

Changing the narrative

This report explores how The Listening Place's strong network of over 160 referral partners has helped the charity redefine suicide prevention in London.



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Foreword

In June 2016, The Listening Place received its first referral, from Kings College Hospital in Camberwell. Before the end of that year, we had received our 100th referral and started building strong relationships with a range of referral partners, including other charities as well as NHS trusts and local GPs. In January 2018, we hit our 1,000th referral and began delivering appointments seven days a week.

At the time of writing, we now receive on average over 900 referrals a month. We have built a large network of over 160 referral partners and around 900 dedicated volunteers, and we operate 12 hours a day, 363 days of the year from four sites across London.

By any metric, we have grown rapidly. It is undeniable that over the past decade or so, social, economic, political and environmental factors have put pressure on the country's mental health, and that suicide rates across the UK have climbed. But we also believe that the increase in demand for our service is a testament to its success and to the fact that our partners trust us to provide swift, reliable and effective support for the people they refer.

We have always been careful to grow sustainably. Our ability to reach out to everyone who is referred to us within 24 hours, and to offer them a first appointment within a week, is a cornerstone of our model of support, and a real point of difference in what one of our partners describes as "a world of waiting lists". Selectively recruiting the right kind of volunteers is also hugely important to us, and we are immensely grateful to all the compassionate and resilient people who have gone through our training and give at least four hours a fortnight to support people with suicidal thoughts.

This report draws on the voices and experiences of eight of our referral partners in order to show how The Listening Place works alongside them and within the wider community to support people who feel like life is no longer worth living. We are very grateful to our partner, H/Advisors, for independently conducting the interviews and helping us put this report together.

Lucy Patterson, Head of Visitor Support
The Listening Place



Bridging the gap

The narrative: “Long waiting lists are inevitable for people with suicidal thoughts.”

The Listening Place difference: We reach out to every referral within 24 hours and offer a first appointment within a week.

People seeking support for suicidal feelings in the UK today regularly face long waiting lists, inappropriate support and the risk of ultimately ‘falling through the cracks’ of an overwhelmed health system. There is an urgent need for timely services that can intervene before individuals reach crisis point, or hold them through a suicidal crisis while they wait for longer term support. Our referral partners often describe their difficulties with accessing support from other services.

“A lot of people want access to counselling support but face waiting times of up to two years in certain areas of London, and some services are just closed in general. So they have to go on a further waiting list, which means it can be years before people access the support they need.”

– **Zoë Cross, Navigator at London Survivors Gateway/WGN**

“TLP do invaluable work for us, given the amount of people they see and support...who the NHS wouldn't necessarily be able to see and support.”

– **Margherita Sweetlove, Public Health Specialist at Lambeth Council**

Many of them praise The Listening Place for the fact that they know every referral will be responded to swiftly and appropriately. This is particularly reassuring when they are referring people at high or imminent risk of suicide, or those who have already waited a long time for mental health support or treatment.

"From my experience and my colleagues' experience, it's happening very, very quickly — I don't know how you do it."

– **Anca Alba, Associate Director for Counselling and Mental Health Support at King's College London**

"It's great being able to tell people with confidence: if I refer you today, somebody is going to give you a call tomorrow."

Matthew Brown, Team Manager at South West London Recovery Café

At The Listening Place, we are absolutely committed to reaching those in need as quickly and efficiently as possible. Our staff team are highly trained, so that every first phone call is a professional, compassionate introduction to our service. We offer around 4,500 appointments a month across London and we're open from 9am to 9pm every day of the week, ensuring that everyone who needs us can find an appointment that works with their schedule.

We usually offer a first block of six fortnightly appointments (i.e. three months of regular support), after which support is reviewed in a collaborative session between the suicidal person, their listening volunteer and the supervising volunteer. At that point, many people feel ready to leave The Listening Place; some move on to other services, others feel that they no longer require extra support. People who still feel actively suicidal are offered further appointments.

As we've expanded over the past nine years, we have always worked to balance growing demand with available support and to ensure that our pathway remains accessible. Our swift response times are one of the keystones of our model of support.



Face-to-face support for all

The narrative: “Only people who can afford to go private can access in-person support quickly.”

The Listening Place difference: All appointments are face-to-face and completely free.

There is a good provision of nationwide telephone and text support for those who feel suicidal in the UK, offered by charities like Samaritans, CALM and Shout. However, accessing in-person support is much more difficult, and we know that the fact our service is delivered face to face is particularly appreciated by both our visitors and our referral partners.

