## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SeafarerHelp services: 2013 overview</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 caseload review</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seafarer problems</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seafarer nationalities</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flag states</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How we work</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of contact/communication</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial contact methods</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts to and from the SeafarerHelp team</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There has been a lot of change this year for SeafarerHelp, the free 24-hour multilingual helpline for seafarers. In April 2013, SeafarerHelp formally became part of the International Seafarers’ Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) when the International Seafarers’ Assistance Network (ISAN) merged with the International Committee on Seafarers’ Welfare (ICSW). ISWAN continues to build on the achievements of SeafarerHelp, as you will see from this annual review.

We are deeply grateful for the continued support for SeafarerHelp by funders and other stakeholders. In particular, I would like to thank The TK Foundation, the ITF Seafarers’ Trust and Seafarers UK for their commitment and funding.

I took over as Chair of ISWAN in November and I am impressed by the abilities and experience of the SeafarerHelp team. Their language skills and dedication to seafarers’ welfare means that SeafarerHelp is able to provide a quality service to seafarers who contact us.

There are still a number of challenges ahead. We need to secure a sustainable funding base for ISWAN and SeafarerHelp that will enable us to plan more fully for the future. By providing helpline services to other organisations through our trading company Seafarers Welfare and Assistance Network Ltd (SWAN Ltd) we will be able to diversify our funding base so we are not over dependent on a small number of grant funders.

SeafarerHelp has the potential to grow and develop, particularly as more and more seafarers gain access to modern communication systems while onboard, both at sea and in port.

I believe that SeafarerHelp can play a greater part in improving the welfare of seafarers worldwide. I am keen for us to work with shipping companies, unions, welfare organisations, ports and flag states to ensure that seafarers are not forgotten and that their vital role in people’s everyday lives is more widely recognised.
2013 has been a very productive year for the SeafarerHelp team and ISWAN as a whole. There are 10, mostly part-time, staff in the SeafarerHelp team. They provide a 24-hour helpline service every day of the year, to seafarers and their families from our UK office in Croydon, south London. Between them, they speak 11 languages fluently, including most of the languages used by seafarers, such as Filipino, Hindi, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, Turkish and Urdu. They can also communicate effectively in several other languages and dialects.

This confidential service is free of charge and independent. Seafarers and their families can contact SeafarerHelp in a number of different ways – by telephone, email, text, live chat, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, letter or fax. We refer most of the contacts we receive to specialist maritime agencies for direct assistance, including the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF); port welfare providers, such as the Mission to Seafarers, Apostleship of the Sea and the Sailors Society; national embassies or consulates; harbour authorities; and medical service providers. We warmly acknowledge the invaluable help these organisations provide.

On 1st April 2013 the International Seafarers’ Assistance Network (ISAN), which has run the SeafarerHelp line since 1999, merged with the International Committee on Seafarers’ Welfare (ICSW) to form the International Seafarers’ Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN). Although the day to day operation of the SeafarerHelp helpline has not changed, the merger has been very important to SeafarerHelp because ISWAN has a stronger voice and better financial and staffing resources than either of its two constituent bodies had individually. The merger meant a significant part of the year has been spent on amalgamating the two organisations and learning to work within new structures. This process continues as we further refine and develop how we work and establish ISWAN’s unique position in the maritime welfare world.

Some of the other important events of this year have been:

- A significant increase in both the number of ‘calls’ to SeafarerHelp and the number of seafarers helped.
- Better promotion of the SeafarerHelp helpline, as part of the wider promotion of ISWAN’s strategic and operational work. We have used social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, to reach individual seafarers more effectively to build awareness of SeafarerHelp. We have also continued to promote the helpline through our SeafarerHelp posters and new, updated, handy credit card sized cards, which we send to organisations all around the world. We believe that the significant increase in the number of cases we have dealt with is in part due to this more effective marketing strategy.
- Improved customer service. We have continued a comprehensive staff training programme designed to improve call handling, customer service and staff knowledge of maritime issues. During 2013 the team participated in 82 training sessions, on top of the training given at the monthly team meetings. These covered topics including the maritime industry, telephone skills, port visits, management training, ship welfare visiting, the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC), Microsoft Office (Word, Excel and Outlook) and data protection. We regard the training and development of staff as essential to the future of ISWAN and SeafarerHelp and we will continue to invest in it.
- Further moves to diversify our funding arrangements so that we are not entirely reliant on grants. We have been negotiating with a major maritime union to run on their behalf a 24 hour, 365 day per year helpline and out of hours service and expect to start the service in 2014. We already provide services to the ITF and Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme (MPHRP) and are looking to expand this type of contract arrangement to other organisations.

