

Helpline Volunteer Meeting 10th October 2022 Minutes

In attendance: Chris Baker, Tatyana, Saskia, Fen Rose, Michele, Graham, Jennifer, Eloise, Anna, John Hammond, Helen Bashford, Jack Mason.

The meeting was opened by Chris introducing himself as the interim Volunteer & Helpline Co-ordinator and going through the agenda.

Shadowing:

Chris had received enquiries about how long this process lasts. He explained that it is entirely up to each respective new volunteer and the mentors as to the length of the shadowing. Some volunteers will feel ready to take calls after a couple of shifts and others may feel they would like longer, there is no right or wrong to this.

Coverage:

He went on to explain that from now on there should usually be two people on shift in the office each time which will help with the shadowing. It will mean that two people are taking calls and supporting each other at the same time. Switchboard would be liable if someone working alone had an accident. To achieve this, volunteers are encouraged, if they can, to come into the office rather than work from home. Chris stated that if there are volunteers who want to work together ongoing they are encouraged to book their shifts so they are on together each time. Hopefully, working more consistently in the office will build stronger connections through the team and make your volunteering more enjoyable and fulfilling.

Listening to calls:

When volunteers are shadowing it is totally possible to hear both sides of the call by having the phone hands free option in use. But it is essential for the mentor to ask the caller and seek their consent to the other volunteer to listening in to the call. You don't need consent to listen to just the volunteer taking the call.

Call Backs:

During Covid and the lockdown the helpline volunteers started to offer a regular call back service for those who, due to the situation, needed an ongoing contact with the organisation. This offered a support system to vulnerable callers who otherwise wouldn't have coped with lockdown and all the implications entailed.

However, the necessity of this call back system and lifeline of sorts should no longer be required. Therefore, going forward it is requested that volunteers encourage the caller to ring us rather than to rely on a call back service. If there is a genuinely vulnerable caller who for a significant reason cannot call us and has specifically asked us for a call back, then we won't refuse. An action can be created in Charity Log for the call back, however it should be made clear to the caller that this will not be on an ongoing basis.

Support:

The WhatsApp group is a good way to support each other and to keep in touch. You are also allowed to create smaller WhatsApp groups if there are two or more volunteers who wish to keep in

touch in-between shifts.

Chris as Helpline Co-ordinator is always happy to support in any way he can and can be contacted via the WhatsApp or by email. He is online a lot so will likely respond reasonably quickly.

Graham explained that part of the role of lead volunteer was that he can act as a go between if anyone feels they cannot approach Chris. He is also happy to be contacted in relation to any support he can provide and is open to a WhatsApp anytime and he will reply asap. Graham will also be available via WhatsApp on a Wednesday and Thursday eve if a volunteer on shift needs support. Although he cannot guarantee to answer straight away, he will attempt to reply within a 24 hour time period. Therefore, any immediate issues or Safeguarding issues should be directed to Chris, Raf or John who is standing in for Jacob at the moment.

Voice Mails and Web Chat communication:

From now on any voicemails and web-chats left in-between shifts and outside shift hours will be listened to or looked at initially by Chris. Where there is an action that needs to be carried out by a volunteer it will be as a CharityLog action. It is then the volunteer's role to carry out this action and to update CharityLog as required on the next shift. This should alleviate the time on shift spent listening to voicemails and make it easier for volunteers to see exactly what actions need to be done during a shift. Emails will still need to be worked through as they currently are during shifts.

Monday Shifts:

It is still the intention long term to open the helpline on a Monday eve as well as Wednesday and Thursday. However, this will be looked at once all the current shifts are being covered on a consistent basis. Chris noted that in the past 6 months the helpline has been closed on average once a month due to lack of available volunteers and that 30% of all available shifts had not been covered.

Before Chris handed over to the guests at the meeting, he shared that it is his intention to have a guest speaker from our projects, the board of trustees or another agency attend each volunteer meeting. This is so that they can get to know who the helpline volunteers are but more importantly we can hear what each project does, who oversees each one, and how best to refer to them.

We were then introduced to Jack Mason (Project co-ordinator), Helen Bashford (Older People's Project) and John Hammond (Dementia Group and currently Interim C.E.O.)

Older Peoples Project:

Helen explained that the project came about because service users demonstrated a need for it. Older people can feel more vulnerable and isolated and cut off from the LGBTQ community. Especially as they may not be able to get out and about as they could at one point, and they find it more difficult to be out after dark. So, there was a need for somewhere for the older people to go and socialise or just be themselves. People do not have to chat, and some find it very useful just sitting in the group. Helen and Jack facilitate the group and help to ensure it runs smoothly. They also visit people at home or at care homes and do assessment work prior to any new member joining in order to check they can meet their needs. It is a very inclusive and small group of approx 25 which means there is an informality and openness to the group.

The project provides those aged 50+ with several regular social activities, meet ups and trips. It also

provides information and hosts workshops about services for older people and makes connections for people within the community and to other services. They have 2 meetings a month one of which is a Tuesday Breakfast club.

Although the project is not a befriending service they do make visits to care homes and any of our volunteers who feel they would like to help with this essential part of the project can email Helen at: helen.bashford@switchboard.org.uk to find out more.

If we get a caller who we feel may benefit from the project Helen has requested that we explain they need to meet with Helen or Jack first, and not simply turn up. In this case please take the details and create an action in Charity Log and assign it to the "Older People Project" user in the same way that we pass calls between volunteers by assigning to "Helpline Volunteer", and Helen or Jack will contact them.

Each project connected with Switchboard has a newsletter and Chris has kindly agreed to circulate this to Helpline Volunteers in future. Relating to the Older Peoples Project it will outline events that they have coming up which we can then tell a caller about. However, it is important to bear in mind that Helen needs to meet with any new member before an event so please ensure there is enough time for this to be done.

The next Volunteer Meeting will be held on Tuesday 15th November 2022 and the Domestic Abuse Project will be attending. They will be introducing their services as well as providing some guidance for us on who and when to refer to their project.

Please do endeavour to attend as some very useful and beneficial skills and information to use on the phone line will be passed on.