“Personally, I think The Listening Place's impact lies in being face to face. It's more of a personal service. You can actually go in and be yourself, and there's no one judging you... I just feel like when you're face to face, it brings a stronger bond, and you actually open up a bit more, rather than talking to someone you can't see, when you feel a bit more on edge.”

– **Jack Baker, Vulnerability Coordinator at British Transport Police**

“There is something really powerful about the connection that TLP's in-person sessions create for people experiencing suicidal thoughts.”

– **Iain Boyd, Manager of the Student Mental Health Advice Team at Imperial College**

We believe strongly in the therapeutic impact of providing a physical space where our visitors know they can come regularly and meet with the same volunteer each time. This helps build the rapport and trust our visitors need to fully engage with the service and get the most out of it. Even those visitors who struggle psychologically with leaving the house or making the journey often tell us how glad they were that they made it to their appointment; small achievements like this can improve self-worth.

As a charity working in an expensive city where space is at a premium, we find that many of our visitors live in overcrowded accommodation where it would be difficult to have a private conversation, making it even more important to offer a safe, welcoming and consistent environment where someone can work through their thoughts and feelings without interruption.

"It has been the one consistently positive appointment that has literally (in some instances) got me out of the house. I have always left feeling that I have got a life worth living."

– **A visitor to The Listening Place, April 2026**

"The Listening Place is a relaxing and calm environment where I can gather my thoughts and express myself. I like the quiet and the greenery. The staff are kind and considerate. The birdsong helps me clear my head before I go in for a session if I'm feeling worried."

– **A visitor to The Listening Place, June 2026**

"From the moment I stepped into The Listening Place, it was quiet. This is what I wanted. The location is hidden and this made it feel like a safe place. I will remember the small details, e.g. the magazines at the reception and the colour of the rooms."

– **A visitor to The Listening Place, July 2026**



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The non-clinical approach

The narrative: “People with suicidal thoughts need medication and clinical treatment.”

The Listening Place difference: A compassionate, volunteer-led service that offers an alternative approach.

The support we offer is not clinical. We provide an active listening service designed with the guidance and expertise of a team of consultant volunteers — senior mental health professionals qualified in psychiatry, psychology and psychotherapy. Our volunteers come from all walks of life and we do not ask that they hold any particular qualifications. We also ensure that all our sites have a welcoming, non-clinical design and atmosphere; we offer hot drinks on arrival and the whole appointment slot is held for the person it's booked for, even if they arrive late. Visitors can leave the service whenever they want, without repercussions. Our visitors find this relaxed approach to be less daunting, especially for their first visit, and our referral partners agree.

“The community-based nature of The Listening Place makes it more approachable for students. They are able to build that trust more organically... It's also the flexibility that they sometimes need it for longer, sometimes for less time and they can use it as they need it.”

– **Maria Vasilopoulou, Clinical Practitioner at South Camden Crisis and Resolution Team**

“It's a very specific type of support. It's not therapy, it's not psychology; it's a listening ear, and sometimes that's what we need.”

– **Iain Boyd, Manager of the Student Mental Health Advice Team at Imperial College**

The fact that our support and referral pathway is not medicalised helps to streamline the process of getting appointments at The Listening Place. There is no need to demonstrate a particular psychiatric diagnosis and — although many people are referred by the NHS — it is also simple to self-refer for support without the involvement of a healthcare professional.

Because we are not a clinical service, our support can be completely confidential and we never share information about a visitor with their families or with other services without their explicit consent. Our experience is that this is hugely beneficial for our visitors, who often feel they have nowhere else to speak frankly about their suicidal thoughts for fear of repercussions, stigma or loss of agency.

"I am very thankful to have found support at The Listening Place. Unlike standardised mental health support services, The Listening Place looks at the situation from a human-first perspective. They looked at me like a person, someone with values, ideas and a future, rather than a patient with issues. This makes all the difference."

– A visitor to The Listening Place, March 2026

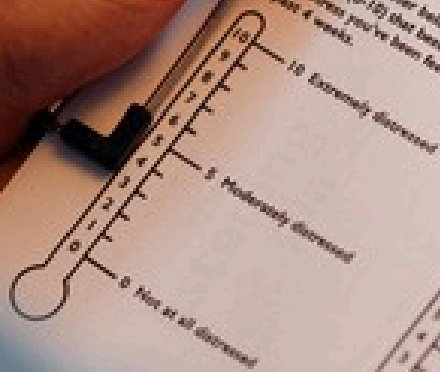
"Everyone has been so warm and welcoming, and it is rare to be able to have a conversation about suicidal ideation without people panicking and safeguarding, so I've really appreciated a non-judgmental space to talk about it all."

