



Lifeboats



WELCOME TO THE RNLI FAMILY

What to expect when someone in your family volunteers
as operational lifeboat station crew with the RNLI

YOUR FAMILY SUPPORT VOLUNTEER IS:

CONTACT DETAILS:



CONTENTS

This booklet is to help relatives of operational lifeboat station volunteers understand a little bit more about volunteering at a lifeboat station as lifeboat or shore crew, and what that means for both you and your family member.

Read this booklet, then sit down and talk about it with your family member who volunteers and with the rest of your family.

It's a great way to make sure everyone's onboard with what's involved, how they may feel, and how to get used to being part of the RNLI family.

- 04 Welcome**
- 06 What's involved in being an RNLI volunteer?**
- 09 How will your loved one be called out to an incident?**
- 10 What will your loved one deal with?**
- 13 How will the RNLI keep your loved one safe?**
- 14 Worried they're not coping?**
- 16 Managing your own worry and fear**
- 18 Support for you and your loved one**
- 20 Connecting with other RNLI families**
- 21 Families with more than one operational lifeboat station volunteer**
- 22 Get the children involved**
- 24 RNLI Families Programme**
- 26 Contacts and useful links**





WELCOME

Thank you for supporting your family member in their role as an operational lifeboat station volunteer.

We know that behind every RNLI rescue there's a family who have a central role in supporting our lifesaving volunteers, and that's something to be really proud of. However, being a family member of a lifeboat station volunteer can mean making some adjustments.

As part of the RNLI family, you provide your loved one with a warm welcome home after a difficult shout. You save the dinners left to cool when the pager sounds. And you take on extra responsibilities at home when your loved one leaves unexpectedly to carry out a rescue.

And you're not alone. Having an RNLI volunteer in the family connects you with a UK- and Ireland-wide community. A support network of volunteers and their families who all have similar experiences, understand the sacrifices you're making, and share the pride you feel in your loved one's contribution to your community.

Without your support, encouragement and sacrifices – sometimes on a daily basis – we wouldn't be able to provide our communities and those in danger with the help they need in an emergency.

From all of us, thank you for joining our family.





WHAT'S INVOLVED IN BEING AN RNLI VOLUNTEER?

While volunteering at a lifeboat station is a big commitment for the whole family, RNLI volunteers and their families also enjoy many benefits.

When a member of your family becomes an RNLI volunteer they join a close-knit team, gaining:

- world-class training in the different aspects of their role
- the satisfaction of helping the local community
- great experience for their CV.

As a family member you'll also have the opportunity to meet new people, make friends, join in with station events and more.

In order to fulfil their volunteer role, your loved one will be expected to:

- Be on call and leave at a moment's notice to respond to call outs when someone needs them, stepping into potentially dangerous situations to help others. (The number of call outs per year can depend on the lifeboat station your loved one volunteers at. Some stations are busier than others and some use rotas to manage crew availability. Speak to the local team to find out their average number of call outs.)
- Attend regular training exercises.


- Form strong bonds with fellow RNLI volunteers so that they can keep people safe together.

They may also be asked to support station fundraising events.

Your loved one will be fully trained to keep themselves safe as they deal with whatever comes their way. They may be called out to a wide range of emergency situations such as:

- recovering a body from the water
- a person in difficulty in the water
- a missing or vulnerable person
- a person in need of first aid assistance
- a person cut off by the tide
- a vessel in difficulty or overdue
- a pet dog or other animal in the water
- a mud rescue
- a false alarm.

The nature of the call outs your loved one attends will depend on the lifeboat station they volunteer at, the lifeboats based there, and the local geography or coastline. Some call outs can last for hours or the lifeboat might return within minutes. Speak to other volunteers and family members at your local station to find out about the types of incident that they regularly attend.



'I worry about my partner when he goes on a shout but I know the equipment is always of the highest spec and the crew have everything they need'

– Charlotte, Blackpool



Remember ...

For many of our volunteers, joining the RNLI brings with it a new way of life – and the whole family is along for the ride. Schedules may need to change, commitments may be missed, and family members may worry about their loved one's safety. This can be hard to get used to and can put pressure on families. But there are ways to manage this and the RNLI has support in place for when things get stressful.



HOW WILL YOUR LOVED ONE BE CALLED OUT TO AN INCIDENT?

