

**Change Is Now<sup>1</sup>:**

**Second Executive Summaries of the Outreach Committee**

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

## **BIPOC Subcommittee**

Co-chairs: Charlotte Lawrence and Lindsay Rosenthal

### **Introduction**

The Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Subcommittee has identified five (5) key focus areas in which sustainable change may be made in order for Crisis Text Line to foster an inclusive environment for BIPOC employees, volunteers and texters:

- (a) Training materials;
- (b) Resources for BIPOC texters;
- (c) Data collection practices;
- (d) Communication, media, and marketing practices; and
- (e) Active rescues.

Each area has been extensively researched by BIPOC Subcommittee members. A brief summary of the Subcommittee's findings are provided below, along with requests for action.

### **(a) Training Materials**

Given the current racial climate in this country, the elevated levels of stress and anxiety within the BIPOC community, and recent allegations of racist behavior exhibited by Crisis Text Line leadership over the past several years, it is of the utmost importance that Crisis Text Line provide effective race and diversity training for employees and volunteers. Crisis Counselors should be provided the necessary tools to relate to BIPOC texters as authentically as possible.

### **Requests for Action: Training Materials**

Crisis Text Line must include enhanced training materials and continuing race and diversity related education for all Supervisors and Crisis Counselors. The BIPOC Subcommittee fully supports the Training Subcommittee's proposal for a 2-part training program which includes counseling skills coupled with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training. Crisis Counselors failing to complete this training, and/or who exhibit racist behavior on The Platform or Our Network after completing training must complete a mandatory refresher DEI course. Any subsequent violations should result in disciplinary action including, but not limited to, suspension from The Platform, Our Network, and termination of their position as a Crisis Counselor with Crisis Text Line

As a backup to Crisis Counselor training, Supervisors with knowledge in specialized areas (i.e., BIPOC, disabilities, LGBTQIA+, religion, etc.) - whether through education and/or substantial life experience in their specialized area- should be available as immediate contacts for Crisis Counselors when they are in need of assistance or guidance with specific conversations.. Such Supervisors would add a note in their Platform profile indicating their availability to assist and would also be responsible for providing continuing education webinars within their specialty field.

Crisis Text Line must stand by its message laid out in the Racial Justice Tipsheet, and reject the "All Lives Matter" phrase and sentiments. Crisis Counselors

1. Continually use the phrase "All Lives Matter,"
2. Who refuse to acknowledge the pain and hatred conveyed by use of the phrase, "All Lives Matter,"
3. Pass the phrase or its ideals that encompass "All Lives Matter" to their fellow Crisis Counselors,
4. Who show a general lack of empathy towards

marginalized groups, should face disciplinary action including, but not limited to, suspension from The Platform and Our Network and/or termination as a Crisis Counselor with Crisis Text Line. The BIPOC Subcommittee is of the opinion that it is impossible for a Crisis Counselor with these beliefs and tendencies to display the validation and empathy necessary to adequately support a BIPOC texter expressing anxiety over the issues of police brutality and racial injustice.

This Subcommittee requests that Crisis Text Line allow Crisis Counselors to share their racial identity with texters upon request if in doing so, the Crisis Counselor reasonably believes that sharing this personal information will better assist in building rapport with the texter.

#### **(b) Resources for BIPOC Texters**

Prior to the addition of new resources to The Platform on June 17, 2020, a search for the terms “racism” and “black” produced only two results – The Obama Foundation, and a PDF entitled “*Opportunities for White People in the Fight for Racial Justice.*” The guidance provided in the Toolbox tip sheet titled “*Racism and Police Brutality Against Black Texters*” (the “Racial Justice Tipsheet” with the exception of the first tip) related to the use of the term “All Lives Matter” as mentioned above. This is a much too general term and does not take into account the unique experiences facing BIPOC texters, especially during these turbulent times.

The BIPOC Subcommittee similarly requests that there should be a much greater focus on the high levels of violence black trans women face—to such an overwhelming degree that it is referred to as an epidemic (McBride, 2019). Two black transgender women have been killed so far in June 2020 alone (Donaghue, 2020). Crisis Text Line has not acknowledged this issue,

nor has the company provided an adequate variety of resources for Crisis Counselors to share with our texters in need of such information.

### **Requests for Action: Resources for BIPOC Texters**

Although the newly added BIPOC resources on The Platform are significantly appreciated, the following resources may also be used by Crisis Text Line as texter resources and in the development of Toolbox Tipsheets:

- Black Lives Matter - <http://www.blacklivesmatter.com>
- Embrace Race - <https://www.embracerace.org/>
- Color of Change - <https://colorofchange.org/>
- Therapy for Black Girls - <https://therapyforblackgirls.com/>
- Black Therapists Rock - <https://www.blacktherapistsrock.com/>
- Therapy for Black Men - <https://therapyforblackmen.org/>
- Black Female Therapists - <https://www.blackfemaletherapists.com/>
- Equal Justice Initiative - <https://eji.org/>
- Inclusive Therapists - <https://www.inclusivetherapists.com/>
- National Queer & Trans Therapists of Color Network - <https://www.nqttcn.com/>
- Communities of African Descent Resource Kit | GLAAD - <https://www.glaad.org/publications/coadkit>
- A Resource Guide to Coming Out for African Americans - <https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/ComingOutForAAJune2014.pdf>
- Transgender Law Center - <https://transgenderlawcenter.org/programs>

Crisis Text Line must regularly promote existing keyword partnerships and actively seek new keyword partnerships with BIPOC organizations. Such partnerships should regularly be highlighted on all social media platforms. Crisis Text Line should also acknowledge the specific needs of its BIPOC and religious organizational partners, and provide adequate training to employees and volunteers to meet those needs. Keywords should alert the Crisis Counselor to the texter's immediate issue, including a link within the conversation to a tipsheet with helpful phrases and resources to provide to texters using each particular keyword.

