

CITIZENS' COUNSELLING CENTRE

VOLUNTEER COUNSELLOR TRAINING PROGRAM

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 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 need 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.), anxiety, situational depression, anger, self-esteem and historical drug and alcohol issues. We support our clients in learning more about themselves and discovering their own answers and solutions. Some clients benefit from a listening ear and a sounding board. Other clients find developing strategies and accomplishing goals helpful. Clients receive 1 to 11 weekly counselling sessions and are charged a fee for service based on household income, ranging from \$15 to \$75 per session. No one is denied access to counselling due to financial hardship.

We offer one ten-month training program each year, starting in September and ending in June. We meet one evening each week, plus three weekends (Saturday and Sunday 9:00-4:00, the first weekend includes a Friday evening), until the end of June. We take applications every Spring – generally April to the end of May.

What is a "Volunteer Counsellor"?

Volunteer counsellors are trained by a team of professionals to provide volunteer counselling services and receive ongoing professional supervision of their counselling. This training does not confer the formal credentials of a professional counsellor; however, it prepares volunteer counsellors with the skills to provide high-quality service to our Centre's clients and to offer valuable contributions within Victoria's mental health community.

While this is a volunteer position, it is not considered an entry-level role. The Centre seeks individuals who can demonstrate a sustained commitment to their own personal growth and who have established support systems, in whatever form they may take.

While each person's path will look different, an ongoing investment in self-development and a demonstrated commitment to community responsibility are required for this role.

What is the training program like?

You will meet one evening per week (on Tuesdays) from 6:00-9:00 pm in a group of 18 participants, along with a training team comprised of two professional trainers and a volunteer training assistant. There are three mandatory weekend workshops- one in the Fall, Winter, and Spring. Since each week covers a different topic, regular and consecutive attendance is required. Trainees are permitted three absences for sickness or family emergencies, but not more than two in a row. More than three absences will be reviewed by the Trainers. A discussion will be held with the trainee as to whether continuation in the training program is feasible.

The training has two components – a personal growth component and a skill development component. This combination makes for a rich experiential learning experience. Because this is a group process, personal issues may come up unexpectedly. Though we will aim to support you in identifying these issues, it is expected that you will have external personal and/or professional support in place.

In the personal growth component, emphasis is on enhancing self-awareness, empathy, and communication skills. In this portion of the training, you will work on your personal issues in an intensive group process and witness and support your fellow trainees in doing the same. Because this is a group process, any issues that may arise and pertain to the group will be addressed as much as possible with the group and 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 presence, self-awareness and empathic engagement with the client. Skills and techniques that are taught include: establishing a strong client-counsellor working relationship, active listening, exploring a client's story, working on solutions, exploring the interaction between thoughts, feelings and actions, finding motivation for change, working with family dynamics, and considering the impacts of trauma on the client.

During the Spring, you will be matched with two other trainees to integrate and apply the counselling skills that you have been learning in training. These sessions will take place outside of training hours, over 12 weeks, with each weekly group meeting spanning approximately 3 hours weekly. These sessions are audio taped and sent to the Trainers for feedback on your skill development.

There will be reading requirements and homework assignments outside of training time. These expectations will be shared at the start of training.

Is there a cost for the training?

It costs the Centre approximately \$3,000 to train each volunteer. There is a sliding scale fee ranging from \$250-\$400 to each trainee for the training- this fee covers a portion of the expenses that are accrued through the 10-month training. This fee will be determined based on affordability.

In exchange for approximately 200 hours of quality training, experiential learning, and practice, you agree to return 200 sessions of direct client contact and supervision. This is expected to include a minimum of 150 direct client hours, the remaining 50 hours may be comprised of supervision, graduate training, and other Centre-approved hours.

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

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 forth by the Centre. This includes ensuring your full attention and attendance throughout the training program and, following completion, committing to a minimum of 85 volunteer hours in your first year—typically involving seeing 2–3 clients per week for one session each. If this minimum is not met, a prompt review of your ongoing commitment fulfillment will be conducted. These hours count toward your overall 200-session commitment, which requires seeing a minimum of two client sessions per week (approximately 2–3 hours each week) until completion.

If you are unable to honour your counselling commitment at Citizens', such as in the event of an unsolvable crisis, you will be requested to repay the Centre for the cost of the training and loss of service to the Centre (\$3000) that will be prorated based on the hours completed.

What else should I know about applying to volunteer?

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

You will have ongoing support from an experienced administrative team available Monday through Friday during office hours. Please note that you are required to attend at least 1/2 hour of supervision each month. Professional Supervision is offered on an individual and group basis.

We require a recent criminal record check to be submitted to us. If you do not have one, we will assist you in obtaining this document at no fee.

Why do people volunteer for this program?

Participants value the depth of personal exploration offered, the quality of training and its subsequent impacts 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 training sessions for ongoing learning, as well as community celebrations, to enhance 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, this training 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 volunteer experience and training.

What stops people from volunteering for this program?

This program requires a long-term, multi-year 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 2-3 clients per week 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 as, and to notice whether this aligns with who they authentically are. This can be a profound learning experience, but it is not for everyone. The training program requires energy, humility, curiosity, openness, and compassion, just as counselling does.

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

What will I have at the end of training?

You will be eligible to volunteer and 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 that you have 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 200 sessions?

Many volunteers continue to contribute to the Centre in the areas of greatest interest to them. This might include working with individual clients with particular issues, offering couples counselling, or facilitating specialized group work. Volunteers may also have the opportunity to serve as an assistant trainer in the Training Program. We have active volunteers from our training program dating back to 1989, some of whom 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 200 sessions of service to the community.

It helps to have some prior experience with volunteer work, particularly in 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 18 individuals per training group but receive 80+ applications each year.** We also select a short backup list, which we draw upon if one of those 18 initially selected withdraws from the training program before it starts.

What happens after I've sent in my application?

The Trainers and Executive Director review all applications and select which individuals will be invited to attend small-group interviews.

Applications are accepted from April to the end of May, and **interviews are scheduled in July.** 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 and Training Agreement by email in August with more details.

We will need you to provide references who can speak to your long-term commitments and offer a well-rounded perspective on your character, including strengths and areas for growth.

If you are not accepted or are on our backup 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.