“The SeafarerHelp team speak 11 languages fluently, including most of the languages used by seafarers, such as Filipino, Hindi, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, Turkish and Urdu.”
The upgrade of our case management software. This has made it much easier for the team to manage cases and has improved the quality of data. We are now able to understand more effectively what is happening to seafarers around the world and what support and assistance they need.

A review of our IT systems to ensure they could accommodate new users. The review concluded that our existing server was working almost to capacity and recommended that we purchase a new server and some new software. This has now been done.

The successful relaunch of the Seafarers Emergency Fund (SEF) under ISWAN and SeafarerHelp management. In January 2013, ISWAN and SeafarerHelp took over the management of the SEF. We have increased the number of applications to the fund and improved the turnaround of grants so payments are made much more quickly.

The setting up of a special SEF fund for seafarers and their families affected by typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in November. We raised over USD114,000 in just a few weeks. These funds were ring-fenced and were used to enable Filipino seafarers to contact home, free of charge, to find out what had happened to their loved ones and their homes. Any funds that remain unspent will be used to assist in the reconstruction of the seafaring communities affected by the typhoon.

A major external development this year was the coming into force of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC). The convention covers all aspects of seafarers’ wellbeing, including conditions of employment, accommodation on board, catering, health and welfare. Once fully implemented, the convention should help improve the lives of many seafarers worldwide. Seafarers concerned about contraventions of the convention can contact the SeafarerHelp team and we will refer them to the appropriate organisations and authorities.

The SeafarerHelp service receives financial support from the ITF Seafarers’ Trust, The TK Foundation and Seafarers UK, whose generosity allows this vital service to seafarers and their families to continue.
“Compared to 2012, there was a 35% increase in the number of new cases handled and an increase of 47.5% in the number of seafarers assisted”
In 2013 the SeafarerHelp team:

- Dealt with 1,257 cases involving 6,473 seafarers and their families
- Helped seafarers of 72 different nationalities calling from 98 different countries
- Had over 36,000 incoming and outgoing contacts by telephone, email, SMS, Live Chat and Skype
- Provided assistance free of charge, 24 hours per day, 365 days per year and often in the seafarer’s own language.

2013 caseload review:

- Compared to 2012, there was a 35% increase in the number of new cases handled and an increase of 47.5% in the number of seafarers assisted
- On average 3.4 new cases came to the SeafarerHelp team each day
- The average number of seafarers involved in each case was 5.2
- There has been a significant increase in the number of cases coming to the team for each of the last three years, and the evidence from the first part of 2014 is that this is set to increase further
- In addition to new cases the SeafarerHelp team was working with approximately 250 ongoing cases at any given time
- The most common problems seafarers raised were in relation to unpaid wages, repatriation, contracts, health and seeking employment. It is interesting to note that the first three issues have remained the same for many years
- Of the 72 different nationalities assisted, the largest number were Filipinos, followed by Ukrainians, Indians and Russians
- We were contacted by seafarers from 17 different Commonwealth countries. The largest number were from India, followed by Pakistan, United Kingdom, Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia and Mauritius
- Seafarers from 15 different European Union countries contacted us during the year
- The contacts that we received came from 98 different countries, of which 27 are in the Commonwealth
- Although many cases involved more than one referral agency, we referred most to the ITF Inspectors, followed by the ITF Maritime Operations Section, the Mission to Seafarers and the Apostleship of the Sea
- The initial contact to SeafarerHelp was usually by telephone or email; however, the use of Facebook is increasing and the use of SMS texting is decreasing.
Comparing the last three years

We believe the considerable increase in cases and seafarers assisted in the last three years is due to three factors:

1. Although we started to improve our marketing in 2012, in 2013 it was much more effectively targeted at seafarers using social media, particularly Facebook. There is a close correlation between our Facebook advertising campaign and the increase in the number of cases, and thus the number of seafarers assisted. This followed a 30% increase in cases from 2011 to 2012.

