

Factsheet 20 : Mental Health Support for Volunteers

We have seen thousands of people across Cambridgeshire sign up to be volunteers since the start of the Coronavirus Pandemic, they join the thousands of people who were already volunteering and are out in our communities every day helping people to manage through the crisis.

It is vitally important that we make sure that your volunteers are supported and well managed. Part of this is about ensuring that they get someone to talk to if they encounter situations that have concerned and upset them and that those looking after and managing the volunteers are able to recognise there is a problem and know what to do.

Vicarious trauma

This issue of volunteers experiencing stress is sometimes called vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress. It can happen to someone after they have been empathetically supporting someone in desperate need and be a result of long exposure to many cases, or in response to a single harrowing experience.

Here are a few signs of how to spot if your staff member or volunteer is suffering from vicarious trauma:

- Experiencing lingering feelings of anger, rage and sadness about the victimisation
- Becoming overly involved emotionally
- Experiencing bystander guilt, shame, feelings of self-doubt
- Being preoccupied with thoughts outside of the work situation
- Over identification (having horror and rescue fantasies)
- Loss of hope, pessimism, cynicism
- Distancing, numbing, detachment, cutting people off, staying busy - avoiding listening to stories of traumatic experiences
- Difficulty in maintaining professional boundaries, such as overextending self (trying to do more than is in the role)

There are a few methods you can employ to help your staff and volunteers to reduce the risk of vicarious trauma:

- Increase self-observation - recognise and chart signs of stress, vicarious trauma and burnout
- Ensure they take care of themselves emotionally - engage in relaxing and self-soothing activities, nurture self-care
- Ensure they look after their physical and mental wellbeing
- Maintain a healthy work/life balance
- Set realistic goals
- Don't allow them to take on responsibility for the other person's wellbeing; supply them with tools to look after themselves
- Balance their caseload – ensure a mix of more and less traumatised clients
- Give them regular breaks, and time off when they need to
- Encourage them to seek social support from colleagues, family members
- Employ a buddy system
- Use peer support and opportunities to debrief
- Offer training opportunities
- If required offer time-limited group or individual therapy

The information below is adapted from material produced by the BMA, Freedom from Torture and the Helplines Partnership by NAVCA

What you need to be doing

If you are responsible for volunteers, even if you are also a volunteer you need to make sure that you are looking after people. It is important that you put in place a system for managing your volunteers, and that this includes some of the points in the checklist above.

The Support Cambridgeshire website has some useful information on managing volunteers
<https://www.supportcambridgeshire.org.uk/volunteering/volunteering-fact-sheets/>

There is general information on volunteering available on the CCVS site and Hunt Forum Site

CCVS: <http://www.cambridgecvs.org.uk/Volunteering/Volunteer%20Managers%20Support>

Hunts Forum: <https://www.huntsforum.org.uk/coronavirus/organisation-response/>

The NCVO site has lots of information <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/your-team>

A free service for volunteers who need to talk.

We recognise that not everyone who is managing volunteers will have the skills or the desire to talk through issues with volunteers. We have worked with the Police to set up a process whereby volunteers who need to talk are able to have conversations with Police staff who are experienced in supporting people who may have been affected by Vicarious trauma. The staff are not counsellors, and obviously they have to report and act on any criminal acts that may be involved, but they will be experienced in listening and helping. If you have a volunteer who would like to take this opportunity for a chat contact Hunts Forum info@huntsforum.org.uk or CCVS enquiries@cambridgecvs.org.uk and we will make an appointment.

Other places to find help

Keep Your Head

This is a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough website that has lots of information about mental health services and ways of helping people. It is a reliable source of information supported by Cambridgeshire County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group

<https://www.keep-your-head.com/#body>

The Heart and Soul Listening Service

This is a collaboration between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust and the Diocese of Ely. It is available to anyone who may be struggling during this difficult time. The listeners are all trained in pastoral care or mentoring skills.

<https://www.sunnetwork.org.uk/dev/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Heart-Soul-Listening-Service.pdf>

Mental Health at Work

Mental Health at work support a phone and text service for essential workers, and have said this can be extended to volunteers. There are also links to other services and information.

<https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/ourfrontline-keywork/>

British Red Cross Coronavirus support line

The Red Cross have a helpline that anyone who is finding it hard to cope can call. This is free and confidential and open between 10am and 6pm. The number is 0808 196 3651

More information <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/uk-emergency-response/coronavirus/support-line>

More general Mental Health enquiries

Mental Health helplines <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/>

Lifeline (operated by Lifecraft) 0808 808 2121 free, confidential and anonymous telephone helpline service that is currently available from 2pm – 11pm 365 days of the year) The Line provides listening support and information to someone experiencing mental distress or if you are supporting someone in distress. Lifecraft have a list of support available <https://lifecraft.org.uk/our-services/information/resourcesto-use-at-home/>

Support good mental health [NHS guidance on mental wellbeing while staying at home](#)

Self help guide for people worried about COVID-19 <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

Qwell – Online Wellbeing Support

Adults in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough can now sign up to Qwell – a free online support and wellbeing community which is provided by CPSL Mind as part of its Good Life Service.

NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do.:

- go to 111.nhs.uk (for people aged 5 and over only)
- call 111