Your loved one will (in the vast majority of cases) receive a pager that lets them know when they need to respond to an emergency. They may also have access, depending on their location, to the RNLI Central Alerting and Messaging System (RCAMS), which sends alerts directly to their mobile phone.

RCAMs can also send text alerts to your mobile phone if you'd like to receive them. This can help to reduce the number of occasions you're left wondering where your loved one has got to or why they haven't arrived as planned. See page 25 for further info.

The sound of the pager is something you'll come to know well. And the pager can go off anywhere, at any time – be it halfway through dinner, when you have just sat down to watch TV, while you're at the supermarket or in the middle of the night. This can be frustrating, but try to remember that the pager going off means that someone's in difficulty and your loved one is one of the few people who's trained to help them. Your loved one could be on their way to save someone's life and that's something you can be incredibly proud of.

This doesn't mean you can't turn the pager off once in a while. By talking to your

'It's a huge mix of emotions when my son's pager goes off but pride is the emotion I feel most. I'm proud of him and the whole lifeboat crew' –

Adelaine, Macduff

loved one, you should be able to agree to some regular downtime when you can be guaranteed you won't hear the pager. This is completely normal; no volunteer is expected to be available all the time – in fact, there will be many times when other things like family and work must come first.

Planning breaks leaves you free for a date night, a family outing or just some peace and quiet together. And if something important is interrupted by the alert, it doesn't mean the moment is lost – consider having an agreement with your loved one that any conversation that gets cut short will be finished later, once you're both in a position to pick it up again.



Remember ...

When the pager goes off, someone is in difficulty and your loved one is one of the few people trained to help.



Things to try ...

Agree downtime from the pager.



WHAT WILL YOUR LOVED ONE DEAL WITH?

Your loved one will be fully trained to handle the different situations they'll find themselves in. But that doesn't mean they won't find it physically and mentally challenging – even exhausting.

They could launch in difficult weather or sea conditions. They may respond to a medical emergency, provide casualty care for an injury, or take part in a prolonged search. Meanwhile, shore-based RNLI volunteers may be responsible for liaising with the coastguard or overseeing the launch and recovery. Whatever your loved one's role and whatever the emergency, they're likely to feel pressure to save lives and ease distress. And on occasions, if the pager goes off in the middle of the night, they'll do it without much sleep.

All of this needs a great deal of physical and mental stamina. This means they'll often need to catch up. They may head to bed early if they've had a call out the night before. They may also be more tired and irritable than usual – try not to take it personally if they are. Remember that support is available for both you and your loved one (turn to page 18 for more information).

As well as the physical challenges, some situations can put extra pressure on your loved one. Some emergency call outs involve extraordinarily difficult circumstances, particularly when severe

injury or loss of life is involved. And because your loved one is supporting the local community, they may find themselves attending a call out that involves someone they know.

Remember ...

Your loved one will be trained to deal with the situations they're going to face as an RNLI volunteer, but there may still be times when they find their role challenging.

Things to try ...

Go to page 18 to find out more about the support that's available for you and your loved one.





HOW WILL THE RNLI KEEP YOUR LOVED ONE SAFE?

All operational lifeboat station volunteers receive extensive training through the RNLI's Competency Framework. This training is undertaken locally at the lifeboat station, and through courses at the RNLI College in Poole, Dorset, and other training venues. They are trained – first and foremost – to keep themselves safe. We want every crew member to come home safely and they can't help a casualty if they get into difficulty themselves.

about their equipment to find out more about how each of these items helps to keep them safe during a call out.

Each class of RNLI lifeboat also has many features designed specifically to keep its volunteer crew safe. Ask your loved one to explain the safety features of the lifeboats at your station so that you can feel confident and put your trust in the lifeboats and equipment they're using.

RNLI training covers every aspect of volunteering at a lifeboat station from social media awareness and chartwork to launch and recovery, casualty care, boathandling, capsizing drills and emergency procedures.

In addition to their training, operational lifeboat station volunteers are provided with bespoke personal protective equipment (PPE). All crew are provided with helmets, safety boots, lifejackets, drysuits or all-weather clothing, flares and personal locator beacons (PLBs). Talk with your loved one



💡 Things to try ...

Speak to your loved one about the safety features of RNLI lifeboats and equipment.