2. The world recession continued through 2013 and the maritime industry continued to be hit, with seafarers often ending up as the victims when marginal companies found themselves unable to continue in business. It is worth noting that in 2013 the team was involved in 16 cases where a ship had been abandoned by its owners, double that of 2012.

3. This year saw the first full 12 months of providing helpline services for other organisations, through our wholly owned subsidiary company SWAN Ltd. This has both raised our profile with seafarers and welfare organisations and increased the number of cases going to these helplines.

However, the number of new cases received each year does not tell the full story of the team’s work. Many seafarers contact us for information on a wide range of subjects. We are able to deal with most of these enquiries immediately, although more complicated ones requiring the involvement of several organisations, sometimes in many ports in different countries, take longer.

The five case studies provided throughout this annual review illustrate the variety of situations that the team deals with.
Case study

A Filipino chief engineer was in Chile when he was advised by a doctor that he needed an urgent eye operation, otherwise he could go blind. He called the SeafarerHelp helpline to explain that the hospital had to be paid before they would operate and had booked him into a hotel to wait for his Protection and Indemnity Insurance club (P&I club) to approve his shipping company’s claim. The shipping company and the P&I club were both based in Japan. The seafarer was very worried and stressed because he felt alone and was not sure he could get the financial approval quickly enough to save his sight.

The SeafarerHelp team referred the situation to the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA) for their contacts in Chile to provide welfare support to the seafarer. At the same time, we contacted the ITF inspector in Chile, who in turn contacted the shipping company in Japan and explained the situation to them. In just three days, the P&I club and the shipping company approved the operation.

While waiting for the operation, the chief engineer felt isolated so one of our Filipino-Spanish speaking team members, who was working nights, telephoned him each evening. The chief engineer found the simple act of talking to someone in his own language comforting and reassuring.

The chief engineer’s operation was successful and he returned to the Philippines. He thanked us for supporting him.

“While waiting for the operation, the chief engineer felt isolated so one of our Filipino-Spanish speaking team members telephoned him each evening. The chief engineer found the simple act of talking to someone in his own language comforting and reassuring.”
The pregnant wife of a Ukrainian seafarer contacted SeafarerHelp to complain that her husband had not been paid for over three months and that she badly needed the money to prepare for the impending birth of their child. We soon established that her husband and the rest of the crew had been abandoned in South Korea by the ship owner, and the caller’s husband agreed for us to refer his case to the ITF. The local ITF inspector boarded the ship and arranged for it to be arrested by the local authorities. The ITF also arranged for the seafarers to be repatriated to their respective countries. However, the seafarers could not be paid their outstanding wages until the vessel was sold by auction. In the meantime, the seafarer was very happy to go home and saw the birth of his baby. A few months later he and all his colleagues finally received their outstanding salaries when the vessel was sold.

Seafarer Help Annual Review 2013

Seafarer problems

Seafarers contact the SeafarerHelp team for a wide variety of reasons but unfortunately the most frequent reason is still to ask us to help in respect of unpaid wages. This accounted for 28.5% of all contacts in 2013 and was a significant increase from 2012, when it was 25% of a much lower total number of seafarers.

Seafarers contacted us for other reasons:

- Information requests – 15% of all contacts, the same as 2012
- Repatriation problems – 14.5% of contacts; although lower than the 18% in 2012, the actual numbers of cases increased in 2013
- Problems in no specific category – 12.5% of contacts
- Contract problems – 6.5% of contacts, less than the 9.5% in 2012
- Seeking employment – 3.5% of contacts
- Other problems encountered included abuse and bullying, ship conditions and claims for personal compensation.

