



Vetlife Helpline

Information sheet for prospective volunteers

Thank you for your interest in volunteering to be a Vetlife Helpline helper. This is a summary of how the 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 helper; 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 shifts are currently 12 hours long and run from 7am to 7pm and 7pm to 7am.
- On average during a 24 hour period Helpline currently receives seven to eight contacts by email and phone.
- Each volunteer completes on average two phone shifts and two email shifts per month; for these can be run at the same time if preferred, so the Helper is on duty for both phone and email for the duration of the shift. Some experienced volunteers choose to complete a month worth of shifts in a 24 hour period by combining email and phone, and running two 12 hour shifts consecutively. We strongly advise volunteers not to do this in their first year of volunteering, and so if they wish to compress shifts together to either do email and phone on the same shift, or run two shifts together, but not both.

- The member of Vetlife staff compiling the rota will ask all volunteers for days that they are generally available/unavailable for shifts. In addition to this, in advance of every new rota you will be asked for specific unavailability for the next three months. If you will only have one or two days per month available for shifts, it becomes difficult for us to fit you into our rota, as we have over 50 volunteers, and need to provide 24 hour cover for our callers. 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 day. This is usually held once annually, so you may have a wait from application to knowing whether you have been accepted as a Helpline volunteer. All volunteers are informed whether their application has been successful at the stages of application form, interview, and training day, with the final acceptance within a week of the training day. The initial training is a full day, usually in Edinburgh. It is informative and interactive and forms part of the selection process as well as delivering training.
- Attendance at training 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.
- Whilst applications are received and interviews held all year round, initial training is held usually once annually. This, plus the fact that the shift rota is set three months in advance 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 character 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, phone 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.