– A visitor to The Listening Place, June 2026

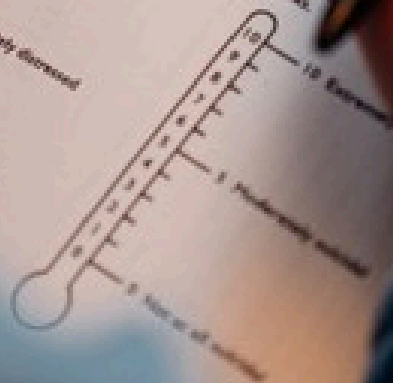
the listening place

your feelings
questionnaire

On the thermometer below, please circle the number (0-10) that best describes how much distress you've been feeling during the past 4 weeks.



On the thermometer below, please circle the number (0-10) that best describes how much distress you've been feeling during the past 4 weeks.



A trusted partner

The narrative: “Third sector organisations are less efficient and reliable.”

The Listening Place difference: Professionalism is the backbone of the service we provide for referral partners and visitors alike.

We understand that most of our referral partners work in extremely pressured environments and are short of time and resources. We have therefore created a referral process that is as simple as possible, while still gathering enough information to take a referral forward effectively. We always notify the referral partner that we have received their referral, contributing to the completeness of their records and offering reassurance that the person in need of support is in safe hands.

“There is a lot for a clinician who is trying to navigate so many things and wants to ensure that the patient is going to have some support, that there is going to be a follow up, so the very good thing about The Listening Place is that the referral is very clear. It's very straightforward. The questions are there, they're not asking for extraordinary things that no one would know... I can just go online, find the referral, complete it and send it. And that's very, very helpful.”

– **Maria Vasilopoulou, Clinical Practitioner at South Camden Crisis and Resolution Team**

“Our experiences have been really straightforward and I don't think a referral has ever been missed. It's an amazing way of referring and we are confident our students will receive a call.”

– **Anca Alba, Associate Director for Counselling and Mental Health Support at King's College London**

Our internal culture of 'warm efficiency' and our commitment to strong governance and financial resilience reassures our referral partners that we will always do what we say we will and helps build trust and respect. We actively engage with many stakeholders in the suicide prevention community to provide advice and training on understanding and supporting people with suicidal thoughts, for example, by contributing to the development of Lambeth Council's suicide prevention strategy.

"We built a good working relationship with them in terms of input to the strategy, how we can support them in the invaluable work they do and how we can work more closely to make sure we provide the right support."
– Margherita Sweetlove, Public Health Specialist at Lambeth Council

In a continuous effort to reach groups in the community who experience high rates of poor mental health and lower engagement with services, we make particular efforts to engage with referral partners that support these groups. We have recently undertaken targeted outreach with men's groups, homeless charities and women's shelters in order to raise their awareness of the support we offer.

"I really appreciate the work that they do and that they're a space available for people, and that they are so prompt at getting in touch with people, and that they're there. I think it's a really important service. And generally, sometimes that's the only referral I'm able to make, and I think that's very important for myself and for the clients."
– Zoë Cross, Navigator at London Survivors Gateway/WGN

"It's quite a rare beast within the charity sector in that it's very well run, it's very efficient. They've got really good systems in place, and they're a really good organisation."
– Matthew Brown, Team Manager at South West London Recovery Café



Conclusion

This World Suicide Prevention Day falls in The Listening Place's tenth anniversary year. After a decade of changing the narrative on suicide prevention in London, we remain as committed as ever to providing free, face-to-face support for those who feel that life is no longer worth living. We are so grateful for the relationships we've built with our existing referral partners, who are all working alongside us with passion and commitment to ensure that no one need suffer alone with suicidal thoughts. While each referral represents a person in distress, perhaps in despair—it also indicates that someone is reaching out for help. As our referral numbers continue to climb, we are honoured to be there for so many people who might otherwise have nowhere else to turn.

We always value the opportunity to partner with new NHS trusts, borough councils, charities, community groups and any other organisations that might need to refer people who are struggling with suicidal thoughts for in-person support at one of The Listening Place's four London sites. If you are interested in referring to our service and you'd like to find out more or visit one of our sites, please get in touch with Lucy Patterson, our Head of Visitor Support at visitorsupportmanager@listeningplace.org.uk.