Chart 2 shows a breakdown of the principal issues that the SeafarerHelp team dealt with during 2013.

Case study

The pregnant wife of a Ukrainian seafarer contacted SeafarerHelp to complain that her husband had not been paid for over three months and that she badly needed the money to prepare for the impending birth of their child. We soon established that her husband and the rest of the crew had been abandoned in South Korea by the ship owner, and the caller’s husband agreed for us to refer his case to the ITF. The local ITF inspector boarded the ship and arranged for it to be arrested by the local authorities. The ITF also arranged for the seafarers to be repatriated to their respective countries. However, the seafarers could not be paid their outstanding wages until the vessel was sold by auction. In the meantime, the seafarer was very happy to go home and saw the birth of his baby. A few months later he and all his colleagues finally received their outstanding salaries when the vessel was sold.

“The seafarer was very happy to go home and saw the birth of his baby.”
Chart 2
Seafarers’ issues raised with SeafarerHelp

- Welfare/Emergency provisions required: 16 / 1%
- Ship sunk or in danger of sinking/Shipwreck/Grounding: 1 / 0.1%
- Seeking employment: 57 / 3.6%
- Psychological/Mental health issue: 1 / 0.1%
- Wages/Salary not paid: 451 / 28.5%
- Health/Medical: 79 / 5%
- Family problem: 3 / 0.2%
- Death/Bereavement: 14 / 0.9%
- Compensation: 24 / 1.5%
- Abuse or bullying: 53 / 3.3%
- Other: 198 / 12.5%
- Unfair dismissal: 19 / 1.2%
- Ship condition or living conditions: 33 / 2.1%
- Repatriation: 230 / 14.5%
- Piracy/War zone: 19 / 1.2%
- Information: 237 / 15%
- Finance or debt: 17 / 1%
- Environmental issues: 5 / 0.3%
- Contract problems: 105 / 6.6%
- Cargo handling violation: 7 / 0.4%
- Abandonment: 16 / 1%
The six Ukrainian crew of a ship that had been abandoned by its Ukrainian owners at an anchorage in Cyprus contacted SeafarerHelp in July 2013 for assistance. They told us they were running out of food, water and diesel and that they had not been paid for four months. We were told that another Ukrainian ship that was nearby had been giving them food and water but was now leaving.

We had a lot of difficulties in communicating with the crew because the telephone lines and mobile numbers did not always work. We contacted the Mission to Seafarers, and the local chaplain was able to make direct contact with the crew and make arrangements for them to receive food and water. We also contacted the Ukrainian Embassy, who in turn urged the Ukrainian ship owners to repatriate the crew. We asked the ITF to pursue the issue of the unpaid wages.

Although the provision of food and water was arranged relatively quickly, it took a few months for their embassy to arrange for the crew to be repatriated and reunited with their families.

“They told us they were running out of food, water and diesel and that they had not been paid for four months.”
In 2013 the team was contacted by seafarers from 72 different countries who required some form of assistance. Of the countries represented 17 were members of the Commonwealth, a further 15 were countries from the EU and another six were from the developed world. The following information relates to the nationality of the seafarer making the contact with the team and does not reflect the nationality of those other members of the crew that they may be representing.

It can be surprisingly difficult to find out a seafarer’s nationality, and 13% of all those who contacted us chose not to reveal their nationality, largely because they were concerned that they could be identified and damage their future employment prospects.

Previously, we reported on the nationality of all the seafarers we assisted. However, as those contacting us on behalf of others often do not know the nationality of the other crew members they are representing, this year we have changed to reflecting the nationality only of the person who made the contact. This ensures that our data is as accurate as possible. This applies, therefore, to the following information.

In 2013 the team took contacts from 98 different countries of which 27 were Commonwealth countries.

In 12.3% of cases the caller either withheld or did not know what country they were calling from. We understand why seafarers withhold their nationality but not why so many are reluctant to tell us where they are contacting us from.

There was a significant increase in contacts from India and the Ukraine, mainly due to our Facebook advertising campaign.

