



Bristol Crisis Service for Women

HELPLINE VOLUNTEER INFORMATION

Bristol Crisis Service for Women was set up in 1986. Our aims are:

- to offer support to women in emotional distress, particularly to those who self-injure, and
- to develop services, and raise awareness of self-injury and mental health issues, through training and providing information.

We are a women-only organisation and we work from a feminist perspective.

THE HELPLINE SERVICE & ETHOS

We run a helpline service on Friday and Saturday evenings, from 9pm to 12.30am and on Sunday evenings, from 6pm-9pm, from our office in central Bristol. Callers' experiences vary considerably, but consistently 60-70% of calls concern self-injury, 40-45% sexual abuse and around 25% depression and isolation. The helpline is a space for any female of any age to talk. Women who ring in are listened to, and offered support, which is confidential, non-judgmental and accepting. Sometimes, for a woman who has been very isolated with her distress, this may be the first time she has talked about her feelings or experiences.

WHO VOLUNTEERS FOR THE HELPLINE?

We have volunteers with a range of ages, who bring a variety of life experiences and backgrounds to this work. We strive for diversity within the team that is also representative of our callers and the wider community. Some volunteers may have had their own experience of mental health issues. Others may want to develop new skills and experiences, maybe as a bridge into work, or a change of direction. The volunteering experience also opens up opportunities to meet new people and develop as an individual. There is no maximum age limit, but there is a minimum age of 20. We regret that currently our premises are not wheelchair accessible.

TRAINING

Before working on the helpline, volunteers are required to complete our training course, which takes place over about 8 weeks, where we cover basic counselling skills, and a range of relevant issues. As part of the training we also expect volunteers to be prepared to look at their own feelings and attitudes to issues covered. The training course is accredited through the Open College Network (OCN), a national accreditation body, at level 2. The course does involve keeping a learning journal and there is also ongoing assessment throughout the training. We offer a mid-way review during training to evaluate how it is going, and to address any difficulties.

AFTER THE TRAINING

If a volunteer successfully completes the training, she will be expected to commit to working on the helpline for one evening every two weeks, for a minimum of one year. She will always work with at least one other volunteer. All helpline volunteers receive regular support: they have individual peer support the day after working on the helpline, from an experienced volunteer, and all volunteers will be asked to provide this peer support after a period of time on the line. On-going training is provided every six weeks in relevant topics relating to helpline work, volunteers are encouraged to attend as many of these as possible. Volunteers also receive Individual Reviews with the helpline project worker at six to twelve monthly intervals to discuss any issues and development needs. We expect volunteers to actively participate in all of these processes as part of the ongoing volunteering commitment.

There are also opportunities to become involved in supporting events, training and promoting the service, as well as an opportunity to participate in the decision making and running of the organisation. The Management Group meets monthly, and volunteers are welcome to attend and become involved in activities such as fundraising, development, finance, publicity and marketing.

EXPENSES

Reimbursement of travel expenses, carer's costs (eg childcare) and some other out-of-pocket expenses are available to those who need them during training, volunteering & meetings, subject to agreed allowances & receipts. We also provide a free taxi home at the end of the helpline shift.

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