

CRISIS TEXT LINE |

Volunteer Voices: The Impact of Volunteering At Crisis Text Line

Insights from a Survey of Past and
Present Volunteer Crisis Counselors

Implication of This Study

Crisis Text Line has trained nearly 60,000 volunteer Crisis Counselors since launching its text-based mental health and crisis intervention service almost a decade ago. We surveyed 3,438 past and present volunteers to explore if and in what ways the experience of volunteering at Crisis Text Line has impacted them, their relationships, careers, and communities. The results emerging from this study paint a picture of how volunteering at Crisis Text Line shapes the lives of Crisis Counselors, and how it can positively impact their relationships and the communities around them.

Donating time to support people in the worst moments of their lives has:

- 01 Empowered people committed to supporting the mental wellbeing of others with skills, practice, and a platform to do this work.
- 02 Provided pathways of skill building and professional development for aspiring mental health workers.
- 03 Increased the mental health and resilience of the volunteers themselves in the process.
- 04 Enabled volunteers to make a difference in their personal and professional relationships, and the communities to which they belong.

About Crisis Text Line

Crisis Text Line is a nonprofit organization that provides free, confidential, 24/7 text-based mental health support and crisis intervention in both English and Spanish for anyone in the United States, including Puerto Rico. To learn more about Crisis Text Line and to support additional research efforts like this, go to crisistextline.org/donate.

About Crisis Text Line Research & Impact

Crisis Text Line Research and Impact is dedicated to evidencing and amplifying Crisis Text Line's impact on texters, volunteers, and society at large. With questions or comments, please contact Chief Impact Officer Margaret Meagher at research@crisistextline.org.

Insights from a Survey of Past and Present Volunteer Crisis Counselors

Crisis Text Line has trained nearly 60,000 volunteer Crisis Counselors since launching its text-based mental health and crisis intervention service almost a decade ago. Volunteers have served on the front lines of our support to texters in their moments of crisis, whenever and wherever they need it.

Volunteering plays a critical role in reaching our vision of an empathetic world where nobody feels alone. To study this impact on volunteers and their communities, we surveyed 3,438 past and present volunteers to explore if and in what ways the experience of volunteering at Crisis Text Line has impacted them, their relationships, careers, and communities.

The results shed light on the power of volunteering with Crisis Text Line at multiple levels, from the individual volunteers to their families, workplaces, and communities. The research offers insights from the voices of volunteer Crisis Counselors themselves towards our shared mission of supporting mental wellbeing for all, at this unprecedented time of mental health epidemic in our country and the world.

What impact does engaging with Crisis Text Line have on volunteers?

1. Volunteers develop valuable skills through their experience with Crisis Text Line.

Volunteers reported learning a range of skills that benefited them in their own personal development, gaining a sense of personal fulfillment through helping others, and reflecting on their role and purpose in life, often leading to or confirming professional pathways in mental health fields.

“Two thirds of volunteers say they use skills learned at Crisis Text Line to deal with some of their own problems.”

Volunteers at Crisis Text Line reported developing various key skills that they use in their daily lives.

90% Can **de-escalate** in situations outside of volunteering.

89% Developed **active listening** skills.

86% Learned **empathy and cultural humility**.

78% Can **identify risky behaviors**, such as suicide risk or self-harm, in communities.

2. Volunteers value the meaningfulness and intrinsic development derived from their experience with Crisis Text Line.

Even volunteers who have only completed training and not yet supported texters in crisis reported a stronger sense of purpose and intrinsic growth.

Volunteers report various personal benefits from volunteering at Crisis Text Line.

2 of 3 Practice **self-care** or **mindfulness**.

2 of 3 Feel better about themselves.

2 of 3 Have **matured emotionally**.

3. Volunteering at Crisis Text Line has impacted the education and career development of volunteers in various ways.

There is a strong relationship between volunteers and educational progression. Half were inspired to continue with their studies; four out of ten say that volunteering at Crisis Text Line made them want to pursue a qualification in a field where they can help people; and for six out of ten, their educational decisions were affirmed through their volunteer experience with Crisis Text Line. More than four out of ten (42%) have qualifications in mental health fields, almost half of which were obtained during and after volunteering at Crisis Text Line. Notably, volunteers with lower level education qualifications as well as those who do not have a qualification in a mental health related field report a statistically significant increase in the development of mental health skills through their volunteering experience at Crisis Text Line.

Does volunteering have a cascading impact on the families, communities, and careers of volunteers?

1. The skills that volunteers develop through their experience with Crisis Text Line transfer to their lives beyond the platform.

Inextricable from personal benefits are the broader social benefits that flow from the experience of volunteering; the relationships between volunteers and their family, friends and professional colleagues have also been impacted because of the skills they have gained and the experiences they have been exposed to through volunteering at Crisis Text Line.

Volunteers attribute numerous social outcomes to their Crisis Text Line experience.

90% Feel that Crisis Text line provided them with **skills to support someone in need of mental health support outside of volunteering.**

80% Found that volunteering at Crisis Text Line affirmed their humanitarian values, including respect for **humanity and diversity.**

80% Indicated that volunteering at Crisis Text Line has enabled them to practice **de-escalation in tense situations outside of volunteering.**

50% **Feel more connected to other people** in general as a result of their volunteer experience with Crisis Text Line.

40% Attribute a **stronger sense of belonging to the communities** of which they form part due to their experience volunteering with Crisis Text Line.

40% Attribute **stronger personal relationships** to their experience volunteering with Crisis Text Line.

33% Report having **stronger professional relationships** because of volunteering at Crisis Text Line.

2. Volunteering at Crisis Text Line has contributed to volunteers seeing themselves as agents of positive change in society.

80%

See themselves as someone who can **influence positive change**.

70%

See themselves as making a positive change in the **communities of which they form part** as a result of their Crisis Text Line volunteer experience.

66%

See themselves as **advocating for relevant policy changes to support the mental well-being of others** because of their Crisis Text Line volunteer experience.

3. While social benefits emerged overall across all volunteer groups, some benefits seem to be more common for certain groups.

For example, in this study, volunteers identifying as Black or African American, Asian or Asian American, LatinX or Hispanic, or any combination of these identities report particularly high levels of social benefits such as feeling more connected to others, improved quality of personal and work relationships, a stronger sense of belonging to the communities of which they form part, and experiencing a stronger sense for humanitarian values.

Volunteers identifying with certain racial or ethnic groups, such as Latine or Hispanic, and Middle Eastern, North African or Arab are more inspired to continue with their studies than those identifying with other racial or ethnic groups. Those who identified as gender nonconforming report a particularly strong sense of belonging to the communities of which they form part because of their Crisis Text Line volunteer experience. Additionally, younger volunteers benefit even more in terms of skills development than older volunteers.

Acknowledgments

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Dedication

This report is dedicated to the many volunteer Crisis Counselors who give their time and energy to helping others in crisis every day, and to all of the brave, resilient people who reach out to Crisis Text Line in moments of need. Led by Margaret Meagher and Sonja Loots, and produced by the Crisis Text Line Research and Impact team, this research was a collaborative project with contributions of many others gratefully acknowledged.

To partner with Crisis Text Line to support volunteering, please contact:
info@crisistextline.org

To become a volunteer Crisis Counselor at Crisis Text line, please visit:
crisistextline.org/become-a-volunteer