The BIPOC Subcommittee requests an update on Crisis Text Line's partnership with the Steve Fund, and an understanding of the expenditure of funds received from John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (The Steve Fund, 2016). The grant funds were intended to *"help strengthen Crisis Text Line text-messaging support services in communities of color, while increasing data collection and research on the needs of this population."* The Subcommittee's research has not produced evidence of these goals having been achieved.

**(c) Data Collection Practices:**

On June 12, 2020, an allegation was made on Twitter that Nancy Lublin had requested a breakdown of Crisis Counselor productivity based on race and ethnicity. A screenshot of the results was included with the tweet. Particularly disturbing is the caption which reads *"We don't want to stop recruiting POC, but we should look into the underlying reasons why Black and Hispanic CCs are less productive so far."* This statement suggests Crisis Text Line is of the opinion that race plays a factor in the quality of Crisis Counselors' conversations with texters and their overall productivity on The Platform.

**Requests for Action: Data Collection Practices**

The Subcommittee requests an explanation for Crisis Text Line deeming it necessary to rank the conversation quality and productivity of Crisis Counselors by race, and whether this type of information is analyzed on a regular basis. The Subcommittee also requests an explicit commitment from Crisis Text Line to eliminate all racial bias, implicit and otherwise, from its data collection practices.

**(d) Communication, Media, & Marketing Practices:**

Following the murder of George Floyd by a police officer on May 25, 2020, nationwide protests against police brutality flooded the country. Such incidents cause heightened anxiety among the Black community, and Crisis Text Line should be a leader in providing support to texters of color during this time. However, a review of Crisis Text Line's website and social media between May 26, 2020 and June 29, 2020 shows there were no posts specifically mentioning George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, or the protests across the country. A June 8, 2020 post states the organization's desire to share its contributions to purge racism from its practices and the world. The link to the blog page included in the post no longer exists.

**Requests for Action: Communication, Media, & Marketing Practices**

The Subcommittee requests Crisis Text Line's consistent, authentic, and public support of the Black community, whether through partnership with Black Lives Matter and/or other similar racial and social justice organizations/movements.

Crisis Text Line's internal and external communications should consistently reflect an explicit and authentic commitment to anti-racism. The organization will foster a culture within its employment practices and its services as an organization that respects and values its staff and volunteers without regard to race, age, color, religion, gender identity, national origin, medical condition or disability, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law. The Subcommittee urges Crisis Text Line to utilize communication, media, and marketing practices that ensure that BIPOC texters are aware that this organization understands their unique experiences and the challenges they face, and that the organization is ready to meet them where they are, provide them with the resources they need, and fight tirelessly to seek racial justice. Similarly, the Subcommittee suggests that Crisis Text Line develop and promote partnerships with mental health organizations which assist the BIPOC community. Such promotions should convey a solid commitment from Crisis Text Line in lieu of vague references.

**(e) Active Rescues:**

Crisis Text Line's Active Rescue (AR) policy poses a risk of serious harm or death to BIPOC texters in crisis. The cases of Breonna Taylor and Charleena Lyles provide evidence for the outcome of police being sent to the home of a BIPOC texter whether or not they are in distress. (Read, 2020; Tastrum, 2017).

**Requests for Action: Active Rescues**

The Subcommittee fully supports the AR Subcommittee's recommendations for alternatives to Crisis Text Line's current AR policy.



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## **Active Rescue Subcommittee**

Co-chairs: Jessica Andrews and Brianna Roy

### **Introduction**

The Active Rescue (AR) Subcommittee aims to address concerns related to the AR process. The AR Subcommittee, in collaboration with additional Subcommittees, has discussed possible initiatives in three aspects of the AR process: support, transparency, and safety.

### **Request for Action: Crisis Counselor Support**

Supporting Crisis Counselors with every step of the AR process is crucial to the ethical continuation of Active Rescues. Post-AR debrief and care is essential to ensuring that Crisis Counselors are able to support texters. According to the Alliance for Children and Families, “responsible supervision creates a relationship in which the social worker feels safe in expressing fears, concerns, and inadequacies” (2003). The Subcommittee recommends allowing Crisis Counselors an opportunity to connect with a coach in a non-automated email after an AR, in order to ensure Crisis Counselors receive the support they need. Crisis Counselors who opt out of this option may benefit from resources on vicarious trauma, either provided on The Platform or in the off-platform training materials. Our Network and The Platform debrief chat may serve as avenues to express concerns and provide opportunities for Crisis Text Line Coaches and Supervisors to build closer relationships with Crisis Counselors.