In order of percentage of contacts: 9.7% of calls came from India, 8.7% from the Philippines, 7% from the Ukraine, 4.6% from the United Arab Emirates, 4.2% from the UK, 3.8% from the United States of America and 3.2% from Russia. Significant numbers of calls were also taken from China, Brazil, Italy and Turkey.

The number of seafarers who contacted us while at sea was 9%.

Chart 3

Nationality of the seafarer making the contact
Flag states

We always ask, as part of our standard information, for the flag state of the vessel the contact is employed on. However, seafarers do not always know where their ship is registered and sometimes they do not want to disclose it, in which case we do not pursue the information. In 2013 a total of 290 of those who contacted us did not disclose where their ship was registered.

In 2013 the SeafarerHelp team dealt with seafarers on ships that were registered in 73 different countries, of which 17 were from the Commonwealth. The six most frequently encountered registries are shown in chart 4 below, together with the number of cases that relate to them and, in brackets, their relative position in terms of their size in the world fleet table, according to the UNCTAD Review of Maritime Transport 2013.

Unsurprisingly, the top three ship registries that ISWAN was contacted about exactly reflect the three largest registries – Panama, Marshall Islands, and Malta. However, the frequency with which ships registered in Antigua and Barbuda were reported to ISWAN was disproportionately high given the size of their registry, while the number of reports about ships registered in Malta fell from 56 to 36, which, given the increase in cases reported to the team, can only be interpreted as an improvement.

All of the countries on the list have ratified the MLC 2006 that entered into force in August 2013. Given that most of the issues that the team deal with are clear breaches of the MLC, it will be interesting to see if over the next few years the number of cases reported, and the flag states they relate to, changes so that they reflect the top six largest registries.

Chart 4
Flag states our contacts’ ships were registered to

(Figure in brackets: Registry ranking by size)
Case study

A chaplain in the Philippines got in touch with SeafarerHelp to report that the wife of a Filipino seafarer had contacted him. Her husband had suffered a work-related spinal injury on board a ship in Argentina and had been taken to hospital for surgery. The chaplain asked the SeafarerHelp team if we could get someone to visit the seafarer in hospital so that his wife could be updated on his condition.

We contacted the Apostleship of the Sea in Argentina and they agreed to make the visit. In addition, one of our Filipino speakers made direct contact with the seafarer, found out about his medical condition and passed the information to the man’s wife. He then kept in regular contact with her. It took a few weeks following surgery for the seafarer to be fit enough to travel but he was then repatriated, with a nurse as escort, to the Philippines.

Once home, the seafarer remained in regular contact with us reporting on his recovery, which was expected to take up to a year, during which time he was unable to work. He expressed his gratitude to the SeafarerHelp team for the help and support we had given him and his wife. He also asked about how he might claim compensation for his injury so we referred him to the ITF in the Philippines, who are continuing to help him with his claim.

“He expressed his gratitude to the SeafarerHelp team for the help and support we had given him and his wife.”
How we work

The SeafarerHelp team receives a very wide range of contacts from seafarers and their families, some of which are more complex than others.

Where it is a simple request for information – for example the address of the Seafarer Centre in a particular port – the team deals with the enquiry themselves. Such requests account for 15% of all contacts in 2013, the same percentage as 2012.

However, the majority of contacts we receive are more complex and the team usually refer them to our colleagues in specialist agencies, who can provide assistance in the port or country that the seafarer is located in. In this way we act as a referral agency to help the seafarer decide on which organisation is most appropriate to assist them. Most of the agencies that we use specialise in the maritime sector and have shore-based personnel in ports around the world. This enables them to provide direct, personal assistance to the seafarer, which can be of great reassurance to them.

Case study

The wife of a Filipino first engineer contacted our helpline to say that her husband had a problem on his ship in Australia, and asked us to contact him directly.

A SeafarerHelp officer contacted the man, who explained that he had a health problem and that a doctor in Australia had given him a certificate saying that he was not fit to work. The first engineer did not want to disclose his health details to us but wanted to go home to the Philippines for treatment. Unfortunately, the captain was delaying his repatriation and the seafarer asked if we could assist with repatriating him while his ship was still in Australia.