How partners rate The Listening Place



- Referral process: **10/10**
- Response time: **10/10**
- Support offered: **9/10**
- Overall impact as a suicide prevention service: **10/10**

Contributors

Working pro bono, consultants at H/Advisors conducted eight in-depth interviews with key stakeholders from our referral network. They were asked about the challenges they face in their roles and their experiences of working with The Listening Place.

We thank each person for their time, their contributions to this report and for their work in the wider community to support those in need.

Anca Alba King's College London

Jack Baker British Transport Police

Iain Boyd Imperial College London

Matthew Brown South West London Recovery Café

Zoë Cross London Survivors Gateway / Women and Girls Network

Evan Parsons GamCare

Margherita Sweetlove Lambeth Council

Maria Vasilopoulou South Camden Crisis and Resolution Team

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Case study appendices

Anca Alba

Manager of the Student Mental Health Advice Team at King's College London

Anca begins by explaining the added barriers that at-risk international students face when accessing support. "We work closely with GPs and will share the information of at-risk students but, as they are not familiar with the support network, it can take international students a while to build that trust with the health and care services." This is where The Listening Place effectively steps in to support. "The community-based nature of The Listening Place makes it more approachable for students. They are able to build that trust more organically, knowing that their information will not go any further."

Anca has observed this trust factor affecting at-risk students on health-related degree courses (e.g. medicine, nursing, healthcare professionals) as well. She notes that they are often reluctant to seek support through statutory services due to stigma and confidentiality concerns. With students dealing with the weight of a number of social factors – including academic stress, concerns about the job market, university fees and family pressures – Anca notes that a lot of students come to her team with pre-diagnosed mental health conditions. Typically equipped to deal with mild to moderate anxiety and depression, she elaborates that her team are going above and beyond to support students when no one else can and The Listening Place is helping to alleviate this pressure. "The Listening Place is very much part of how we work. We appreciate them working with our students because we feel quite limited in what we can do for them."

In detailing the referral process, Anca acknowledges the speed with which The Listening Place makes contact. "Our experiences have been really straightforward and I don't think a referral has ever been missed. It's an amazing way of referring and we are confident our students will receive a call." For this reason The Listening Place has become a trusted and reliable partner for King's College London, both for students and for the counselling and mental health service.

For students, "they find it really valuable and they appreciate the flexibility of the support in that they can receive it for as long as they need. The Listening Place makes a huge impact on the community in what it offers to students. It's a fantastic service and we're really impressed and grateful for how responsive they are."

Jack Baker

Vulnerability Coordinator at British Transport Police

As a Vulnerability Coordinator, Jack works to build a picture of those who present with mental health issues or suicidality on train platforms. In our conversation, he explains how a simplified referral process can help monitor people who come through the system and ensure vulnerable individuals remain connected to appropriate support services.

Throughout our conversation, Jack praises the responsiveness of The Listening Place. Whether it's contacting the referred individual within 24 hours or updating the referrer on the status of the initial contact, Jack says, "The Listening Place is one of the best charities in terms of responsiveness and keeping you updated."

Once he has referred someone to The Listening Place, he says they respond to let you know if they were able to make contact, if they require further information or if they have made an appointment with the person. Jack says this is incredibly helpful in keeping records complete. That way, if the person presents again later down the line, the British Transport Police have a detailed record of the support they have received in the past.

Overall, Jack believes the face-to-face element of The Listening Place's support goes a long way in engaging visitors. "It's a more personal service where you're not a number. You're more free to be yourself and to create a stronger bond with the person providing the support."

Iain Boyd

Senior Student Mental Health Advisor at Imperial College London

Speaking about the weekly challenges he faces in his role, Iain pinpoints sustained engagement as a particular issue when working with students who are struggling with their mental health. He notes that students often have difficulty engaging with the sensitive issues they are seeking support for. Particularly for those experiencing suicidal thoughts, the long wait for secondary mental health referrals or psychiatrist appointments can result in them becoming disengaged from services.

Iain says, "This is why it's so important that the Imperial College service maintains contact to the best of our ability without compromising confidentiality."

On the experience of referring students to The Listening Place, Iain praises the ease and effectiveness of the process.