### **Request for Action: Transparency and Confidentiality**

Transparency regarding ARs for texters and Crisis Counselors alike can ease anxieties for everyone involved. Subcommittee members expressed that Coaches shared more about the logistics of calling in an Active Rescue when asked but cited a desire for more transparency

surrounding the process in training. Some Subcommittee members noted feeling unprepared for what to say or do after “laddering up,” while others felt they did not know enough about the process behind the scenes at all. In discussions with the Training Subcommittee, the AR Subcommittee recommends a module in training about the entire process of an AR from a Crisis Counselor perspective as well as a Supervisor perspective. The Subcommittee also recommends a module in training containing an explanation of confidentiality and any local relevant policies, applicable laws, information regarding protection of private health information, and how this applies post-Active Rescue. Subcommittee members expressed a desire to be more open with texters regarding the process of ARs and when ARs are required. Cooperation, collaboration, and engagement with texters surrounding the AR process can provide more transparency to the texter.

### **Request for Action: Ensuring Texter Safety**

Texter safety in Active Rescue is crucial to ensure that Active Rescues are an ethical part of crisis intervention at Crisis Text Line. The AR Subcommittee, in cooperation with the BIPOC Subcommittee and the LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee, recognizes the risks that the current involvement of law enforcement officials poses to most vulnerable texters. The Active Rescue Subcommittee echoes the concerns regarding safety of trans texters outlined in the LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee as well as the concerns regarding police intervention shared in the BIPOC Subcommittee.

The AR Subcommittee proposes two alternative solutions to the current policy to ensure a safer experience for all of Crisis Text Line’s texters. One possible solution is eliminating non-consensual ARs entirely and adopting a policy similar to the policy at Trans Lifeline (Trans

Lifeline, 2018). The LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee details the concerns regarding non-consensual ARs and how this impacts texter trust in an organization.

The second potential solution is collaborating with local agencies to ensure that trained mental health professionals are the first point of contact in ARs, leaving law enforcement as a last resort intervention. One example of an organization like this is CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets), a crisis intervention service based in Eugene, Oregon. CAHOOTS service offers a broad range of services including but not limited to: Crisis Counseling; Suicide Prevention, Assessment, and Intervention; Conflict Resolution and Mediation; Grief and Loss; Substance Abuse; Housing Crisis; First Aid and Non-Emergency Medical Care; Resource Connection and Referrals; and Transportation to Services (White Bird Clinic, 2020). Another example is the Mobile Crisis Team (MCT) in King County, Washington State. MCT is a 43-member team of Mental Health Professionals and Substance Use Disorder Professionals that accepts referrals from first responders and helps resolve client crises by finding the least restrictive method of intervention. MCT risk assesses the client and, depending on the outcome of the assessment, connects the individual in crisis to local community resources (DESC, 2020).

The Active Rescue Subcommittee proposes a collaboration between Crisis Text Line and local agencies that utilize non-law enforcement professionals for Active Rescues when the option is available to ensure a safe and transparent experience for all texters.

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## **Policy Changes Subcommittee**

Co-chairs: Surosree Chaudhuri and Hayley Jones

### **Introduction**

The goal of the Policy Changes Sub-Committee is to work on enacting changes in ways that ensure that Crisis Text Line can meet the needs of texters, Crisis Counselors, and staff members. The focus in this document shall be on ensuring transparency with regards to staff and data collected by Crisis Text Line, as well as clearer, more inclusive marketing.

### **Staff-Related Concerns**

*Organizational Structure:* Currently, there is no clear way to see the number of Coaches and Supervisors employed at Crisis Text Line. There is also no way to identify current employees other than those in board and advisor positions, such as Head of Resources or Head of Applications. These issues notwithstanding, the current list of board and advisor positions still throws volunteers into confusion as to whether or not Bob Filbin is still in the Chief Data Scientist position, as he is not listed on the directory but is nonetheless mentioned as Chief Data Scientist on the weekly newsletter. The Subcommittee requests a clear and updated Organizational Chart clearly defining the roles and titles of the Board, Advisors, and staff members on Crisis Text Line's website in order to ensure that two-way communication with Coaches, Supervisors, Staff, and Volunteers can be conducted as smoothly as possible. Likewise, a clear and updated *Directory Page* with appropriate contact information should be made available and updated accordingly to provide the most current information. Transparent information on the Organizational Structure would provide knowledge of functional

responsibilities and roles, in order to achieve direct and efficient communications within Crisis Text Line.

*Unbalanced Staff to Volunteer Ratio:* With the recent surge in volunteer numbers due to the COVID-19 pandemic - as apparent from the hundreds of Crisis Counselors online at any given hour - the rising stress of Supervisors and Coaches is becoming more of a concern, as they have to manage a significantly rising number of Crisis Counselors at any one time. In short, personal experiences have demonstrated that the staff to volunteer ratio is becoming further unbalanced. While there is no clear way to see the number of Coaches and Supervisors currently at Crisis Text Line, anecdotal evidence from personal experiences of Subcommittee members on The Platform have shown that one Supervisor may, at any point in time, be responsible for 20-30 volunteers. Not only can such an unbalanced ratio result in overworking of staff, but it may also result in a significant decrease in the quality of service rendered by Crisis Counselors. As such, the Subcommittee requests to put forth a policy focused on maintaining a ratio of 15-20 volunteers per supervisor. Having such a specific number in mind, backed up by research and experiences of similar institutions, will also aid Crisis Text Line in determining when to close hiring for new volunteers, as it has done in the past (Hide 2009, Sargent 2008).