⚠️ Remember ...

- Your loved one will be well trained to keep themselves safe while they're doing what they can to help other people.
- They're provided with world-class bespoke PPE and lifeboats.
- Even though they're out helping the community, their number one priority is getting home safely at the end of the call out.



WORRIED THEY'RE NOT COPING?

Being an operational lifeboat station volunteer can be mentally and physically stressful, and any volunteer can struggle to cope at times. It's important to keep an eye out for signs of mental health difficulty and seek help if you see them.

Signs of heightened stress after a call out are to be expected and your loved one may appear wired, tired or a bit flat in the days that follow. If these symptoms don't last long, they're part of a normal stress response – but if they continue for more than a few weeks, they could be a sign that your loved one needs a bit of extra help.

Everyone's different and needs to be supported in different ways. Some volunteers will come home and share the details of what they've been doing, including things they've found stressful or upsetting, while others may prefer to keep it separate from life at home.

You'll know your loved one and are well-placed to understand if they're working things out on their own (which is OK) or bottling things up (which can be less helpful).

You're not expected to fulfil the role of a counsellor. The best thing you can do, in the first instance, is to listen if they want to talk and acknowledge their feelings without giving advice.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS CAN INCLUDE:

- worrying more than usual
- seeming tired or irritable, even if there hasn't been a late night
- trouble sleeping at night
- muscle tension or restlessness.

SIGNS OF LOW MOOD OR DEPRESSION CAN INCLUDE:

- difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- dramatic changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- anger, sadness or frustration – particularly after a call out
- losing interest in things they used to enjoy
- feelings of worthlessness.



! Remember ...

- Signs of heightened stress after a call out are normal.
- Everyone is different and will need to be supported in different ways.
- Lots of support is available from both the RNLI and external organisations.

💡 Things to try ...

- If you have any concerns about your loved one, speak to them and encourage them to consider seeking additional support.
- Have a look at the information on pages 18 and 27 so you know what support is available if or when your loved one needs it.



MANAGING YOUR OWN WORRY AND FEAR

Your loved one has volunteered to undertake some of the most dangerous tasks in your community. It's totally normal to be concerned for their safety.

This is especially true when an emergency requires their complete focus and attention, which means they won't be free to let you know that they're OK. This can make it extra tough for those waiting at home.

Your loved one is fully trained to deal with the situations they'll find themselves in

It's important to remember that your loved one is fully trained to deal with the situations they'll find themselves in. And that training isn't just focused on saving other people's lives – it's focused on keeping them safe too.

There can be other sources of stress too. If you're their partner, you may find yourself feeling resentful of the time their role takes away from your family and relationship as they spend a great deal of time at the lifeboat station.

Remember ...

- Focus on the outcome and what your loved one is achieving.
- Try to think about the casualty and their family, who need help. This isn't always easy, as the call out may have come at a time that's inconvenient for you and your family.

Things to try ...

Seek support from other volunteer families. When someone in your family volunteers at a lifeboat station, you become part of an extended family. Other volunteer families know about the worry and inconvenience, which makes the community that surrounds your loved one's volunteering team a great place to turn to for advice or support.



SUPPORT FOR YOU AND YOUR LOVED ONE

It's good to talk and there are a number of places you and your loved one can turn to for support.

It's helpful to talk; being listened to by someone we choose can make a significant difference. The following list is not exhaustive but may help you decide who to talk to.

THE LIFEBOAT OPERATIONS MANAGER (LOM) OR OTHER RNLI VOLUNTEERS

They will be able to connect you or your loved one to the support systems that are available to RNLI volunteers and their families.

OTHER RNLI FAMILIES

Speak to other families at your lifeboat station or go to page 20 to find out how to connect with other RNLI families.

RNLI FAMILIES PROGRAMME

The Families Programme provides a range of support and initiatives aimed specifically at the families behind every lifeboat launch or rescue. You can find out more about the Families Programme on page 24 or by emailing families_programme@rnli.org.uk.

GP OR THE NHS/HSE

This is usually the first port of call for most people when they're having a tough time, either physically or mentally.

SUPPORT 24/7

Support 24/7 is a confidential and completely independent service providing practical information, guidance and therapy for a wide range of work, family and personal issues. The service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, by phone, email and online. There is no limit to the number of times you can use it.

