

CASE STUDY

When Samaritans training was put into action by Network Rail manager Ben

Network Rail mobile operations manager Ben West was on a station patrol one day in South London when he spotted a man standing on a platform, staring into space, with beer cans at his feet.

Ben remembered the key elements of his intervention training, provided by the Samaritans.

He knew instantly that something was wrong.

Ben said: "I was in the right place at the right time. The man was standing in isolation, he looked dejected, there were cans of beer by his feet... and those were all things that the Samaritans gave me as signs to look out for.

"With a bit of gut feeling, honed by the Samaritans training I was able to tell straight away without any debate."

Ben knew he had to take action quickly and approached the man.

He said: "I subtly put myself in a position where I could physically intervene and started asking him ice-breaking questions, like 'how are you today? What train are you going to get, where are you heading to'... just to build a bit of rapport. The nature of the questions was open as I needed him to speak to me.

"A key part of what we are taught by the Samaritans is that you need to invoke 'emotional sickness'. That is where people who have all these thoughts and emotions swirling around within them can open up and expel them. By doing so they can bring them under control and physically and emotionally move them away from a very dark spot and bring them back to a more stable frame of mind.

"After a few generic questions I felt confident enough and had built up enough rapport to state to him directly "I know what you're going to do. He nodded and tears started falling down his face. I said to him why don't we go and have a chat, and I took him to the station office."

As he took the man to the office, he motioned to station staff to call the British Transport Police, which they did.

Ben added: "The Samaritans training was very, very important. It really gave me structure and context and showed me how people can get into the frame of mind when they are suicidal. It also showed me how to approach them, and how to potentially bring them out of that cycle."