



Vetlife Helpline

Information sheet for prospective volunteers

Thank you for your interest in volunteering to be a Vetlife Helpline volunteer. This is a summary of how Vetlife Helpline works. If, once you have read this, you think that volunteering with Vetlife Helpline could be for you, then please complete an application form and we will arrange a phone interview with you.

- Vetlife Helpline is a confidential, non-judgmental, listening service which provides emotional support by phone and email. We offer peer support through listening, not counselling, coaching or mentoring.
- Because we provide peer support, In-depth knowledge of the veterinary profession is a requirement for our volunteers. Volunteers can come from any veterinary background and our volunteers include vets, nurses, practice managers, and other practice staff. We recommend that student vets and student VNs finish their training before applying for interview.
- Anyone currently serving on RCVS Disciplinary Committee or Preliminary Investigation Committee is not eligible to become a Helpline volunteer; this is because we receive calls from people involved in the disciplinary process. If a person who is a Helpline helper applies to sit on RCVS DC or PIC they will be suspended as a Helper until their DC or PIC term is complete.
- Vetlife Helpline phone shifts are currently 6 or 12 hours long and run from 7am to 1pm, 1pm to 7pm, and 7pm to 7am. For email shifts run from 7am-7pm and 7pm-7am.
- On average during a 24 hour period Helpline currently receives 10-12 contacts by email and phone.
- Each volunteer completes on average 2-4 shifts per month. Shifts can be phone or email. Phone and email shifts can be run at the same time if preferred, so the volunteer is on duty for both phone and email for the duration of the shift. Some experienced volunteers choose to combine email and phone shifts or to do two back to back shifts. We strongly advise volunteers not to do this in their first year of volunteering.

- Volunteers book their own shifts according to availability on an online rota. We have almost 100 volunteers on rota and volunteers are encouraged to book at least a month in advance. Your own work life balance is a priority too, Vetlife encourages you to be realistic about this, and if it is not the right time to volunteer, to reapply again when you have enough time available.
- You will need to have a mobile phone with good reception at home, because calls are put through to us by text or phone. If you do not wish to own a mobile or do not have reception, you could manage a shift by being within earshot of a landline for the entire shift, but please think carefully if this is going to be practical for you.
- Selection for Vetlife Helpline is a multi-stage process. The first step is submitting an application form, which is then reviewed by the selection team. The next step is a phone interview, followed by taking up your references (if you are successful at this stage) Then the final stage of selection is the selection and training course. This is held over six sessions online – all are interactive sessions with group exercises and discussion and attendance is needed at all sessions. These are usually held over consecutive weekend evenings. Training is part of our selection process. Final acceptance is within 1 week of completion of training.
- Attendance at update training annually is required for ongoing volunteering with Helpline. We hold ongoing training for all volunteers at least once annually, and you need to attend this at least once every two years to continue as a volunteer. We also hold group reflective practice sessions quarterly, and you will need to complete individual clinical supervision (funded and provided by us) at least once every two years.
- Whilst applications are received and interviews held all year round, initial training is held usually once annually. This means that there can in some cases be over a year between application and starting volunteering. We have a waiting list for volunteers so in some cases it is not possible to join the next training group.
- We require contact details for two referees who can give you a reference. References will be taken up only if you are successful at the phone interview and then commit to initial training.
- Full support is provided for new volunteers, which includes working with a mentor for your initial six months on shift, debriefing after every shift, ad hoc support as required from the Helpline Manager during your shift, group supervision with other volunteers and a professional facilitator quarterly, and ad hoc professional supervision as required.
- A common question we are asked is whether people who have experienced ill health themselves can apply. People with lived experience are very welcome to apply. We make reasonable adjustments for disability as necessary.