

Change Is Now¹:

Executive Summaries of the Outreach Committee

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¹ Disclaimer: This organization is an independent group, unaffiliated with Crisis Text Line in any manner. Any and all ideas expressed in this report are not necessarily endorsed by Crisis Text Line and/or any of its staff.

Introduction

The Outreach Committee was formed June 12, 2020, serving as a sounding board where fellow Crisis Counselors could voice their concerns and ideas on issues regarding Crisis Text Line. This committee aims to organize and collect the myriad of concerns voiced by Crisis Counselors with the stated goal of approaching Crisis Text Line Staff with a cohesive position. As the committee grew, various subcommittees were formed to focus on areas of specific interest within the overarching Outreach Committee.

Each of these subcommittees consists of an incredible group of Crisis Counselors working on the issues, goals, and plans of each subtopic daily. To coordinate the efforts of the various subcommittees, the administrative staff appointed seven subcommittees, (co-)chairs, directed and led by the Outreach Committee Chair, Hannah Presley. Five subcommittees were established, focusing on the following:

- Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) [**Pg. 3**]
- Active Rescue [**Pg. 5**]
- Policy Changes [**Pg. 7**]
- Volunteer Training [**Pg. 10**]
- LGBTQIA+ [**Pg. 14**]

Each subcommittee has an individual goal, focusing on improving one small part of the greater whole--with the broader aim of creating and maintaining change within the organization for texters, Crisis Counselors, and staff. Each of these individuals, alongside the 120+ members of the Outreach Committee, are dedicated to seeing change at Crisis Text Line, immediately.

BIPOC Subcommittee

Chair: Charlotte Lawrence

Introduction

The BIPOC Subcommittee aims to ascertain the ways in which Crisis Text Line can make The Platform, new volunteer training, and the overall experience better for BIPOC texters, Crisis Counselors, and staff. Both BIPOC and non-BIPOC shared their experiences and how they could work together to enact this change.

Plans

Initial plans involved new training material, texter referrals, data collection, communication, and media and marketing practices. New training modules addressing race and diversity should be implemented to address the inadequate course of support on The Platform thus far.

Currently, there are no specific referrals for BIPOC texters. When one looks up “Black” and “racism” they only receive two results: The Obama Foundation and a PDF called “*Opportunities for White People in the Fight for Racial Justice*.” A lack of BIPOC resources can result in Crisis Counselors experiencing difficulties connecting with the texter and being unable to provide helpful assistance.

In regards to data collection, there is picture evidence that Crisis Text Line collected data based on race, specifically analyzing volunteer productivity between races and ethnicities. Questionable data collection processes are apparent and are shown to be racially biased. An explanation and transparency on what data analysis on Crisis Counselors looks like now is necessary.

For communication, media, and marketing practices, the branding and messaging for Crisis Text Line should reflect a commitment to anti-racism. Media support for fellow BIPOC Crisis Counselors should not have to be asked for.

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Active Rescue Subcommittee

Co-chairs: Jessica Andrews and Brianna Roy

Introduction

The Active Rescue (AR) subcommittee is addressing issues associated with the Active Rescue policy. Solutions are proposed so that the organization can implement a safer, more equitable, and more transparent experience for texters and Crisis Counselors. These suggestions play into the larger range of policies surrounding ARs, as the committee is aware of significant debate and discussion regarding this issue.

Plans

Proposals include more training surrounding ARs, a reminder of resources and renewed support for Crisis Counselors post-AR, and more transparency and consistency with texters and current volunteers.

An additional in-depth training besides the “ladder up” assessment would be beneficial. Training Crisis Counselors for consensual ARs could also be beneficial to transition away from nonconsensual ARs. Nonconsensual ARs are currently part of the AR policy but there are other options available. Consent training would help the Crisis Counselor know what to do, and instead of law enforcement being dispatched, other mental health professionals can be used such as mobile crisis units or social workers. Using a resource other than law enforcement may also help with the problem Crisis Counselors have been expressing of the lack of support during and after the AR process.