*Resources Committee Expansion:* The past reality of a Referrals Committee has been spoken of among Crisis Counselors, who claim that they were on a board-like committee that filtered through referral suggestions to seek those that best fit the needs of texters. However, although this committee has since been disbanded, Crisis Counselors actively want to be more involved behind the scenes. Additionally, Crisis Counselors are not provided enough information

about the process of vetting and processing referrals; therefore, this Subcommittee requests more transparency on this matter.

An understanding of the way the previous Referrals Committee operated would be beneficial in creating a strong foundation for the potential formation of a Resources Committee, which the Policy Changes Subcommittee would like to put forward as a request. Not only would such a Resources Committee allow for more in-depth Crisis Counselor involvement, but it may also allow for reconsideration and strengthening of the requirements for inclusion of resources. This Subcommittee's current understanding of requirements for resources is that they must have not-for-profit origins, be free of advertisements, and be particularly unique in comparison to pre-existing resources.

Additionally, it is to the understanding of the Policy Changes Subcommittee that one staff member is involved in the process of accepting and rejecting resources. The current resource lists on The Platform lacks description of the resource content, making it difficult to categorize. This requires additional improvement. The Resources Committee should also be representative and diverse to adequately acquire a wide variety of resources, in order to meet all texters' needs.

### **Data**

In direct response to the allegations that Bob Filbin manipulated the organization's data, the Subcommittee requests further transparency of data being collected: what's being collected, why, and how it's being used. Data can only be helpful if it is true data and the data being gathered will be used for progression analysis, organizational forecasts, productivity, and positive improvements for both the Crisis Counselors and the entirety of the Organization. This request is essential for rebuilding the trust and to ensure that the previous report of inappropriate



and racially motivated data collected under the direction of the former CEO, Nancy Lublin, is not repeated. If there are queried ongoing reports collected in direct relation to Crisis Counselors' performances on The Platform, it's vital to understand to what extent that data might become useful and open to be used as a resource on The Platform. Similarly, a readily accessible overview of Crisis Text Lines's "Data Philosophy" can provide much needed clarity and transparency to those it most directly affects.

### **Possible Improvements on Marketing**

As it is right now, Crisis Text Line's social media marketing does not provide adequate information about the services provided at Crisis Text Line and is sometimes misleading. The social media accounts post mostly memes, and though that is an effective marketing strategy, Crisis Text Line's social media should also be a place where people can understand how the organization functions. For example, posts on Crisis Text Line's social media often state that Crisis Text Line offers help "no matter what you're going through." This could be potentially misleading, as it lends itself to an interpretation that Crisis Text Line can provide long-term care for more complicated situations, where in reality, long-term use of the line is discouraged. A possible improvement would be providing clarification that Crisis Text Line is a short-term solution that can help get texters through a hot moment, but long-term care should be sought out from the appropriate professionals. Further elaboration on Crisis Text Line policies in social media page descriptions, such as Active Rescue, can prevent texters coming out of a conversation feeling frustrated, for example because they were blindsided by the organization's Active Rescue policies or went in expecting resources that Crisis Counselors cannot provide, such as medical referrals or advice.

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## **Training Subcommittee**

Co-chairs: Divya Daripalli and Sneha Gupta

### **Introduction**

Crisis Counselors have felt woefully unprepared for shifts on The Platform. The duty of the Training Subcommittee has been to consolidate these concerns and to channel them into productive initiatives in order to improve the efficacy of Crisis Counselors and the experiences texters have when engaging with Crisis Text Line. Data collected when surveying volunteers show that the training program lacks education on significant parts of the crisis intervention process, in turn leading to confusion and preventing volunteers from being able to help texters to the best of their ability. The current simulations provided are inadequate, as they lack the real-time pressure of a conversation on The Platform. In addition, training does not cater to the diversity of the country and, now more than ever, it is important to recognize internal biases and work towards creating a safe, equitable environment for everyone.

### **Proposals**

The Subcommittee's proposals for the new training program will be divided into two parts: counseling skills and the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) modules. Additionally, the Subcommittee would like to request more transparency on ARs, mandatory reporting, feedback, and quality scoring. Moreover, in order to provide realistic simulations and strengthen the relationships between Crisis Counselors, the Subcommittee proposes a mentorship program.

### **Counseling Skills Training**

*Role playing and Shadowing:* After surveying 91 Crisis Counselor, results of the training survey showed that 52.8% felt that the simulations presented in-training were neither realistic nor

representative of the conversations taken on The Platform. Therefore, in order to ease new volunteers into their first shifts, the Subcommittee proposes replacing the simulations for the first half and second half, the practice full conversation, and the final conversation with roleplaying opportunities with a higher-level Crisis Counselor (tentatively defined as Level 5 and above). In addition to roleplaying, the Subcommittee proposes to have the trainee shadow a high level Crisis Counselor in real-time after the role-play is complete. This will, in turn, allow for a deeper understanding of the flow of the operations mechanisms of The Platform. In support of this proposal, 71% of volunteers strongly agreed they would have felt more comfortable on The Platform had they had the chance to shadow a higher-level Crisis Counselor.