We explained how SeafarerHelp works and after checking what agencies were available at his location, we asked him who he wanted us to refer him to. He chose the ITF so we asked its local inspector to visit the seafarer on the ship, which he did that day. With the inspector’s help, the seafarer was taken to a hotel the following day to wait for a flight home. Two days later we received an email from his wife, saying she was very happy that her husband was now home and thanking us and the ITF for providing such quick assistance.
The agencies that the team refer to include the ITF inspectors, the ITF’s Maritime Operations Team and various national seafarers’ unions in cases where the issue relates to a contractual problem. For welfare or personal issues, we will contact welfare organisations such as members of the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA), for example, the Apostleship of the Sea, the Mission to Seafarers, Sailors Society, Deutsche Seemannsmission and the Seaman’s Church Institute. The team refers cases to port authorities, and, where appropriate, government agencies such as embassies, consulates or the police or coastguard services. We also refer to organisations such as the Red Cross, Red Crescent, port medical facilities and the MPHRP. In many cases, the issues that seafarers present to us include both contractual and welfare issues, in which case we will refer them to the ITF or a union, as well as to a welfare agency.

One of the key principles of the SeafarerHelp service is that a case will only be referred to a particular agency with the seafarer’s consent. We are sensitive to seafarers’ concerns that their employment opportunities might be harmed if particular unions are involved or their wishes to be assisted only by those of a particular faith. We do our best to balance these requirements in order to achieve the best possible outcome for the seafarer, but it can be difficult if, for example, a particular port does not have welfare facilities.

Making contact with the SeafarerHelp helpline will usually result in the seafarer being referred to a welfare agency or other organisation in the country that they are in. Before 16 September 2013, when we upgraded our case management software, it was not possible to gather all the information to make a referral following the first contact so we could not log which organisations seafarers had been referred to – as a result, those statistics have a category of ‘No first referral, for these cases.‘ The new software resolved this so that in 2014 we look forward to having all the information about referrals to welfare organisations.

As the most frequent problem seafarers report to us continues to be non-payment of wages, often for many months and in some cases over a year, it is not surprising that many of our contacts are referred to the ITF, either its inspectors based in the relevant country or the Maritime Operations Team in London, or to the appropriate national union.

“The most frequent problem seafarers report to us continues to be non-payment of wages.”
Chart 5
The organisations that the SeafarerHelp team referred cases to in 2013

- Apostleship of the Sea
- Embassy of Seafarer
- ITF Inspectorate
- ITF MOPs Team
- Mission to Seafarers
- MPHPR
- No first referral
- Other maritime welfare agencies
- Other
- SEF
- Union
As always, we try to make it as easy as possible for seafarers to contact the SeafarerHelp team. They can contact us in a wide variety of ways: by telephone on international toll free lines, email, SMS text, Live Chat, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, fax and by post.

The information regarding communication methods is presented in two ways. Chart 6 shows only the method the seafarer initially used to contact the helpline, not how any subsequent contacts were made. Chart 7 shows all the incoming and outgoing contacts of the SeafarerHelp team, including initial contacts.

“We try to make it as easy as possible for seafarers to contact the SeafarerHelp team.”

Do you have a problem with unpaid wages, repatriation, a welfare issue, do you just want to talk to someone? If so we are here to organise help for you.

SeafarerHelp is the only worldwide helpline for seafarers and their families that is:
• Free
• Confidential
• Multi-lingual
• Available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.

SeafarerHelp is supported by:

SeafarerHelp is the only worldwide helpline for seafarers and their families that is:
• Free
• Confidential
• Multi-lingual
• Available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.