In regards to support post-AR, there should be reminders of the resources available to them for support, including the Debrief chat, survey debrief, and Our Network. A non-automated connection with a coach or other personnel post-AR may also be considered.

More transparency and consistency with texters goes into being more open about the AR process with texters. ARs can be used as a collaborative safety planning tool with texters. This will lead to better communication and connections between the texter and Crisis Counselors.

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Policy Changes Subcommittee

Co-chairs: Surosree Chaudhuri and Hayley Jones

Introduction

The Crisis Text Line Policy Changes Subcommittee is a collaborative effort with a growing number of volunteers actively commenting on the issues and potential solutions discussed. Though the committee cannot speak for all Crisis Counselors, it strives to incorporate as many voices as possible while aiming to be inclusive and transparent in all proceedings.

Plans

There have been proposed ideas that involve data, budget transparency, referral committee reinstatement, feedback opportunities with staff, limiting of work hours, and revision of titles.

For data, one issue is that Crisis Counselors agree to have their data shared with no available contention. It should be possible to opt-out of data collection, especially considering the irresponsible use of data as mentioned above in the BIPOC plans section. Loris.ai is a closely related data company run by Nancy Lublin that shares Crisis Text Line data with other businesses. Some are not comfortable with their data being used by a company run by the former CEO of Crisis Text Line who was terminated for allegations of racism. Instating a consent form to share data as part of the application process, as well as sending a consent form to current volunteers, are possible avenues of improvement to consider. It should not be mandatory to have data collected on people who choose to become a Crisis Counselor. There are also concerns with data security. Since Crisis Counselors must agree to have their data shared by third parties, it can

lead to personal information being exposed in the event of a companywide hack or misuse of data. Naturally, there are clarifying questions to ask the tech team before seeking further action.

In the case of budget transparency, the budget figures are not fully comprehensive and do not seem accurate. For example, the available figures say that \$27,000 goes into training, but also that it takes \$1000 to train each volunteer. Different perks, such as \$20 gift cards going to new volunteers who quit, also seem dubious. There is no way of knowing what the money is being spent on and how much of it is going into making the organization better if all the documents are not made readily available to the public. Available figures need to be more specific on what the money is going to. Saying that 71.1% of the budget is going to “programs” gives no insight into what those programs are. If these figures were known, there would be more insight into how much of the available money could go to expanding training, finding resources for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ members, and more valuable causes.

Regarding referral committee reinstatement, there is an apparent need for a more thorough background check due to the higher quantity of Crisis Counselors coming into the system. For many applicants, the background check only took a few hours, which does not seem thorough, especially considering the volume of new applicants. Also in regard to references, the statements can easily be forged or contain false information since they can be submitted by anyone. Reinstating a committee of people to look through applications could ameliorate this issue.

For feedback opportunities with staff, there is currently little to no opportunity to provide feedback on their experience as a volunteer. Years ago, staff members were able to fill out a “Happiness Survey,” which was removed shortly after negative feedback was discovered and

rejected by Nancy Lublin. Given the high volume of current volunteers, very few are receiving feedback within their first week of working on The Platform. Many have noted that they have had no interaction with their coach that they did not initiate themselves. Past conversations taken on The Platform are also not reviewed by anyone, leaving little opportunity to receive feedback on their performance.

On limiting work hours, there is a recommended weekly volunteer commitment and a soft limit on the number of hours that can be taken on The Platform in a week (12 hours). This does not stop volunteers from being pressured into taking shifts much longer than they anticipated, with some being encouraged to take a 12-hour shift. A limit on how many hours in a row each volunteer can work may be beneficial to ensure a healthy workload.

