surrounds the organization. To do this, we scheduled four events at the Samaritans during the month of March: a movie night, a paint party, a cookie exchange, and a speaker night. Not only were these events that could draw people into the space, they did not focus on the negative stereotypes that the community associates with the group; this allowed members of the Limerick community to come into the space with an open mind.



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This model represents how our group planned to accomplish the tasks set out for us in the Spring Practicum. By partnering with John Downey of the Samaritans of Limerick and Tipperary, we aimed to help him make better use of their facility's unused space, to increase the public's familiarity with the location of the organization, as well as to increase their knowledge and understanding of the services offered. To accomplish these goals we would engage in community outreach through various outlets. These included social media, informational posters, hosting events and partnering with UL clubs and societies. We aimed to engage not only with members of the Limerick community but also with other Limerick based mental health organizations and UL clubs and societies.

Looking in to the future, we believed that accomplishing the aforementioned short term goals would lead to greater awareness and understanding of the Samaritans' purpose and thus to an

increased use of the their services. Moreover, we believed that it could lead to increased coordination with other mental health organizations in the community that would generally improve mental health supports in Limerick. Eventually, we intended for our efforts to decrease the stigma surrounding mental health problems, as well as to improve the community's perception of the Samaritans.

# COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The Samaritans is a non-profit organization that was started in 1953 in order to prevent suicide in Ireland. Today, the organization has over 200 branches in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Over 20,000 volunteers help the people of Ireland overcome mental illness by being available to talk over the phone 24 hours per day or in person during the day. Our team was assigned to the Limerick City Samaritans project to research public perception of the Samaritans and mental health. Most of the public views the Samaritans as a last resort resource only for people that are clinically suicidal, when actually only approximately one in six calls taken by a Samaritans volunteer is related to suicide. There are 150 volunteers at the Limerick center helping those with mental health issues every day. Two new programs that have started in Limerick are the Prison Outreach and Peer Outreach programs at the University of Limerick.



John Downey is the Director of the Limerick & Tipperary branch of the Samaritans organization. Although he began working for the Samaritans in Limerick in 2010, he has not always been the director: “While initially starting as a listening volunteer, I later became involved in larger tasks such as the training and mentoring of new volunteers and fundraising for the organization. Then in May of 2015, I became the branch Director.” His day-to-day role as Director involves: overseeing all aspects of volunteer and caller support in order to “enable its work with suicidal people, or those in crisis, to be carried out effectively”. What John is focusing on now, is how the organization can change its public perception, which is where the UL Engage project came in handy. John is happy to be working with the Samaritans, especially in Limerick city, as that is where he is originally from.

## John on UL Engage:

“Samaritans were delighted to become engaged with UL Engage because it offers the chance to put into practice projects that we would love to do, but because of the logistics involved and voluntary nature of the organization can be difficult or too time consuming to achieve. It has also granted us the opportunity to work with a highly educated, diverse and motivated group of students.”

# STUDENTS



## **Gabriella Haire-University of Minnesota**

Gaby is a sophomore honors student at the University of Minnesota studying computer science with an emphasis in computational biology. She has experience starting a non-profit from scratch and expanding its programming as it found success. In addition, she has a passion for studying public health and innovating ways to give all populations a broader access to healthcare. In her free time, she enjoys baking, running, and Nordic skiing.



## **Jaxon Sommers – University of Minnesota**

My name is Jaxon Sommers and I am from the Minneapolis area and am a second year student from the University of Minnesota. I am pre-dental and my major is Biomedical Engineering. I chose to study at the University of Limerick this semester because it fit well with my major, it is a relatively affordable option, and it is an incredible opportunity to study and travel in Europe. In Ireland I have enjoyed the beautiful scenery, the welcoming people, and the opportunity to grow. Mental health is an important issue to me so I was excited to be paired with the Samaritans project in Limerick city.



## **Grace Bocking– McMaster University**

Grace is an exchange student from Toronto, Canada. She is currently in her fourth year at McMaster University where she is completing her Honors B.A. in Sociology. After graduation, she hopes to continue her education by pursuing a Masters degree.



## **Matt Moran– Southern Connecticut State University**

Matt is from the small town of Seymour, Connecticut. He is currently enrolled at Southern Connecticut State University where he is working on his Bachelor's degree in English. After college (and graduate school), his plan is to teach English at the high school level. He has wanted to be a teacher for most of his life, other than the six months in sixth grade that he thought he should be a chef, and he is ecstatic to be so close to that goal. Eventually he wants to oversee a school district as superintendent, but wants to work his way up to that title. In the meantime, he spends weekends at his part time job as a receptionist for a nursing home/ rehabilitation center, which allows him to save money for the future (and study abroad of course). In whatever free time he has left, he likes to bake, write, and spend time with his friends. He is so happy to have had the chance to study abroad in Limerick this semester, he has made some lifelong friends, and learned a lot about himself.