*Mentoring Program:* In addition to the shadowing and roleplaying opportunities, the Subcommittee proposes a mentoring program wherein higher level Crisis Counselors will be able to support lower level Crisis Counselors through practice, role playing, and debriefing. The Subcommittee understands that Supervisors are responsible for juggling multiple Crisis Counselors and texters. As such, if a Crisis Counselor requests to debrief in private after a conversation, they should be able to ask for an available mentor through an already-existing system. Furthermore, the Subcommittee understands that talking to real texters can be a rather unnerving experience. In order to ease anxiety, the Subcommittee proposes the creation of a practice queue, wherein Crisis Counselors will have the opportunity to roleplay and practice their skills.

High-level volunteers will likely welcome the program, as it is an opportunity to facilitate interactions between volunteers of different levels, and make use of time spent waiting in queue. In addition, not only would such a mentorship program be beneficial in building relationships

between volunteers, but it would also show the higher level Crisis Counselors that they are valued and trusted to take on the responsibility of passing down their experience to new volunteers.

*Restorative and Continued Training:* Training is constantly updated and reviewed as practices of crisis counseling are fine-tuned. As such, it is important for each Crisis Counselor to keep up with training. In this proposed system, when a Crisis Counselor enters The Platform, they will be able to choose whether they want to prioritize texters (the active texter queue) or development (the continued training queue). Counselors who choose to prioritize development will take lower priority in the texter queue than those who chose to focus on texters for that shift, in turn allowing Crisis Counselors to refresh their skills and enhance their knowledge while still fulfilling their volunteer hours. According to the survey administered to Crisis Counselors, 70% agreed that volunteers must go through continued training in order to “renew, refresh, and expand their skills.” After they finish reviewing the allocated training materials, Crisis Counselors will then be placed in the active texter queue and continue operations as normal. These training materials will consist of refreshers of skills with a special focus on the multisystemic nature of society as well as more complex and in-depth DEI training. Considering the high number of Crisis Counselors in-queue during a conventional shift at this time, this would provide a productive way of utilizing volunteer hours on The Platform.

If a Crisis Counselor is returning from an extended break, they must take a refresher training course - a more condensed version of the initial training - before returning to The Platform. Furthermore, past hesitance to remove Crisis Counselors who have displayed hurtful and/or discriminatory behavior is of special concern to this Subcommittee. As such, the

Subcommittee proposes a one-strike system, wherein Crisis Counselors who have displayed such behaviour will be provided with specific learning materials and training. Should a Crisis Counselor fail to exhibit growth or learning after a Coach or Supervisor calls in the volunteer for discriminatory actions, the volunteer must be let go.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training**

Results from the training survey showed that 98% of the Crisis Counselors believe that DEI training is crucial to work as Crisis Counselors, and 56% of Crisis Counselors believed that 20-50% of the training should have material focused on DEI. Multicultural training must be put in place in order to target the preconceived notions, attitudes, and behaviors of Crisis Counselors as it relates to marginalized communities. Previous studies have shown that implementing this kind of training can increase comfort and openness while interacting with diverse populations (Celinska and Swazo, 2016). The Subcommittee proposes that new DEI training includes modules on implicit bias training, ally training, and additional anti-racist training. A multicultural focus should ensure that all vulnerable populations are addressed in some capacity in these training modules as well.

*Bias Training:* Unconscious or implicit bias is defined here as prejudice, unsupported arguments, or unsupported judgements in favor of or against a person or group as compared to another, usually in a manner that is unfair. Evidence suggests that these biases occur automatically and are based on quick judgement (Fox, 1970). In order to combat implicit bias, individuals must learn more about its existence and how it can be combated by individuals, groups, organizations, and society at-large. The most successful training, research shows, will be the one that focuses on “the cognitive processes that can lead to bias” (Lattal, 2016). As such,

Crisis Counselor training should include information about structural dynamics and systemic racism, as well as strategies to fight against internalized biases. Such strategies typically include, but are not limited to, listening to stories of others and sharing one's own, developing brave spaces to discuss unconscious bias, and avoiding stereotypes and overgeneralizations (Fox, 1970).

Diversity training is an ongoing process, and it would be improbable to cover every intricacy in-depth during the short training period. As such, during training, the main focus will be on recognizing bias and being an ally, with some focus on vulnerable populations. Later on, during their time as a Crisis Counselor, volunteers will be able to access videos and lessons on other intersectional topics (including historical lessons on oppression of various marginalised communities) as a part of their continued training as well.

In accordance with multicultural training, the Subcommittee proposes an inclusive training covering strategies and resources for a variety of topics including, but not limited to, domestic violence, undocumented immigrants, neurodiverse texters, child loss, miscarriages, racism, ableism, and much more.

