

CITIZENS' COUNSELLING CENTRE
VOLUNTEER COUNSELLOR TRAINING PROGRAM
QUESTION AND ANSWER GUIDE

The Citizens' Counselling Centre appreciates your interest in our volunteer training program.

The Centre has been providing quality volunteer counselling to the Greater Victoria community since 1969. The Centre is a non-profit society governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. All volunteer counsellors automatically become members of the Greater Victoria Citizens' Counselling Centre Society and have full voting privileges at each annual meeting. The Centre is funded by the United Way, the BC Gaming Branch, various grants, fees for services and through our fundraising efforts.

We offer individual, couples and group counselling to adults. Clients are most often coping with "the problems of living" and are needing psychological, not psychiatric assistance. We cover a wide variety of life issues including relationship difficulties, communication, changes in status or roles (grieving/loss, divorce, illness, career changes, etc.), situational depression, anger, self esteem and historical or current abuse. We focus on helping clients find their own solutions and the means to make constructive changes. Clients receive one to ten sessions of counselling and are charged a fee for service according to family income from \$10 to \$60 per session. No one is denied access to counselling due to a lack of money.

We offer one nine month training program each year starting in October and meeting one night each week plus two weekends, until the end of June. We take applications from March through May.

What is a "Volunteer Counsellor"?

Volunteer counsellors are trained by professionals to provide volunteer counselling services, and receive ongoing professional supervision of their counselling. This training does not give them the formal credentials of a professional counsellor; however, it does give them the skills to provide a high quality of service to our Centre clients and to be highly valued within Victoria's mental health community.

What is the training program like?

You meet on Thursday evenings from 6:30-9:30 pm in a group of 18 to 20 participants, a professional facilitator and assistants. There are two mandatory weekend workshops, one of which is a residential weekend held out of town. There are two components to the training, the personal growth component and the skill development component, combined for an experiential learning experience.

In the personal growth component, emphasis is on enhancing self-awareness, empathy and communication skills. In this portion of the training, you will be working on your own personal issues in an intensive group process and witnessing and supporting your fellow trainees in doing the same. Because this is a group process and issues may come up for you within this group setting, any issues that come up that pertain to the group will be addressed as much as possible with the group and with the facilitators. The deeper personal work involves your family systems exploration, clarifying your personal values and biases and experiential process work.

In the skills training, emphasis is on you being fully present, self aware and empathic with the client. Skills and techniques taught include: establishing a strong working relationship, active listening, working with a client's story, working on solutions, working with the interaction between thoughts, feelings and actions, working to help people find motivation for change, working with family dynamics, and considering the impacts of trauma on the client. During this portion of your training you will team with two fellow trainees and co-counsel, audio taping your

sessions and receiving feedback from your triad. This is an additional 18 hours outside of your weekly commitment over 6 months.

You will have access to our on-line manual and you will need to do weekly on-line readings.

Is there a cost for the training?

While it costs the Centre approximately \$3,000 to train each volunteer, there is no monetary cost for the training. The only cost is for food and accommodation for the residential weekend (**\$200**). In exchange for approximately 200 hours of quality training, experiential learning and practice, you agree to return 250 sessions of direct client contact and supervision.

Upon entering the training program you will be required to sign a Letter of Agreement whereby you agree to abide by the principles and work commitments set out by the Centre. This includes ensuring your full attention and attendance to the training program and fulfilling your **250 session commitment** by seeing a minimum of two clients a week (approximately 2-3 hours each week) after the training has been completed.

What happens when I've completed the training portion? How do I return my hours?

Towards the end of the second half of your training you will begin seeing individual clients that are matched to your counselling experience and you will receive support through regular supervision. You are required to attend a minimum of 1/2 hour supervision each month. Supervision is offered on an individual and group basis.

Why do people volunteer for this program?

Participants value the depth of personal exploration offered, the quality of training that makes a noticeable difference in their interactions with their own family, friends, and co-workers, and the experience of being a part of a group of committed, caring individuals. In addition we offer various graduate trainings for ongoing learning as well as community celebrations, as a way of enhancing involvement with your fellow trainees and the Centre community.

Participants value the opportunity to help others in the community who could not otherwise afford such service. They also enjoy the type of contact and learning that counselling offers which they do not get in their work life. For those considering counselling as a career it provides valuable direct experience and may enhance their application to college and university programs.

The training itself does not give you the qualifications to become a professional counsellor. However it may enhance your ability to secure work in related areas when listed on your resume as a volunteer experience and training.

What stops people from volunteering for this program?

This program requires a large, long-term commitment and not everyone can find the time to attend regular evenings and weekends over the course of a year, nor commit to meeting with clients for an additional two to three years. **If you are looking at job prospects outside of Victoria or planning anything that would prevent you from fulfilling this commitment this would NOT be the time to apply. Furthermore, if you are currently, or have recently, struggled with issues related to your mental health, this may not be the appropriate time to volunteer with us. The training can be an intensive experience and we ask that you have a numbers of years of stability with your health before volunteering in our counselling program.**

Participants need to be willing to look within themselves at a deep level, to apply the counselling models to their own lives, to explore who they present themselves to be and to notice if this aligns with who they authentically are. This can be a profound learning experience, but is not for everyone. The training program requires energy, humility, curiosity, openness and compassion just as counselling requires the same.

What will I have at the end of the program?

You will be qualified as a volunteer to offer valuable counselling services through Citizens' Counselling. We hope you can say what others have said, "it has been a remarkable life changing experience", that you "come away with a deepened sense of self and relationship with both yourself and others", and an "ability to be present with clients in a way that helps and heals".

Are there more opportunities at the Centre once I have completed my 250 sessions?

Many volunteers continue to contribute to the Centre in the areas of their greatest interest. This might include working with individual clients with particular issues, offering couples counselling, or offering specialized group work. Another option is to serve as an assistant to the facilitator in a training group. We have volunteers from our training program as far back as 1989 who have completed thousands of hours and continue to volunteer, co-facilitate groups, and promote Citizens' Counselling Centre events.

There are many applicants. On what basis do you select participants?

We select a diverse group of individuals of different ages, occupations, and backgrounds. The majority of people accepted into the program are over 30 as most of our clients ask for counsellors their age or older. We look at your ability to commit to attending and completing the training program, and your ability to honour the commitment of 250 sessions of service to the community.

It helps to have had some previous experience with volunteer work particularly in the area of human services. It also helps to have been a client in individual, couples or group counselling and to be committed to your own personal growth process.

And, honestly, we look for our ability to connect with you as a self-aware, compassionate person -- what we would want our clients to experience. We take only 18 to 20 individuals per training group but get many more applications than that, so if you are not selected this year we do encourage you to apply again. We also select a backup group which we draw upon if one of the 18 initially selected withdraws from the training program before it starts or in the first weeks after the start date.

What happens after I've sent in my application?

Staff review all applications and select individuals to come for one of several group interviews. Applications are accepted from March through May and interviews are scheduled for late June and early July. By mid July a letter will be sent to those who do not receive interviews.

What happens after my interview?

If you are accepted into the training program you will receive a telephone call when all the interviews are complete, inviting you to join the upcoming training group. You will receive a letter in August with more details.

If you are not accepted or are on our back up list you will receive a letter by mid August.

Both the training program and the actual counselling are demanding, but the rewards are great. Citizens' Counselling Centre thanks you for your interest and your desire to be part of our important volunteer community in Victoria.