



MEET *Hanu*

One volunteer's experience on Samaritans' 24-hour crisis hotline, discovering what it truly means to connect.

Q. What brought you to Samaritans?

A. When I moved to New York City I was looking for ways to give back and initially thought about volunteering at a soup kitchen. But I realized I had more time to offer and wanted to be part of something with a bigger commitment. When I saw Samaritans, it felt like the perfect fit—the training, and the idea of learning to communicate with people in crisis really intrigued me.

What was the biggest difference between your expectations and the reality of volunteering?

A. I knew that it would be challenging and rewarding from what I'd heard, and in many ways, that was true. What surprised me was how much being a hotline volunteer pushed me to change and grow. It challenged my biases and opened my mind to the vast complexity of each person's struggles.

I Initially, I thought I'd just be touching on mental health topics, but the depth of the conversations goes beyond that. It's about sitting with people in their pain, allowing them to talk openly without judgment.

Q: How has being a hotline volunteer impacted you beyond the work itself?

A: It's wild to think about it now, but I used to only want to text. The thought of calling anyone other than my parents would send me into an anxiety attack.

But volunteering has really changed that. Now, I actually prefer just picking up the phone and talking to people. It's like this new skill I've learned—to just pick up and chat without overthinking it.

The hotline taught me so much about communication and connecting with people beyond words, and that's had a huge impact on me.

Q: How do you decompress after a shift?

A: I usually head to a Pilates class or some other workout to clear my head. It's a way to let go and shift focus. On the hotline, we're trained to step back from ourselves and focus entirely on the caller, setting our own feelings aside. Debriefing is built into every shift, so there's always support if something sticks with us, but after a shift, it's almost like I do the opposite—I step back into myself and return to my own life.

Q: If you had a superpower what would it be and why?

I'd love to have the power of teleportation! I really enjoy traveling and experiencing different cultures, so how amazing would it be to have lunch in Paris and dinner in Bangkok without the hassle of airport lines and everything else?

But it's more than that—travel has shown me how connection goes beyond language. It's about finding common ground, whether through a shared interest, a smile, or simply being present with someone.

Even if we don't speak the same language, there are so many other ways to understand each other. It's those moments of connection, often without words, that make travel so meaningful to me.

Q. What's something people would be surprised to learn about you?

People might be surprised to know that I'm really into oil painting. I started in art classes back in India, and when I moved to the U.S., painting helped me adjust to all the changes. My apartment is full of my work—mostly still lifes and landscapes.

What I enjoy most is the process. With oil paint, you have to wait for each layer to dry, so you keep coming back to it. There's no pressure to make it "perfect"—you just see where it goes.

It's similar to what we do on the hotline. It's about being there, not trying to say the right thing or fix someone's problem, but just being present with someone else. The process itself is what truly matters.



ABOUT HANU

Born in India, Hanu moved with her family to the U.S. when she was in high school, navigating the challenges of a new culture and school environment. She found comfort in math, a constant across both countries, which helped her build connections in unfamiliar surroundings. Later, she studied math and economics in college.

Today, Hanu lives and works in New York City. She has been a Samaritans volunteer for 7 years and continues to explore her love for connection and expression through oil painting.