"From guiding a student through the website to filling out the forms, the whole process is very quick and responsive. I also appreciate that The Listening Place confirm with us that they have received the referral."

The feedback Iain has received from those who have been referred has generally been positive. While there are some who have disengaged from the service, he attributes this to the individual's preference or needs, rather than the service itself. Overall, Iain values the in-person element of the support, commenting: "There is something really powerful about the connection that The Listening Place's in-person sessions create for people experiencing suicidal thoughts."

Matthew Brown

Team Manager at South West London Recovery Café

As Team Manager at South West London Recovery Café and a volunteer at The Listening Place, Matthew is uniquely placed to share his experience as a referrer and a support provider. In our conversation, he talks about how a clear understanding and autonomy is valued among those in need.

In his role, Matthew works with those who present an immediate risk of attempting suicide. While the first port of call is the emergency services, depending on the person's existing support network, Matthew will also offer the option of referral to The Listening Place, as "once the immediate crisis has passed, they'll hopefully be able to make use of that support." Matthew is conscious that not everyone wants to be referred. "They might say it's too far away, not the right time or they are not interested but I push for my team to explain as clearly as possible the process and what The Listening Place offers. Making people aware that they are free to withdraw even after the referral helps to alleviate any pressure they may feel to commit." Instead, Matthew encourages them to see the referral as an opportunity to find out more about the service and vice versa. "Then it's a mutual decision about whether or not to move forward. That makes people feel much more comfortable consenting to a referral."

For those who do consent, Matthew says "It's great being able to tell people with confidence that if I refer them today, someone from The Listening Place will give them a call tomorrow and attempt contact a few more times if they can't get hold of them the first time." As a volunteer at The Listening Place, Matthew feels he can give more information than others when introducing people to the charity. "I suspect for other referrers they wouldn't necessarily know the details of how it works so, for me, you can't do enough in terms of explaining and then re-explaining what The Listening Place does to really build their understanding ahead of that first call."

Feedback from visitors often includes praise for the listening volunteers as very compassionate and supportive. The face-to-face element of the service is incredibly valued and, on The Listening Place's expansion to East London, Matthew says "my hope is that they will manage to maintain the quality of what they do, as The Listening Place is a rare beast in the charity sector in that it's very well-run and efficient with good systems in place."

Zoë Cross

Navigator at London Survivors Gateway / Women and Girls Network

Having been introduced to The Listening Place by her colleagues, Zoë appreciates the charity as an available source of support.

"It's a really important service and sometimes it's the only referral I'm able to make." Often when searching for an appropriate referral service, she encounters the challenge of specialist services being closed to referrals. Zoë says, "A lot of people want access to counselling support but face waiting times of up to two years in certain areas of London, and some services are just closed in general. So they have to go on a further waiting list which means it can be years before people access the support they need."

In combination with the long wait times for NHS mental health support, closed or unavailable services mean the London Survivors Gateway frequently experiences a bottleneck of clients waiting to be referred to the appropriate service and then usually face another wait to receive support from that referral service. For example, "if a rape crisis centre is closed, we'll keep people on a list and refer them when that centre reopens. So they can be waiting a long time before a referral is even made, and then have a further wait with the organisation they have been referred to."

With the majority of her clients experiencing suicidality to some degree, Zoë differentiates what it means to be considered high risk. She explains that someone who has active plans or who has made recent attempts to take their life would be considered high risk, rather than someone who has experienced passive thoughts of suicide.

When referring these individuals to The Listening Place, Zoë praises the speed of response and the notifications to acknowledge that her referral has been received. "There have been a few occasions when I've had to chase a referral that I've made and The Listening Place have always got back to me very quickly to let me know why they haven't reached out in the first place." On the referral process, Zoë notes that it is very smooth and she appreciates that the form doesn't require a lot of information. She says, "It's a really good option for people who are on those long waiting lists and just want a space to be heard."

Evan Parsons

GamCare

At GamCare, a charity that provides support for people looking to stop gambling, Evan Parsons works with clients to assess their risk and any broader mental health support they may need. As a volunteer of The Listening Place, he reflects on the unique approach that The Listening Place brings to the mental health care network.

Evan begins by explaining a unique challenge facing clients of GamCare. "As clients come to terms with their gambling addiction and are in the process of seeking help for it, they are also being targeted with relentless advertising that offers "free spins", for example, which often leads to them returning to harmful gambling cycles."

