

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the recruitment and screening process look like?

Our recruitment and screening process takes place in four steps

Step One: We ask that those interested in volunteering with our team complete the Volunteer Expression of Interest Form, indicating which information session they would like to attend.

Step 2: We will send out the zoom link for the information session, so those interested may attend

Step 3: Following attendance at the information session, we will send out the full volunteer application, including a request for references

Step 4: Once the volunteer application has been submitted with references, we will schedule a phone interview to take place between the applicant and one of our Volunteer Recruitment Coordinators.

Following completion of these steps, applicants will either be invited to join our volunteer community or will receive information on how they can strengthen their application for the future.

All applicants over the age of 18 must also complete a **Police Information Check** with a **Vulnerable Sector Check** before beginning their coaching shifts on the lines. The cost of this requirement is covered by the Volunteer Alberta Volunteer Screening Program.

Please note: Volunteers under the age of 18 are not required to submit a Criminal Record Check.

I submitted my application, but am still waiting to hear back- what happened?

We are so thankful to receive so many applications from incredible people looking to support others as members of our team. Our team reviews every application that is submitted as soon as possible, but it does take some time. If you haven't heard from us after a couple of weeks, it's likely that one or both of your references were not submitted. Please connect with your references to ensure they have completed the reference form.

For more information, or if you still have questions, please contact us at volunteer@distresscentre.com.

Do I need to have previous education or experience in the mental health field to volunteer?

No! We are proud that our volunteer community reflects the community we serve- each of us with our own backgrounds and experiences.

What is the training process like?

- Our volunteers do not need prior knowledge or experience in crisis support. Distress Centre offers comprehensive training to all new volunteers in topics including, but not limited to:
 - Crisis Intervention
 - Suicide Intervention,
 - Youth Issues
 - Grief & Loss
 - Mental Health and Communication Skills
 - Addictions and Domestic Violence
 - Being an Ally

For a full list of our training modules and classes, please click here - [Training Classes / Module Checklist.pdf](#)

- Volunteers in training will complete a series of online self-paced modules alongside attendance at classroom sessions onsite and some remote role-playing classes.
- We offer a variety of training schedules. Please click here for a list of upcoming training classes. [Upcoming Training Dates](#)
- All volunteers in training complete a minimum of three coaching shifts with the full support of a leadership volunteer- a coach who has completed at least one full commitment with our team. While we work diligently to schedule coaching shifts for volunteers in training during the times they are available, we ask for some flexibility as we are often juggling multiple schedules.

What if I can't make all of the training dates?

For the sake of those we serve, it is critical that volunteers in training attend all scheduled training sessions. As such, if someone is not able to attend each of the training sessions we ask them to wait and join a class they can attend in full.

What happens after training?

Successful completion of training and graduation from coaching shifts will be followed by a three-month probation period. This provides the volunteer and Distress Centre opportunities to determine if this is a good fit while providing additional support and learning opportunities.

- The Distress Centre adheres to a hybrid model of remote and in-person work. Volunteers will have the option to volunteer remotely once a 3-month probationary period has been reached.

Once a Volunteer has completed their training in full, they will:

- Receive regular feedback and development from peers and supervisors
- Be paired with a Distress Centre Calgary mentor to provide support and guidance
- Be trained and supported in effectively de-escalating crisis and high stress situations
- Make a tangible difference in others' lives
- Develop communication and social skills
- Be part of a supportive team and create lasting friendships
- Receive a reference letter upon completion of your 200-hour commitment (upon request)

What is the time commitment a volunteer is expected to offer?

Distress Centre Calgary expects volunteers to complete 200 Hours over the course of the year, on average 1 four-hour shift per week. Volunteers can complete shifts with more frequency if they choose to and can manage an increased pace. An accelerated commitment must be communicated and decided together with their mentor or someone from the volunteer team

What happens if I cannot complete my commitment?

While we understand that life circumstances can be unforeseeable, we encourage potential volunteers to wait until a time in their life they have confidence they can complete the commitment. That being said, life events happen and can occur unexpectedly. The expectation is that volunteers maintain communication with the agency.

How are shifts scheduled? When are the shift times?

In the application, we ask volunteers when they plan to complete their shift each week. We make onboarding decisions with the volunteer's availability in mind, alongside their other qualities, as we must ensure adequate coverage on the crisis lines at all times.

That being said, our Scheduling Coordinator will use the availability shared on the application to pre-schedule volunteer shifts. If a volunteer's availability changes, we ask that they communicate that to us as soon as possible.

*There will be occasions when, due to unforeseen circumstances, the volunteer may need to stay past the formal shift end time. These circumstances, while rare, would be to ensure the safety of service users, volunteers, and staff members.

Are there opportunities for additional training?

The Distress Centre strives to provide developmental training when the opportunity allows. Previous topics have included: building assertiveness, mental health support in the community, gambler's anonymity, parental alienation, ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), and Indigenous Cultural Awareness.

Do volunteers work alone? Do I have to call 911 for those who are suicidal?

Volunteers connecting with Service Users on our crisis lines are always supported by staff. Staff are available to provide volunteers with guidance, support, referrals, and feedback. The decision to contact emergency services and other authorities is not made by our volunteers, nor is that decision taken lightly. However, it is the volunteer's duty to notify a member of the Distress Centre staff when there is a person who is at risk to themselves or others.

What types of calls do volunteers handle on the lines?

Distress Centre operates a 24/7 crisis and distress line available to anyone who is in need. Our service users come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, just like our volunteers. Service users may present with a wide variety of issues, including situational distress, mental health challenges, grief and loss, marginalization, concerns about relationships, and thoughts of suicide.

How long do I have to volunteer before I can receive a letter of reference for academia or employment?

Volunteers are expected to fulfill the minimum commitment, in order to receive a letter of reference. The Distress Centre does not provide general letters of reference. We request that volunteers give their staff mentor a minimum of two weeks to complete a reference letter.