

CASE STUDY: HELP FOR SEAFARERS WHEN THEY NEED IT MOST

A female seafarer contacted the helpline in an extremely distressed state. She was having suicidal thoughts brought on by a traumatic relationship breakdown.

The helpline officer who first spoke to the seafarer realised the gravity of the situation. While providing emotional support, the helpline officer also gathered as much information as possible from the seafarer to undertake a suicide risk assessment and work out the best way to help her.

The helpline team assessed the seafarer as being a high suicide risk and spent the next few days having long telephone conversations with her. The seafarer was very emotional – she felt that her career in the maritime industry had come to nothing, that she had no value and that there was no point in carrying on. She had no family or friends she could turn to so she felt isolated and vulnerable. The helpline team reassured her and explained that they were there for her whenever she wanted to talk. They also rang her over the weekends to make sure she was OK.

In the meantime, the helpline team were exploring other ways in which they could assist the seafarer. They believed she would benefit from face-to-face counselling, so with her consent they contacted her trade union's local office who agreed to fund some support. The seafarer was on leave and living outside of her home country so the trade union arranged for her to see a local counsellor who spoke her language.

However, it became apparent that the counsellor's command of the seafarer's language was not good enough the helpline team needed to find a replacement.

Despite contacting the seafarer's local embassy and another government's local consulate, the helpline team couldn't find anyone suitable where she was living so they asked the seafarer if she would be happy to be counselled over Skype instead. When the seafarer agreed, they found and put her in touch with a counsellor experienced in the maritime industry. Over the next few weeks, the counsellor supported the seafarer through what was a very difficult time.

The seafarer now has a much better outlook and, at the time of writing, is pursuing a new job. She feels much stronger and more able to cope with the challenges she faces. The helpline has offered the seafarer further support including counselling if she needs it.

In situations like this, it is vital that someone can respond immediately to a person in such distress. Without the helpline team to talk to when she needed it most there is a chance that this seafarer might have taken her own life, and she told us how important the assistance and support she received was during such a difficult time. Mind Call is available any time of day or night all year round, and our team have been trained to give emotional support and to undertake suicide risk assessments by a clinical psychologist and counsellors.

Source: International Seafarer's Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)