### **Coaches**

There has been confusion among Crisis Counselors regarding the role of a Coach. The Subcommittee is asking for clarification on this matter, as well as on-time and additional feedback from Coaches for the first few conversations a Level One Crisis Counselor takes. It is believed that there must be more supervisory and current feedback on conversations, as feedback is invaluable in the development of crisis counseling skills. A volunteer's most sensitive and greatest period of development occurs during their first 20 conversations. This is when a Crisis

Counselor must receive the most feedback, allowing them the opportunity to improve based on advice from their respective Coach. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has stated in their guide for successfully training that consistently evaluating members gives Supervisors (or in this case, the Coaches) the chance to discuss performance with volunteers, suggest changes, and figure out what is or is not working (SAMHA, 2005).

It has recently come to light that there are Crisis Counselor productivity and quality scores. The Training Subcommittee requests access to these scores, along with strategies on how to improve them. Transparency from Crisis Text Line will increase the quality of Crisis Counselors' work (Hattie, 2007).



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## **LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee**

Co-chairs: Faith Gipson and Frankie Williamson

### **Introduction**

The aim of the LGBTQIA+ subcommittee is to create an environment that respects and embraces LGBTQIA+ identities whilst also creating a place for allies to grow and learn how to better support their LGBTQIA+ peers. This section of the document will focus on how active rescues can be harmful for trans individuals, revision of training to include more information on LGBTQIA+ issues, sharing pronouns with texters, LGBTQIA+ resources, diversity on the Crisis Text Line website and promotional materials, and the disciplinary process for queerphobic counselors.

### **Non-consensual Active Rescues for Trans Individuals**

The LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee discussed the implications of the current Active Rescue policy on trans texters. In a survey conducted by Trans Lifeline reaching over 800 trans individuals across the US, respondents were asked to rate how comfortable they felt interacting with doctors, nurses, paramedics, firefighters, and police officers on a scale of 1-5, respectively. The average score for each profession was under 3, with police officers having the lowest, scoring between 1 and 2 (Trans Lifeline, 2018). Meanwhile, According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, at least a quarter of respondents reported being denied equal treatment, harassed, disrespected, or assaulted in a hospital, and at least one-fifth of respondents reported mistreatment in a mental health setting. Nearly half of respondents reported having been harassed, asked to leave a public space, or assaulted after having to present incongruent identity documents (Trans Lifeline, 2018). Exasperating these current concerns, a rule finalized earlier

this month by the Department of Health and Human Services means that the federal government no longer recognizes gender identity as an avenue for sex discrimination in health care (Sanger-Katz & Weiland, 2020).

Police training does not tend to prioritize mandatory crisis intervention orientation. Despite these trainings being available, they are often optional and overshadowed by trainings that encourage the use of brute force. Simply put, any person risks being harmed or killed when in the presence of police; however, these chances increase exponentially when the person is trans, BIPOC, or disabled (Please note the findings of the BIPOC Subcommittee for more information on risk to BIPOC). For more information on how failure to properly train police officers poses a risk to trans people, the Subcommittee is providing information on the death of Kayden Clarke, an autistic transgender man, in his home on Feb. 4th, 2016. Clarke was shot dead by a three person police officer team who entered his home using lethal weapons. Only one of the three police officers were trained in crisis intervention (Autistic Advocacy Network, 2016). Non-consensual active rescue poses several other risks for the LGBTQIA+ community. Young callers frequently share that they have experienced a non-consensual active rescue after sharing suicidal ideation with another support line. Many of these young people are not out to their families, causing the active rescue procedure to potentially out them. This likely results in abuse, rejection, and occasionally sudden, unexpected homelessness (Trans Lifeline, 2018). Hospitalization following an active rescue adds another layer of risk. Approximately one-third of transgender people live below the poverty line (Fitzsimons, 2019). For many callers, being charged for an ambulance or hospital bill can make the difference between survival and being out on the street. A history of involuntary commitment can also preclude them from receiving

gender-affirming medical treatment (such as surgery) in the future, or greatly decrease their chances (Trans Lifeline, 2018).

The LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee also notes the hesitation on the part of trans texters to be fully open with Crisis Counselors at Crisis Text Line due to the current Active Rescue policy. The Trans Lifeline position statement highlights these concerns. When surveyed, many trans individuals shared that they “would not be comfortable speaking to us [Trans Lifeline] about anything from walking their dog to getting top surgery to coming out to family unless we assure them that we will not call authorities without their consent” (Trans Lifeline, 2018). For the purposes of collecting data to back up this position, the Subcommittee is also including some anecdotal evidence. To protect their identity, their real names will not be used. When asked about their comfort with using a hotline that performs non-consensual active rescues, both respondents (trans identifying) replied that they would not use the service. One claimed that “it [crisis hotlines that perform non-consensual active rescues] raises concerns over what I would be comfortable discussing with the service, like what they may think is too serious and would need emergency help called” (Williamson, 2020).

Taking these concerns into consideration, the LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee shared its findings with the Active Rescue Subcommittee. The LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee supports the proposals of the Active Rescue Subcommittee to ensure equity and safety for trans texters.

