

THE ME ASSOCIATION

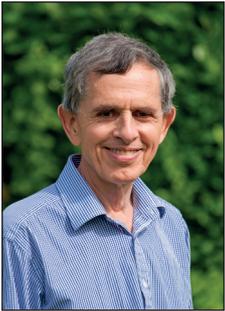
me

ME CONNECT

Information and Support Line

ME CONNECT HELPLINE: 0344 576 5326**by Hilary Briars**
ME Connect Manager

INTRODUCTION

Neil Riley, Chairman of The ME Association, writes:

When you are ill with a chronic condition like ME there are many things you want to know. What treatments work, where can I find

a doctor who understands ME, where can I get guidance on filling in my benefit claim. Even more important is to hear another voice, someone who understands how ME affects everyday life. Someone who will listen.

The role of ME Connect is simple. It is there to support people with ME and their carers to make informed choices. It is there to listen to a caller and try to understand all the issues they are facing. Each year it does this for thousands of people. Of all that The ME Association does for people with ME it is our Telephone Helpline of which I am proudest. It is what a charity is all



about; giving help to those who need it at a difficult time in their lives.

Our volunteers do that every day. Why? Because it is intensely rewarding for them to help others and they want to contribute something in their lives to society. By helping others it in turn enriches their lives.

I hope you will come and join our volunteer team. They are a lovely friendly bunch. Many have or have had ME and all of them understand the illness. You'll make friends and you'll learn a lot. Just pick up a phone or email us. We would love to hear from you.

"It is really good that you offer this service, it is such a relief to speak to someone who understands."

CALL OUR
ME CONNECT
SUPPORT LINE

0344 576 5326

365 days a year
10am-12noon, 2pm-4pm, 7pm-9pm

ME CONNECT

Hilary Briars, ME Connect's Manager, writes:

I am very proud of the fact that ME Connect takes thousands of calls each year and I'm equally proud of our volunteers who respond to these calls.

We are all really pleased to be able to help so many people with ME and those who care for them. However, we would like to help more people and thus we need more volunteers to take calls.

The work is rewarding. In a short call you can help a person with their problem or help a distressed caller get through their day. With so much information to hand and an understanding of ME, we can really help people.

So many callers say to us "Thank you so much for giving your time, it is just so nice to speak to someone who really understands what I am going through."

Many of our volunteers have appreciated the fact that they can do their training and take calls in their own home. Others have said that helpline work has given them a sense of purpose and a feeling of job satisfaction.

Please do join us; you will be given a warm welcome!

"Thank you so much for giving up your time to work on this Helpline. It is just so nice to speak to someone who really understands what I am going through."



VOLUNTEERS

Sue Mayes, ME Connect's Lead Volunteer, writes:

I have been a volunteer for ME Connect for many years. Even with that experience, I always feel a nervous anticipation before my shift. As I lay out my papers, put the manual within reach and find the ME Association website on the computer, I wonder how busy I will be.

Will the calls be people wanting information, or will they be anxious about their symptoms? Have they already been diagnosed or do they want more information about the illness? Are they in a muddle with claiming benefits or are they worrying about their child with ME and the effect on schooling? Do they just need someone to talk to who understands the effect ME can have on your life?

Sometimes the caller can be fearful and can't put into words their difficulties. A "listening ear" usually brings comfort and the call ends with thanks for being so understanding. Sometimes a caller finds that a sympathetic understanding after months of incomprehension brings tears of gratitude. Often the call can end with a gentle joke and some laughter, something that can be missing from their lives.

The training you receive gives you the confidence to answer these calls. You have all the information to hand, signposting lists for the questions you can't answer, regular supervision to talk through any problems and of course you have lots of common sense and knowledge to see you through!

Our volunteers say:

■ It goes without saying that helpline work is incredibly rewarding. It is wonderful to hear the words "thank you for being there", "it's so nice to talk to someone who understands", and "yes, that's exactly how I feel".

■ Before I started with ME Connect I was given training which taught me to listen, really listen, to the people who call. I found these skills transferred automatically to non-helpline contexts. As a result I learned to connect better with others. Social situations hold less anxiety for me now.

■ I love working on ME Connect. I've always wanted to help people and thought I wouldn't be able to do that when I got ill but being able to do this from home means that I can do what I want to do in an environment that suits me. The MEA staff and other volunteers are all really friendly and easy to talk to if you need help with anything.

■ Realising that you can, in some small way, make a difference to someone's life is very humbling and rewarding.

■ I find my sessions fulfilling and I get a massive sense of satisfaction when I am able to help a caller feel better about things. I consider it a real privilege to work with ME Connect. It feels rewarding that just a small amount of my time can help someone else so much.



Our callers say:

"Thank you, you have been an absolute angel."

"Thank you so much, you have helped me get through the day."

"I didn't know where to turn, thank you for pointing me in the right direction."

"I have worried about this problem for weeks but within 5 minutes you have given me the answer, thank you very much indeed."

"I really needed someone to talk to, I feel so much better now. Thank you."

JOINING ME CONNECT

Our helpline is available six hours a day, 365 days a year:

10am-12noon, 2pm-4pm and 7pm-9pm

Each volunteer covers one or two shifts per week.

Callers ring an 0344 number and their call is diverted to the volunteer(s) on duty.

We receive calls from people with ME/CFS, carers, families, health professionals and interested others.

Volunteers log themselves in and out for the duration of their shift. Thus you will not receive calls outside of your shift and callers will not be aware of your personal telephone number.

You will need a landline to take calls.

For part of your training and also for some of the calls you take you will need a computer to find information.

Training is 25 hours and is mainly paper based together with one-to-one telephone training.

Contact:

ME Connect Manager:
Hilary Briars

admin@meassociation.org.uk

Helpline number:
0344 576 5326

Thursday-Monday
8.30am – 12 noon