In terms of title revisions, there are titles that can be misleading and, in some cases, not exactly accurate. The current volunteer title of “Crisis Counselor” is misleading to texters, as it implies that all volunteers have the equivalent training that a counselor does, which is simply not true. Similarly, referrals on The Platform need to be considered “resources” instead. The term “referral” carries the connotation of a medical professional, and many Crisis Counselors already use the word “resource” instead when conversing with texters.

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Training Subcommittee

Chair: Sneha Gupta

Introduction

The Training Subcommittee is dedicated to improving training for incoming volunteers, as well as current volunteers. There are several who did not feel that the current training fully prepared them for their first shifts on The Platform, during which they felt uneasy and anxious. The following changes proposed to training will ensure that all Crisis Counselors, especially new ones, are adequately prepared to take shifts on The Platform. The current training modules do not account for Crisis Text Line's diverse population of texters. In light of recent news, it is time to recognize biases and work towards creating a safe and equitable environment for everyone. These changes to the training are essential not only for volunteers, but for staff as well.

Plans

The new training will be divided into two parts: Counseling Skills and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) module. In addition to the current counseling skills module, there needs to be more transparency within the Active Rescue process. There must be more diversity in the conversations that are simulated during training, including but not limited to various mental health conditions.

To ease new volunteers into their first shifts, this committee proposes that, in addition to simulating the correct use of Good Contact Techniques and the phases of a conversation, the Crisis Counselor-in-training will role play with a high-level Crisis Counselor enacting the role of a texter. This method will enable the trainee to receive specific feedback, as well as give them experience practicing a realistic conversation. During the conversation, the trainee will be given

helpful notes from the higher level Crisis Counselor. These pointers will allow the trainee to modify their texts in order to fit Crisis Text Line's specifications.

The committee's second proposal is to have the trainee shadow a high-level Crisis Counselor in real time after the role-play is complete. This will enable the trainee to ease into The Platform while gaining insight into how experienced Crisis Counselors interact with texters.

The DEI Module will be broken into three parts: Identity and Bias Training, Ally Training, and Anti-Racist Resources for specific communities. There is evidence that suggests that multicultural discussions and exposure to diversity helps people feel more open when working with diverse populations. To recognize and have conversations on racial injustice, one must investigate their own identity and acknowledge their own biases. Identity and bias training can empower Crisis Counselors to navigate their defenses and create a stronger connection to texters and others on The Platform. After one recognizes their own biases, they can better focus on the role of an ally which will help navigate these difficult conversations in a respectful manner. There will also be a heavy focus on systematic racism and vulnerable populations. Evidence suggests that this training should not be a single opportunity, but continuous. Therefore, it would be most effective to start during training, then periodically follow it up through activities and videos. More specific implementations of this will be discussed in further executive summaries.

In the midst of all these changes, the current Crisis Counselors must be kept up to date to make sure that everyone is on the same page. In order for the DEI module to be effective, it must be taken by everyone. This committee proposes placing the training videos on The Platform. Once a Crisis Counselor signs on for their shift, they will be placed into one of two queues, one

of which is an Active Texter queue while the other is a Continued Training queue. These two separate queues would allow counselors to count their time spent in training towards their overall hours spent on The Platform.

When a Crisis Counselor enters The Platform, they will be able to choose whether they want to prioritize texters (Active Texter queue) or development (Continued Training queue). Counselors who decide to prioritize texters will be the first to receive texters. Counselors who choose to prioritize development will be virtually placed in line after those in the Active Texter queue, allowing them time to refresh their skills while still fulfilling their volunteer hours. After they finish reviewing the allocated training materials, they will join the Active Texter queue, which tells the system that they are ready for a texter. In the event of more texters than Crisis Counselors in the Active Texter queue, those in the Continued Training queue will then receive texters. Due to the high number of Crisis Counselors on during a shift, this would be a productive way to utilize excess time.