Call Support 24/7 (freephone) on **0800 116 4362** (from the UK) or **1800 303407** (from Ireland). You can also text **+44 7909 341229** (standard SMS rates apply), email assistance@workplaceoptions.com, or log in to [RNLI.helpwhereyouare.com](https://rnli.helpwhereyouare.com).

Company Code is RNLI and Company Password is volunteer.

TRAUMA RISK MANAGEMENT (TRiM)

Our peer support system TRiM is designed to help people exposed to traumatic events process them effectively. TRiM practitioners have undergone training to understand the impact of trauma and the importance of confidentiality. Rather than professional counsellors or therapists, they're fellow RNLI volunteers or staff who have good listening skills and can offer practical advice and assistance.

For TRiM support, contact the RNLI Central Operations and Information Room on **0800 011 3129** (from the UK) or **1800 200376** (from Ireland), or email trim@rnli.org.uk.

RNLI WELFARE ADVISER

The RNLI's welfare adviser provides confidential, person-centred support and guidance in times of difficulty.

If you experience personal challenges, it can be reassuring and helpful to share your concerns with someone who's not connected to your station but who understands the RNLI context.

Issues for discussion may include (but are not limited to): work, volunteering, stress, physical and mental health, grief, personal finances, family or relationships.

Our welfare adviser doesn't offer counselling but will listen without judgment and help you identify the most appropriate

support available – both internal and external to the RNLI.

To contact them, call or text **+44 7824 866046** or email welfare@rnli.org.uk.

RNLI BENEVOLENT FUND

The RNLI Benevolent Fund can provide one-off or short-term financial assistance to current or former RNLI lifeboat and shore crew members, and their families. It can offer financial assistance in situations such as bereavement, relationship breakdown, caring for others, long-term disability, short-term illness or injury and for low-income households.

To find out more, call **+44 1202 663202** or email lbf@rnli.org.uk.



There is a range of additional support resources available. Several of these are listed in this booklet on page 26 along with space to add others you may find helpful.

CONNECTING WITH OTHER RNLI FAMILIES

No one understands what it's like to have an operational lifeboat station volunteer in the family as well as other families in the same situation. Because of this, many people find time with other volunteer families to be worthwhile.

There are lots of ways to connect with other volunteer families. Here are a few of the most common:

- Attending lifeboat station social events.
- Visiting the lifeboat station to watch the lifeboats launch on exercise.

- Looking for opportunities to get involved in station life, such as fundraising or public events.
- Joining the RNLI Families Facebook group, where you can find support and friendship from RNLI family members throughout the UK and Ireland: facebook.com/groups/RNLIFamilies.
- Getting in touch with your volunteer Regional Family Support Coordinator by emailing families_programme@rnli.org.uk.

'The station family's brilliant – they're always on hand to lend a hand where they can!'

– Jenny, Blyth



FAMILIES WITH MORE THAN ONE OPERATIONAL LIFEBOAT STATION VOLUNTEER

Some families have a long history with the RNLI. They may have had parents – or even grandparents – who volunteered, which makes the lifeboat station part of a family tradition.

You may find you become invested in the lifeboat station just as deeply as your loved one who volunteers, and that you decide you want to join the crew yourself. Volunteering alongside a loved one on a call out can also mean seeing them in danger, which can raise concerns about volunteering together and how you see this working – both practically and emotionally. It can also create practical challenges, such as who'll look after other members

of your family if you're both on a call out. These are important conversations to have together, as a family, when applying to join the crew.

Volunteering as a parent sets an example for your children that promotes selflessness, which means they may decide to continue the tradition into the next generation by volunteering when they're old enough.

If your current volunteering relative is someone other than one of your children, you may like to think about how you'll feel if your children decide to volunteer. Perhaps you could also speak to the parents of other young lifeboat station volunteers.



GET THE CHILDREN INVOLVED

If you have children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews, you might like to think about ways they can get involved. This page has been written with children in mind, but some of these ideas might be relevant to other family members too. Most children understand that RNLI lifeboat and shore crew volunteers play a vital role in the community and are really proud of their loved one for volunteering.

Here are a few ways you can get your children involved in volunteer life.