Evan describes his client base as typically withdrawn and hesitant to consider accepting help for their care needs. However, for those who have consented to a referral to The Listening Place, he remarks that he's heard consistently positive feedback about the support provided – "I hear good feedback about The Listening Place from colleagues who have referred people from different backgrounds."

While talking each client through the standard wellbeing questionnaire, Evan considers the suitability of The Listening Place in the broader care of each case – especially the level of trust that visitors are able to develop knowing that their care is protected once they become a regular visitor of The Listening Place. As a referrer, Evan appreciates the confidentiality of the charity limiting the amount of information they share with him, "They notify us when they've booked the first appointment and that's it." The responsiveness of the charity is a standout for Evan. Of the initial contact post-referral, he says "The Listening Place is quicker than anything else that I refer people to."

Margherita Sweetlove

Public Health Specialist at Lambeth Council

With prior experience promoting positive wellbeing and preventing ill mental health in Lambeth, Margherita Sweetlove shares the challenges affecting mental health care provision and outlines the role of The Listening Place in the borough's strategy.

Margherita recalls her initial encounter with The Listening Place in 2021 during the development of Lambeth's most recent suicide prevention strategy. "We built a good working relationship with them in terms of input to the strategy, how we can support them in the invaluable work they do and how we can work more closely to make sure we provide the right support." She says the input that The Listening Place provided back then has continued in the form of support, feedback and data that is otherwise difficult to access. "We have data from various sources about people who have died by suicide but The Listening Place provides us with valuable insight into people who are experiencing suicidal ideation and seeking support."

One of the biggest challenges Margherita cites in her role is maintaining effective communication. She acknowledges Lambeth as having a collaborative partnership in the healthcare space but explain that there is room for improvement to coordinate action, particularly among the voluntary organisations, where some are lesser known than others and are, therefore, less visible. Creating equal visibility of all voluntary organisations in the sector could help ensure no one falls through the gaps and can access the support they need.

Margherita also refers to effective communication in the context of advertising The Listening Place so more people are aware they can refer themselves directly to the charity. GPs are the primary referrer, but she says more needs to be done to raise awareness of the existing support that is available. In concluding our conversation, Margherita reiterates, "The Listening Place do an invaluable job and we really benefit from them existing." She notes there will be planning in place in the new suicide prevention strategy for Lambeth to support the advertisement of The Listening Place and their work.

Maria Vasilopoulou

Clinical Practitioner at South Camden Crisis and Resolution Team

At South Camden Crisis and Resolution, a team that was set up to support hospital demand, Maria Vasilopoulou works to support people with high-risk mental health issues in the community. In our conversation, Maria shares the challenges she faces on a daily basis and how The Listening Place offers a smooth referral process and a supportive listening ear.

Speaking about the daily challenges of her role, Maria says issues sit on both ends of the telephone line. From the perspective of the team, given the fast-paced nature of the role, managing demand in times of staff shortages can make contacting patients within the 24-hour response window and scheduling or rescheduling appointments difficult. From the perspective of the patient, Maria explains that engaging with them within that 24-hour window is not always in the team's control. The team have a general rule of thumb of three attempts at contact, but the person may not always be as responsive.

"The patient might not be ready, willing or consenting to work with the crisis team. We try to be flexible by offering office and home visits and can attempt contact a fourth or fifth time on a case-by-case basis but actually seeing the person can be difficult from a referral point of view."

One of Maria's first introductions to The Listening Place included an in-person visit to one of their sites. She recalls this being useful in developing an understanding of the service. "Being able to visit the site and meet some of the volunteers in-person helped me gain a better understanding of how the charity operates and the people who provide the support." Since this experience, Maria has made numerous referrals to The Listening Place, a process she says is clear and straightforward. "Referring people to other services can be tricky, especially when the initial referral is not the right type of support – that follow up support combined with a long referral process can be very demanding. With The Listening Place, they're not asking for excessive information that no one would know. I can just go online, complete the referral form and send it. That's incredibly helpful."

Maria recognises that the type of support The Listening Place provides is specific, "It's not therapy, it's not psychology, it's a listening ear and sometimes that's what we need." She says it is very important to set expectations with potential visitors, given their possible previous experiences of receiving help for suicidality. One feature that visitors appreciate about The Listening Place is the fact the support is provided in person, "A lot of the COVID services have remained online for no real reason, so now that people have the option to meet someone face-to-face and talk about these difficult thoughts, it's extremely helpful."

the listening place

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With heartfelt thanks to **H/ADVISORS**