# PROJECT OUTCOMES

Our project was a great starting point for what John Downey wants the Samaritans to do going forward, which means that it is difficult to truly see an outcome of our work. What our events did do was prove to John that their space can be used for a wide variety of events if they are willing to organize them. Not only did the events prove that events can work in the space, they demonstrated the types of events that will do well in their space. We are calling all our events successful because each event brought people into the space and allowed us to have the conversation about the Samaritans that John feels is missing from the public: that the Samaritans is open for everyone, not just people who are feeling suicidal. At the same time, our work showed that some events (such as a paint party or movie night) have the potential to draw more people in, while other events (such as the cookie exchange) will produce a smaller crowd. Going forward, John now has the tools and information to host successful events in their space.



## Going Forward

The following recommendations have the potential to increase the impact of current mental health services and promote the highest level of mental well being in Ireland.

- Increase the outreach of current services in rural areas
- Increase collaboration amongst current organizations to streamline access to resources for those in mental distress
- Increase programming related to promoting overall mental wellness
- Increase programming that targets intervention in the earlier stages of mental illness rather than waiting until people are on the verge of self-harm

## More Information

For a more detailed analysis please refer to “Attitudes and Services for Mental Health in Ireland: The Current State and What to do About It”

### Green Ribbon

<http://www.greenribbon.ie/>

### Limerick Mental Health Association

087 2485742  
[info@limerickmentalhealth.ie](mailto:info@limerickmentalhealth.ie)  
<http://limerickmentalhealth.ie/>

### Cura

021 4277544  
[curacares@cura.ie](mailto:curacares@cura.ie)  
<http://www.cura.ie/locations/limerick>

### GROW

061 318813  
[midwesternregion@grow.ie](mailto:midwesternregion@grow.ie)  
<http://grow.ie/contact/mid-western/>

# Mental Health Resources and Attitudes



## LIMERICK, IRELAND

Gabriella Haire and Jaxon Sommers

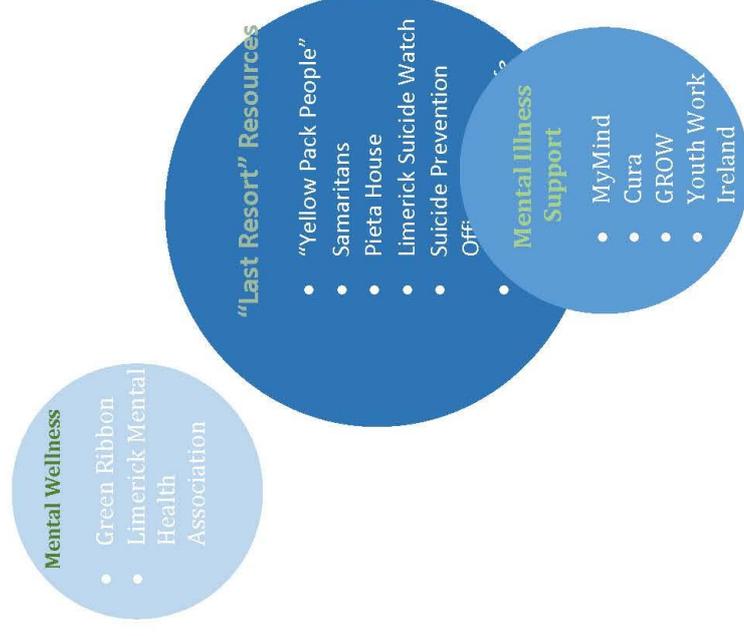
## Quick Facts

- National suicide rates in Ireland are constant at 10-12 per 100,000 people
- middle-aged men are most likely to die by suicide
- suicide rates in Irish cities have decreased while those in rural areas have increased
- Irish mental health resources are concentrated in urban areas
- Irish mental health resources are focused on late stage intervention with attention to suicide prevention

## Current Issues

- Mental health resources in Ireland are not readily accessible to people in rural areas
- There is still a large stigma in Ireland surrounding mental health
- Ireland's mental health resources are concentrated on late intervention, but people could benefit from help sooner

## Local Mental Health Resources



# Rethinking The Samaritans

Gabriella Haire | Grace Bocking | Matt Moran | Jaxon Sommers

UL Engage Practicum | Spring 2017

**Task:** Our assignment was to work with the Limerick Samaritans to "explore the use of the venue to raise awareness of the organization and offer an entertaining venue for people to meet". What John Downey, the director of the Limerick/Tipperary branch of the Samaritans, wanted from us was to try and utilize the room they had to change the public perception and stigma that surrounds the organization. To do this, we scheduled four events at the Samaritans during the month of March: a movie night, a paint party, a cookie exchange, and a speaker night. Not only were these events that could draw people into the space, they did not focus on the negative stereotypes that the community associates with the group; this allowed members of the Limerick community to come into the space with an open mind.