PREPARING THEM AHEAD OF TIME

- Speak with your lifeboat operations manager or station manager and find out if it's possible for your children to have a tour of the lifeboat station.
- Introduce them to the pager system and help them understand what it means:

that when it goes off, it's the sound of someone calling for help.

- Talk them through what happens when the pager goes off, and the role their loved one plays in that process. If they're old enough to understand,

'I'm happy my dad is a volunteer, he is very brave'

– Harry, Blyth



let them know what the call outs may involve and how long their relative may be away.

- Teach them about RNLI training and equipment so that they understand it keeps volunteers safe as well as helping them to save lives.
- Discuss a routine way to say goodbye when their loved one has to race out the door – and a way to welcome them home when they return.
- Discuss how much their loved one is likely to want to talk about their call out once they get home.

DURING A CALL OUT

- Let them know what you know. For example: when their loved one was called out, where they are and when you think they may be home.
- If they're worried, let them know that's OK and remind them about the training and equipment the RNLI provides to keep the lifeboat crew safe while they carry out a rescue.
- Stick to your normal routine as much as possible – children often find routine reassuring.

AFTER A CALL OUT

- Follow through on the routines you agreed ahead of time, such as how they welcome their loved one home.
- Depending on what you've agreed (and what is age-appropriate) let them know a bit about the call out.
- Help them understand that their loved one may be tired and so need a nap at an unusual time. Or that they may feel upset or stressed. Help children to understand that it's OK to feel any or all of these things after a challenging or difficult incident.
- Children often blame themselves for a change in a loved one's behaviour or mood. If their loved one is upset or stressed after a call out, let children know that things will be OK and reassure them that it's not their fault.





RNLI FAMILIES PROGRAMME

We know that rescues can only happen with the support of RNLI families, so we've wanted to say thank you and give you a helping hand if you ever need it.

The RNLI Families Programme provides the following initiatives and support for the families behind every lifeboat launch.

RNLI FAMILIES PROGRAMME SUPPORT TEAM

Who's it for? The families of all operational lifeboat station volunteers.

What's available? The RNLI Families Programme has a network of volunteers, including Regional Family Support Coordinators and station-based Family Support Volunteers, who provide information and support to the families of lifeboat and shore crew members.

BRANDED CLOTHING FOR CHILDREN

Who's it for? All volunteers and staff with a young RNLI enthusiast in their lives.

What's available? RNLI-branded lifeboat station clothing is available exclusively to RNLI volunteers and staff. Designed for children aged 2 years and above, the range includes hoodies, polo shirts and T-shirts. Email families_programme@rnli.org.uk for more information.

RCAMS: Call out notification for a family member

When the pager goes off, lifeboat and shore crew respond immediately – often without having time to let family know that they've been called out.

RCAMS allows crew to add an extra contact to the system who will then receive a notification every time the pager goes off.

To add an additional contact:

1. Log in to RCAMS.
2. Click the menu button (top left).
3. Choose 'My Settings'.
4. Scroll to 'Set up RCAMS to notify someone when you receive a call out alert'.
5. Select 'Yes'.
6. Follow the on-screen instructions.

Once set up, the new contact will be sent a notification every time the system sends a call out alert.

Email rcams@rnli.org.uk for more information.

RNLI FAMILIES FACEBOOK GROUP

Who's it for? Any close relative (aged 18 and over) of an operational lifeboat station volunteer.

What's available? A place for families to find friendship and support, and to chat with other RNLI family members about their proud moments, worries and shared experiences. Join the group at facebook.com/groups/RNLI Families.

CONTRIBUTION TO A LIFEBOAT STATION FAMILY EVENT

Who's it for? All lifeboat station families.

What's available? An annual financial contribution to a lifeboat station family event where all members of the lifeboat station family are invited, including children. Some stations host barbecues or pizza and movie nights, or arrange a trip to the cinema, bowling alley, a pantomime or local swimming pool. Speak to other families at your station to see if any family events are happening soon, or email families_programme@rnli.org.uk to find out how to request a contribution.

FREE STORM FORCE MEMBERSHIP

Who's it for? The children and grandchildren (aged under 11) of current operational lifeboat station volunteers.