### **Training on LGBTQ+ Issues**

This Subcommittee requests that Crisis Text Line provides diversity training to Crisis Counselors that focuses on specific LGBTQIA+ issues that they will encounter with texters on The Platform and with other Crisis Counselors that they interact with. Possible diversity training

options could include an adaptation of the Trevor Ally Training, which provides a basic framework of understanding LGBTQ+ youth and the unique challenges they often face (The Trevor Project, 2018). This training focuses on describing various terminology related to LGBTQ+ communities, explaining the unique challenges facing LGBTQ+ youth, identifying ways to create safer and more supportive environments for LGBTQ+ youth, and discussing the services offered by the Trevor Project (this may be revised to focus on services offered by Crisis Text Line) (The Trevor Project, 2020). Another potential alternative is the Safe Zone Project - a free online resource providing curricula, activities, and other resources for educators facilitating Safe Zone trainings (sexuality, gender, and LGBTQ+ education sessions), and learners who are hoping to explore these concepts on their own (The Safe Zone Project, 2013).

Furthermore, the LGBTQIA+ subcommittee requests to revise the current policy around only transferring to another Crisis Counselor in the case of gender-based violence, the end of a Crisis Counselor's shift, or if the conversation is triggering for the counselor. Texters who feel more comfortable talking to counselors who share their same identity/experience should be allowed to do so if the option is available. In addition, a randomized controlled trial of more than 400 people in England published in *The Lancet* has shown that care from peer support workers with lived experience of mental health conditions may help reduce the likelihood of readmission for people who have recently left acute mental health care (Lancet, 2018). Potential redesign to connect texters with a counselor who shares a similar lived experience could include establishing a 1-2 question survey at the beginning of the conversation asking whether texters would prefer to connect with a counselor who shares their lived experience should that be possible.

The LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee requests that Crisis Counselors are provided training on how to use gender neutral pronouns with a focus to remain neutral using the pronouns “they/them/theirs” with texters, other counselors, and staff members until they know otherwise. Neutral terms such as “parent” as opposed to “mom” or “dad” should also be used. Studies show that using a gender-neutral pronoun reduces mental biases that favor men and boosts positive feelings towards women and LGBT people (Sample, 2019). Gender-neutral language demonstrates inclusion for people who do not identify with the stereotypical gender binary. It also ensures that potentially harmful memories are not brought up for people through incorrect language usage (Yurik, 2019).

### **Sharing Pronouns with Texters**

The LGBTQIA+ Subcommittee requests to allow Crisis Counselors to share their pronouns with their texters should they choose to do so. However, this should not be required out of respect for those who do not want to.

“If someone uses the wrong pronouns for them [trans/gender non-conforming folk], they may feel invalidated and disrespected. People who fall outside of the commonly used gender categories have the burden of telling others what their pronouns are. This can be alienating, marking that person as different or ‘other.’ Learning to share pronouns is a vital aspect of building a more inclusive society. Transgender individuals and those who do not conform to the male or female gender categories often struggle when deciding to tell others their pronouns — or asking people to use them. When cisgender people take the lead in sharing their pronouns, it reduces the stigma associated with talking about gender pronouns. It also signals to others that you are an ally” (Blackburn Center, 2020).

Identifying oneself as an ally of the LGBTQ+ community should be a primary and visible aim of Crisis Text Line.

The Subcommittee recognizes that Crisis Text Line has already made some strides in becoming more inclusive (e.g., making pronouns visible in global chat on The Platform, staff having pronouns in email signatures, etc.), but there is still more work to be done. This anecdote from Argo Collective shows just how valuable a small change such as placing pronouns in an email signature can be:

“At Argo Collective, we always have our workshop attendees make a commitment before the close of each session. One of our clients committed to adding his pronouns on his LinkedIn profile. Two days after he added “He/Him” after his last name, a University reached out to him and said they noticed he and some of his colleagues added pronouns on LinkedIn. The University told him they had a transgender student who was looking for an internship placement and this company seemed like a safe environment for the student to begin their career” (Masure, 2018).

The Subcommittee understands that sharing pronouns with texters poses a certain risk because it might alienate texters who either do not understand pronouns (and the Subcommittee recognizes that a moment of crisis probably is not the best time to learn) or who are queerphobic (while this behavior is not supported, it is understood that counselors are here to support people in moments of crisis and their views may not necessarily align with those of the counselor). The Subcommittee’s proposal, then, is to allow Crisis Counselors to share their pronouns if they choose to and add a link to a website explaining pronouns in the beginning of the conversation. This way, while texters wait, they can read up on what pronouns are (if they so choose) along

with the terms of service. This method is expected to create minimal disruption in supporting the texter during their moment of crisis. The Subcommittee proposes that this be the website paired with the Terms of Service: <https://www.mypronouns.org/> (Sakurai, 2017).

