**Helpline Volunteers Role Specification**

Preamble: This role involves answering the charity’s helpline. Callers will generally be making their first contact with the charity in such a call. Our service users, who are mostly men, are often in a distressed state, feeling isolated, confused and fearful. Accurate communication with them may be challenging, but is also the crucial part of this role.

# Role Definition

* Helpline Operatives must be available to answer calls to the helpline for the duration of those times for which they have agreed to be available. This may be as little as a couple of hours per week, or far longer, according to individuals’ personal circumstances.
* Reliability is of central importance, as an unanswered helpline presents a bad image of the charity. So a key attribute of helpline volunteers is being available throughout the “on duty” periods which have been agreed with the Helpline Coordinator.
* The charity’s helpline is the first stage of a triage process. As such the task of the Helpline Operative is only to gather some limited information from the caller to permit progress to the next stage of the process (which will delve more deeply into their issues).
* The Helpline Operative is the “face” of the charity as far as callers are concerned, and so it is important that they present as friendly and helpful.
* The focus of the call will usually be to complete the first two pages of the charity’s standard Service User Pack within our secure Teams file system, ready for the next stage of the process to pick up the case from there.
* The Helpline Operative shall not provide the service user with advice nor otherwise progress the case. The Helpline Operative’s role, in addition to presenting the charity’s friendly “face”, is only to obtain and record the limited information defined by the first two pages of the Service User Pack.
* The charity’s helpline is based on the CircleLoop VOIP (voice-over-internet protocol) system. Helpline Operatives will be provided with access to this, which can be installed on the volunteer’s own PC, laptop, tablet or mobile. (Callers to the helpline will not see the volunteer’s private ‘phone number).
* Helpline Operatives will need a PC, laptop or tablet because data entry during the call is required directly into a Word version of the Service User Pack proforma. Provision of a charity tablet device is possible if the volunteer does not have their own equipment, though a PC or laptop is best.

# Experience and Skills Required

* Essential: Ability to empathise with service users (mostly men) who may be emotionally vulnerable.
* Essential: Ability to remain focused on completing the required task (addressing the first two pages of the Service User Pack) whilst being patient and allowing the caller space to talk.
* Desirable, not essential: Experience of working on a helpline.
* Desirable, not essential: Experience working with victims of domestic abuse.
* Desirable, not essential: Knowledge of the operation of the family court in private law, especially as regards child arrangement issues.

# Time Commitment

* Commitment to an agreed number of hours of volunteering time (suggested minimum of 2 hours per week).
* Commitment to attend training.

# Supervision

You will be supervised and line-managed by the charity’s Helpline Co-ordinator or another member of the management team approved in this function.

# Training

Essential Pre-Deployment

All new volunteers who are to be assigned designated roles (as listed in the Volunteer Roles document) must be given an Induction prior to being deployed. This generic Induction can be carried out by any member of the Management Team. A common set of briefing material exists for this Induction, regardless of role.

For volunteers to be newly assigned to the Helpline Operative role, training in the requirements of the role, consistent with the above description, must be provided prior to being deployed in that role. This will include, (a) use of the CircleLoop VOIP system, (b) use of the Teams file system (via membership of the team “Secure SUP Completion”), (c) training in completing the first two pages of a Service User Pack, and, (d) the elements of effective helpline-style interactions.

A set of briefing notes (the Induction for Helpline Operatives) exists to provide the required scope of this training. The written training brief shall be augmented by an online “interview” with the Helpline Coordinator or with a similarly experienced member of the management team. This will provide the candidate with an opportunity to ask questions to ensure the nature of the role is understood and to clarify any aspects of the written training brief. In practice this training may be carried out at the same time as the General Induction.

Desirable Within Deployment

External or online training is desirable to enhance all volunteers’ skills. For Helpline Operatives the most relevant will be helpline training, essentially amplifying and reinforcing the messages in the Induction for Helpline Operatives. This would include such things as active listening, open questions, accurate listening, feedback, paraphrasing, empathic responding and observing boundaries in dealing with the service users.