“Contact us:
Send SMS messages to:
+44 (0) 7624 818 405
Email us:
help@seafarerhelp.org
Live chat:
www.seafarerhelp.org
Toll Free:
00 800 7323 2737
Request call back:
+44 207 323 2737
Find us online at:
www.seafarerhelp.org

Service provided by:

ISWAN
Depending on what method a seafarer used for the first contact with SeafarerHelp, the team will often explore other methods to continue the contact more easily or securely, such as email. We would be concerned, for example, about dealing with a case totally through Facebook because of the potential lack of confidentiality and would find it difficult to deal with a case completely via SMS text. However, if a seafarer insists on a particular method of contact then we will comply with their request.

It is interesting to note how the contact methods change, even over a short period of time. For example, the number of initial contacts by SMS text fell from 129 in 2012 to 99 in 2013. This may be because texting incurs a charge and other, free methods are just as convenient to use. In contrast, the number of initial case contacts by Facebook rose from 12 in 2013 to 41 this year, and we were contacted a further 110 times in this way for follow-up contact. We think it likely that this increase is due to us using Facebook more effectively since October and seafarers’ familiarity with the medium.

For ISWAN an advantage of Facebook is that it allows us to contact seafarers directly. As seafarers become more aware of our Facebook presence, we expect to see a substantial rise in 2014 in the number of initial contacts using it. Following our promotional campaign on Facebook, the number of likes for the SeafarerHelp page soared by 86,000 to reach nearly 90,000.

There was also a 34% increase in the number of seafarers using Live Chat for their initial contact, from 176 in 2012 to 236 in 2013.

However, the most popular methods of initial contact remain the telephone (up from 353 in 2012 to 523 in 2013) and email (up from 257 to 370 in the same period).
All incoming and outgoing contacts

Chart 7 shows all the incoming and outgoing contacts for the SeafarerHelp team, so gives a more representative picture of the ongoing level of activity. Incoming contacts rose by a modest 2%, while outgoing contacts fell by 24%.

However, the 2012 both incoming and outgoing contact figures do not compare directly with 2013. The 2012 figures included two additional staff who are now working as part of the ISWAN administration, so their communication data is not included in the 2013 figures. Also, in 2012 the SeafarerHelp team updated the Seafarers Centres Directory and undertook research for the port levies report, produced by ISWAN in May 2013, which together required them to make and respond to a very large number of contacts. While the figures are not directly comparable, they do show some broad trends in terms of communication methods.

Chart 7
All incoming and outgoing contacts

Incoming contacts to SeafarerHelp team

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<th>Method</th>
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</tr>
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Outgoing contacts

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<td>Skype</td>
<td>2,422</td>
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<td>1,990</td>
</tr>
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Conclusion

The increase in the number of calls to SeafarerHelp shows that, despite the coming into force of the MLC, there is still a need to support seafarers who face a range of problems while carrying out their occupation.

There are still many employers who do not treat their crews well and these seafarers are forced to turn to organisations like ISWAN for help. On a more positive note, there are signs that the shipping industry is beginning to recover from the worldwide recession, which will provide more opportunities for seafarers.

We hope that over the coming year seafarers will gain greater access to free or cheap communications while onboard. This will not only improve their welfare but will enable them to more easily contact SeafarerHelp if they need us. We are looking at how we can adapt and improve our services to meet the welfare needs of seafarers as they change. We are also looking at how we can work more closely and co-operatively, and share resources, with other organisations concerned with seafarers’ welfare.
“There are signs that the shipping industry is beginning to recover from the worldwide recession, which will provide more opportunities for seafarers.”

Photo on this page: Julián Péter
Back cover: Bigstock
The images of seafarers appearing in this report are not related to those referred to within it.
Contact us

If you would like more information about ISWAN, the SeafarerHelp service or the Seafarers Emergency Fund please contact us directly or check our websites. Details are given below.

Similarly, if you would like to know more about the services we currently provide or what services we could provide for you, or if you can offer financial or other support, please feel free to talk to us using one of the numbers below.

SeafarerHelp telephone: +44 (0) 207 323 2737
SeafarerHelp email: help@seafarerhelp.org
ISWAN office telephone: +44 (0) 300 012 4279
ISWAN email: iswan@iswan.org.uk
ISWAN and SEF: www.seafarerswelfare.org
SeafarerHelp: www.seafarerhelp.org