### **LGBTQIA+ Resources**

The Subcommittee first proposes that Trans Lifeline be added to the list of approved resources. If there is concern that the person would prefer to only speak to someone who is LGBTQIA+ and this isn't feasible for Crisis Text Line, they could be referred to Trans Lifeline which is staffed by trans crisis responders to respond to trans people in crisis (Trans Lifeline, 2020). The Subcommittee also proposes the Safe Zone Project as a resource, as it is a website which contains a large amount of training on how to teach allyship, offers safe zone training, and also provides a large amount of LGBT resources for those facilitating training on LGBT issues (The Safe Zone Project, 2013). The Subcommittee envisions that this would be more of a resource for counselors and staff to use rather than one provided to texters and the use of this resource has been highlighted earlier in this section. The Bisexual Resource Center is another strong resource that contains information for those facing issues due to bisexuality, including stigma and difficulty fitting into queer and straight spaces, and it also provides links to find bisexual support groups (Bisexual Resource Center, 2020). The Anti-Violence Project provides bilingual (Spanish and English) abuse intervention hotlines, and helps with abuse reports. This Project has significant experience in violence against those in the LGBT community, and can also offer resources to help cover counseling (Anti-Violence Project, 2020). InterACT provides resources and visibility for Intersex Youth, and helps explain laws surrounding intersex people



and their legal rights. InterACT also provides resources to help young people understand intersex (InterACT, 2020).

At the moment, Crisis Text Line has 15 resources cited on their website for LGBTQIA+ texters. The Subcommittee believes that there is room for improvement, especially due to the high volume of LGBTQIA+ texters reported. Currently, Crisis Text Line seems to be lacking specific resources for intersex texters, bisexual texters, LGBTQIA+ people specifically in violent situations, and LGBTQIA+ people dealing with adult issues such as workplace discrimination, adoption laws, police brutality and arrests (ACLU could be a potential resource for this), and raising children as a LGBTQIA+ family.

### **Lack of Diversity on Website/Promotional Materials**

Currently on the website, there is no clear indication on the homepage that Crisis Counselors are trained to be sensitive to LGBTQIA+ issues. In the “About Us” tab, there is a video that talks about Crisis Text Line and what it is, which heavily features Nancy Lublin. This video talks about how 47% of texters to Crisis Text Line do not identify as heterosexual (Crisis Text Line, 2013). Sexual and gender identity is also mentioned on the resources page. However, the Subcommittee thinks it is important to make a clear declaration somewhere easily accessible on the website that Crisis Text Line is LGBTQIA+ friendly. That way, if a texter is in crisis and concerned about Crisis Text Line’s stance on LGBTQIA+ texters, they may easily identify that information and feel safe texting in. The Subcommittee requests that Crisis Text Line adds a section on its public facing website that it is an LGBTQIA+ friendly organization. This could be a blurb, such as those on the homepage where there are six topics listed: “Coronavirus, Anxiety, Emotional Abuse, Depression, Suicide, and School” (Crisis Text Line, 2013). In terms of social

media representation, the Crisis Text Line lacks supportive ads, social media posts, and interactions related to the LGBTQIA+ community. The Subcommittee recommends that there needs to be clear examples and mentions of LGBTQIA+ support on social media. In this generation, it is common for people to survey a resource on social media before engaging.

Generally, most of Crisis Text Line's posts about LGBTQIA+ issues are during pride month. To ensure that Crisis Text Line is being represented as a safe space for these texters, the Subcommittee thinks it is imperative to talk more openly about Crisis Text Line as an ally. This can also help with building texter rapport since counselors would not need to establish that allyship as in-depth early in the conversation if texters already feel safe.

### **Disciplinary Process for Queerphobic Crisis Counselors**

In the discussions with the members of this Subcommittee, many counselors revealed that they were unsure of the process for reporting Crisis Counselors who exhibit queerphobic behavior. This includes, and is not limited to, intentional misgendering, microaggressions about the LGBTQIA+ community, deadnaming, or mishandling conversations with LGBTQIA+ texters. Generally most people have been unaware of the current system, which is the "Talk to Us" button on The Platform. In the general chat, on The Platform and Our Network, there is potential for unsafe dialogue that could negatively impact the mental health of LGBTQIA+ Crisis Counselors. The Subcommittee requests a clear reporting system for these issues. There are several things that will be imperative in this process. Firstly, a clear and well-communicated reporting system. There should be a way to report behavior of other counselors that is easy to find and is well advertised. This would function similarly to a HR report system in a general

corporate structure. This also should be somewhere easily accessible to Crisis Counselors at any point.

There should also be a level of anonymity to reports so that Crisis Counselors feel confident reporting things without concern of potential pushback. Crisis Text Line staff would know who reported them, but the person who was reported should not know the identity of who made the report. A clear investigation will be key. There should be follow-up by staff with the person who made the report so that they know that their concerns are being taken seriously and that a thorough investigation is conducted. It would make for a healthier reporting system to know that reports are not just being left untouched. This subcommittee endorses the ideas proposed by the Training Subcommittee regarding disciplinary actions following reports.

During these discussions, the necessity for texters to be able to report queerphobic Crisis Counselors was also discussed. Although there is a feedback survey at the end of the conversation, that could leave the texter wondering if anyone is checking the surveys besides just for data. The disciplinary function for this should function how the disciplinary process for Crisis Counselors exhibiting queerphobic behavior towards other Crisis Counselors has been proposed to function. Possibilities for fixing the reporting steps for this issue are: a link at the beginning of the conversation that gives texters a form where they can report behavior and can choose to enter info for a follow up, or an option to include data during the feedback survey if they want someone to contact them about their feedback.

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