## Movie Night

### Preparation

- Contacted local movie club to get tips and tricks for hosting a movie
- Developed advertising materials
- Distributed advertising via Meetup.com and The Samaritans' Facebook
- Emailed University of Limerick students the information

### Execution

- Set up the space to cater to movie viewing
- Distributed Samaritans' promotional items throughout the space
- Provided snacks and drinks
- Played a free domain movie

### Outcome

- 8 people attended the event
- Attendees were all informed through Meetup.com
- Despite over 50 shares on Facebook, this method of advertising did not produce any attendees
- Learned that it would be best to facilitate a casual pre and post viewing environment by playing music and setting out refreshments

## Mental Health Speakers

### Preparation

- Suggested by community partner John Downey
- John downey provided a list of several local mental health speakers
- Potential speakers were invited, and three were ultimately scheduled to present
- Local mental health stakeholders were invited
- Event was advertised on Samaritans' Facebook

### Execution

- Set up the space to cater to speaker presentations
- Provided tea and cookies
- Facilitated the three speakers presentations as well as Q & A sessions after each speech

### Outcome

- Approximately 20 people attended the event
- Attendees were informed through direct contact
- While the talks were not focused on the broader goal of mental wellness, they provided a space to discuss more mild mental health issues and coping mechanisms
- Discovered a large community interest in these topics

## Cookie Swap

### Preparation

- Developed Advertising for the event
- Distributed advertising via various Limerick Facebook pages and Meetup.com
- Informed University of Limerick Students through email

### Execution

- Prepared 10 dozen various baked goods to ensure a positive experience for attendees even if the turnout was low
- Arranged the space to allow for casual group conversations
- Opened the doors and allowed people to come and mingle for about an hour while exchanging treats

### Outcome

- Low attendance at 4 people
- We are hesitant to dwell on this number due to the bus strike and low taxi availability due to student race day
- Playing music at the event may have made the space more inviting
- We realized more aggressive advertising may be necessary to engage people in these events

## Paint Party

### Preparation

- Selected a paint tutorial
- Developed advertising materials
- Created a google form to get RSVP's and ensure proper quantity of supplies
- Advertised on Facebook and Meetup.com
- Emailed University of Limerick students event information
- Prepared necessary supply lists

### Execution

- This event was cancelled the day prior due to a specific paint being unavailable at the art store
- All individuals who had responded with positive RSVP's were notified of the events cancellation

### Outcome

- Event was very well received with 20 positive RSVP's
- The event will be hosted at a later date as it had such a positive response
- May consider closing the RSVP sooner to ensure that there is enough time to retrieve the necessary supplies

## Outcomes

Nearly 50 people entered the Samaritans and became familiar with the space. The Samaritans facility was used for a broader. We learned that additional advertising or at least more clever forms of it are necessary to engage people in the event. People were especially eager to attend a novel event such as the paint party.

## Recommendations

Continue outreach to the community (events, offering the space to be used by other groups and organizations) to increase familiarity with the Samaritans and decrease stigma. Develop advertising that is more positive in nature to challenge negative stigmas and beliefs about the organization.

Set up more social media accounts

- Twitter and Instagram could broaden the Samaritans' outreach towards younger people.
- Could be useful platforms for shifting public opinion and advertising events.

- Continue advertising events on Meetup.com since most attendees were informed on this site.
- Collaborate with similar organisations in order to develop strategies to decrease stigma surrounding mental health which prevent individuals from making use of their resources.

# Mental Health in Ireland and What to do About It

Gabriella Haire | Jaxon Sommers

## Facts & Figures

- national suicide rates in Ireland are constant at 10-12 per 100,000 people
- middle-aged men are most likely to die by suicide
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### Mental Wellness

- Green Ribbon
- Limerick Mental Health Association

### "Last Resort" Resources

- "Yellow Pack People"
  - Samaritans
  - Pieta House
- Limerick Suicide Watch
- Suicide Prevention Office
- Connecting For Life

### Mental Illness Support

- MyMind
- Cura
- GROW
- Youth Work Ireland

## Going Forward

The following recommendations have the potential to increase the impact of current mental health services and promote the highest level of mental well being in Ireland.

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