

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 General Meeting. The Centre is funded by various grants, our fee for service and through our fundraising efforts.

We offer Individual and Couples Counselling and psycho-educational groups 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 drug and alcohol issues. 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 ten-month training program each year starting in September and meeting one night each week plus two weekends, until the end of June. We take applications every Spring – generally mid-March to mid-May. **Covid restrictions may affect how the training is delivered.**

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 one evening per week (on Tuesdays) from 6:00-9:00pm in a group of 20 participants, a trainer (professional) and 2-3 training assistants. There are two mandatory weekend workshops. The training has two components – a personal growth component and a skill development component. They combine for a rich 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 training team. 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 client-counsellor 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 35-40 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. 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?

Toward the end of the training a training evening will be devoted to a 3-hour Orientation to client and building procedures. We take care to help you feel ready and get off to a good start. 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 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.

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.

The training and hours commitment can be an intensive experience and we ask that you have a number of years of stability with your physical and mental health before volunteering in our counselling program.

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 a maximum of 20 individuals per training group but receive between 60-80 applications each year. We also select a short back up list which we draw upon if one of those 20 initially selected withdraws from the training program before it starts.

What happens after I've sent in my application?

Staff review all applications, and the trainer selects individuals to come for one of several group interviews. Applications are accepted mid-March to mid-May and interviews are scheduled in May and June. By mid-June 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 welcome letter via email in August with more details.

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