A specific, detailed description of a coach's roles is needed moving forward. In discussions, there seems to be an inconsistency in what coaches do depending on the individual. To ease new volunteers and help them improve, the first few conversations taken must be reviewed and specific feedback must be given. Through their time as a Crisis Counselor, there should be frequent supervisor/coach feedback to facilitate growth. Volunteers must also be able to access their feedback and productivity scores. The post-texter survey needs to have a question asking if the Crisis Counselor would like to have a supervisor or coach contact them so that they can debrief.

The committee aimed to narrow down what needs to be worked on through discussions with various counselors. In order to understand the specifics and have quantifiable data, this committee created the following Google Forms survey ([Training Satisfaction Survey](#)). The shadowing and role-playing techniques mentioned earlier are modeled after the training procedures of various hotlines and crisis-intervention organizations.

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LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee

Chair: Frankie Williamson

Introduction

The LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee focuses on the ways Crisis Text Line can make The Platform, training, and overall experience better for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Both members and non-members of the LGBTQIA+ community shared their experiences and how they could work together to encourage change. There were six primary subject areas discussed during several days of conversation: AR policy for trans texters, revision of training to emphasize neutrality when referring to texters (and each other), sharing pronouns with texters, adding more LGBTQIA+ specific resources for texters, concern over the lack of diversity on Crisis Text Line's website, and disciplinary procedure for queerphobic Crisis Counselors.

Plans

When considering new training material, the committee suggests adding modules that specifically address concerns regarding the LGBTQIA+ community in addition to the BIPOC community. Training needs to incorporate gender neutrality when referring to texters. For example, the language should be centered around pronouns such as "they" and titles like "parent" instead of "mom" or "dad" unless stated otherwise by the texter. On the Platform, if a counselor wishes to share their pronouns with a texter, it should also not be discouraged or prevented.

When performing an AR, it is imperative that Crisis Counselors and supervisors keep the unique needs of LGBTQIA+ texters in mind. The police are not trained to empathetically support; allowing them into the house of someone who is not out could potentially be dangerous.

According to a recent statement from the Trump Administration, trans people are not protected under medical law. In order to protect these vulnerable texters, staff need to consider these recent changes when making new policies.

Promotional media and resources for Crisis Text Line must be more diverse and inclusive. More resources need to be included that provide LGBTQIA+ specific counseling. It is imperative that Crisis Text Line makes a strategic commitment to include the diversity of gender that it features in its websites, marketing ads, promotional social media ads, etc. Gender neutrality needs to be reflected internally and externally and should be a part of the improving culture within the organization.

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Conclusions

The findings of this committee are preliminary and are by no means exhaustive. Each subcommittee is composed of a dedicated and motivated team that is working quite literally day and night to create lasting change in this organization. Though aiming to be as inclusive and transparent as possible, we understand that many of the background organizational decisions, by their very nature, will be somewhat inaccessible to the larger community. This is by no means an intentional goal, but rather a consequence of organizing any group outside of the massive community of 10,000+ volunteers. If you are interested in joining and are either a current or past Crisis Counselor, please email ChangeIsNowBLM@gmail.com.

This has been a time of fast-paced growth on many levels. As we grow and change, we ask for the community's help in understanding what changes are most pertinent, and maintaining pressure to see those changes enacted. We also realize that this group is not a perfect voice, and most likely never will be considering the breadth of the Crisis Text Line community. The group kindly asks for understanding on this point as well. Ultimately, this will always be driven by the desires of the Crisis Text Line community at its core.

The Outreach Committee remains determined to create change and inspire improvements for texters, volunteers, and staff alike while simultaneously fostering inclusion and openness at every step. We understand that not all Crisis Counselors can or will join this group, and our aim is to share our progress through these executive summaries as our findings become relevant.

As one final note, we would like to thank the members of the Outreach Committee, without whom this project would not be possible. In the interest of preserving individual privacy, their first names will be listed on the following page.

Members of the *Change Is Now* Outreach Committee (6/16/20)

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