What's available? Free membership of Storm Force, the RNLI's club for children under 11 years old. Members receive an exclusive membership pack and four magazines a year. Claim your free membership by calling our Supporter Experience Team on 0300 300 0063

(from the UK) or 01 511 9836 (from Ireland) or by emailing supporterexperience@rnli.org.uk. Please provide the name, address and date of birth of the child, plus the full name and ID number of the lifeboat/shore crew member who's claiming the subscription.

RNLI COLLEGE DISCOUNTS

Who's it for? All operational lifeboat station volunteers and their immediate family.

What's available? Generous discounts on the usual bed and breakfast rates at the RNLI College in Poole, Dorset. Crew members attending residential training courses at the college can also bring their family with them for a discounted charge per night per additional guest sharing their room. Rooms allow up to one additional adult and two children. For more information and to make a booking, call +44 300 300 7654 or email rnli_college@rnli.org.uk. The college team will need the ID number of the lifeboat/shore crew member making the reservation, their lifeboat station and role. Please note that you can't use this discount online.

BLUE LIGHT DISCOUNT CARD

Who's it for? RNLI staff and operational volunteers (unfortunately this scheme is not currently available in the Republic of Ireland).

What's available? Access to hundreds of offers and discounts at high street shops, restaurants and online retailers. Go to bluelightcard.co.uk to find out more or email families_programme@rnli.org.uk.

EMERGENCY CONTACT SHEET

There's always someone you can call in an emergency, whether it's someone from the lifeboat station team, a friend or a family member.

Below, you'll find space to note down those important numbers.

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COMMON RNLI ACRONYMS:

ALB - All-weather lifeboat
ALC - All-weather Lifeboat Centre (Poole, Dorset)
COIR - Central Operations Information Room (Poole, Dorset)
DLA - Deputy Launching Authority
DoDo - Drive-on Drive-off (lifeboat launch and recovery carriage)
ILB - Inshore lifeboat
ILC - Inshore Lifeboat Centre (Cowes, Isle of Wight)
IRB - Inshore rescue boat (mainly used by RNLI lifeguards)
IRH - Inshore rescue hovercraft
LMA - Lifeboat Medical Adviser

LOM - Lifeboat Operations Manager
LPO - Lifeboat Press Officer
MOB - Man overboard (training exercise)
PPE - Protective personal equipment
RCAMS - RNLI Callout and Messaging System
RWC - Rescue watercraft (jet ski used by RNLI lifeguards)
SAR - Search and rescue
SHE - Safety, Health and Environment
SIMS - Systems and Information Management System (computer software onboard lifeboats)
SLARS - Shannon Launch and Recovery System

SUPPORT

Below you'll find a list of other sources of support.

Visit your GP

Support 24/7

Freephone:

0800 116 4362 (from the UK)

1800 303407 (from Ireland)

Online: [RNLI.helpwhereyouare.com](https://www.rnli.org.uk/help/where-you-are)

(Company Code is RNLI and

Company Password is volunteer)

Mind UK

[mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)

[mind.org.uk/about-us/mind-cymru](https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/mind-cymru)

(available in Welsh)

Phone: 0300 123 3393

Email: info@mind.org.uk

Samaritans

116 123 (from the UK and Ireland)

Email: jo@samaritans.org

nhs.uk/mental-health

headspace.com

breathingspace.scot

lifelines.scot

mentalhealthireland.ie

mentalhealthwales.net

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION:

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Thank you to all the families who make up the wider RNLI family. Whether you're helping to save lives as a lifeboat or shore crew volunteer on the frontline, or are supporting a loved one in their lifesaving role behind the scenes, we couldn't do it without you.

You're all lifesavers.



Lifeboats

Royal National Lifeboat Institution, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1HZ
0300 300 9990 (from the UK), 01 511 9836 (from Ireland),
+44 1202 663234 (from any other country)

RNLI.org



This resource is based on similar resources created by Scottish Mountain Rescue, Lifelines Scotland and Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ). We'd like to thank these organisations for their input and assistance with the development of this booklet.

Photos: Stephen Duncombe, Nick Mailer, RNLI/Jaye Mackay, Nigel Millard, Kester Sheppard, Nathan Williams)

The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution, a charity registered in England and Wales (209603), Scotland (SC037736), the Republic of Ireland (CHY 2678 and 20003326), the Bailiwick of Jersey (14), the Isle of Man (1308 and 006329F), the Bailiwick of Guernsey and Alderney, of West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1HZ