



Mindful Employer In-House

Protecting the Psychological Health and Safety of Volunteers

Tool Kit

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The National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace states that in addition to employees, the psychological health and safety of volunteers and students should be protected.

There are however, some challenges since volunteers are generally not supervised in the same way that employees would be, which means it may be more difficult to identify and respond to a volunteer who may be struggling with mental health concerns.

By putting some structure and strategies in place, organizations can do a better job of not just supporting volunteers but in protecting their well-being. In this toolkit we will cover three areas: organizational strategies, managing volunteers, and responding when a volunteer may be struggling.

Volunteers come from all walks of life. This means a percentage of them will have lived experience with addiction, trauma or mental illness. Other's will be struggling with personal, financial or health issues. The purpose of this toolkit is to explore the strategies that can be used to improve the psychological health and safety of volunteers.

How does your organization currently support the health and safety of volunteers?

Orientation/Training

Resource/Supports

Coaching/Mentoring

There are policies and processes that can help improve clarity about accountability for volunteers in a supportive way. For example, an interactive and robust orientation, where volunteers get to engage with employees within the organization that could be a support to them, if and when they needed it, such as occupational health, wellness, or human resources professionals.

What are the pros and cons of each of these policy changes?

Policy Change	Benefits	Risks

Who is the individual you could share these with, that has the authority to make policy changes?

Most people want to feel valued and that the work they are doing matters whether the work is paid or unpaid. While volunteers would not expect to be disciplined or to go through a performance review process, having check-in's such as the, One-on-One's, shown here, can help your volunteers to feel that they are being heard and that what they do matters.

Holding volunteers accountable to describe what they are going to do and how they would measure success, gives you an opportunity to check in with them to see if they have met their own goals. These meetings could be as short as ten minutes. This also helps to keep the volunteer supervisor aware of how things are going. Where a face-to-face meeting is not possible, the volunteer can still fill in the One-on-One and email it.

Review the One-on-One template below. Consider how practical this resource would be in your organization to facilitate discussion between volunteers and their supervisors. Are there questions you would add or remove?

One-on-One Discussion Points
<p>Please provide thoughtful answers to each of the following statements:</p>
<p>My challenges right now are... <i>(everything that may be frustrating, overwhelming, annoying or concerning you)</i></p>
<p>The errors I have made this week are <i>(and I need help to correct them or I corrected them this way)</i>...</p>
<p>Specific people I have delighted in my role as a volunteer include... <i>(who and what did you do)</i></p>

I am contributing to positive workplace mental health in this way...
My fellow volunteers or employees have been helpful to me in this way...
I was most energized when doing this volunteer work...
Any other comments or contributions...

Adapted with permission from Mary Ann Baynton & Associates.



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If your organizational policies encourage volunteers to reach out, and your management strategies support early identification when issues exist, the next step would be being able to respond effectively when there is a concern.

Some resources that are available to full-time staff may not be available to volunteers, such as employee and family assistance programs. But there may be other organizational and community resources that may be helpful.

Discuss the resources that you're aware of, as well as those that should be explored.

What resources does your organization offer that can help support a volunteer that might be struggling with life or health issues?

What other resources could be developed that may be helpful to volunteers?

Mental Health Resource List

Organizational Resources	Contact Name	Phone	E-Mail
Human Resource Department			
Member of Volunteer Staff			
Wellness/Health Centre			
Occupational Health Nurse			
Other			

Mental Health Resource List

Community Resources	Name	Phone	Location/Contact
Family Doctor			
Local Branch of Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)			
Mood Disorders Associations			
Addiction Services			
Distress Line			
Child and Family Services			
Family Support Groups			
Return-to-Work Planning			

Mental Health Resource List

Community Resources	Name	Phone
Online Information and Tools	Working Through It When employees are struggling with mental health issues, you may be concerned about invading privacy or being seen as harassing. Working Through It is a resource that provides employees with practical strategies for personal coping strategies at work, off work and returning to work.	workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/wti
	Check Up From the Neck Up This simple, online, private, mental health check-up can identify some symptoms of common mood disorders so you can get help if you need it. You can also learn more about mood disorders on this site and find resources to help yourself, your family members, or friends.	moordisorders.ca/program/check-up-from-the-neck-up
	Find your local CMHA CMHA branches across Canada provide a wide range of innovative services and supports to people who are experiencing mental illness and their families. These services are tailored to the needs and resources of the communities where they are based.	cmha.ca/get-involved/find-your-cmha/
	Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Foundation CAMH combines clinical care, research, education, policy development and health promotion to help transform the lives of people affected by mental health and addiction issues.	camh.ca
	Workplace Strategies for Mental Health Workplace Strategies for Mental Health, is the primary vehicle through which the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace makes free information, tools and resources available to employers and organizations who recognize that a healthier workplace can improve their bottom line.	workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Mental Health Resource List (continued)

Community Resources	Name	Phone
Online Information and Tools	Mental Health Commission of Canada The Mental Health Commission of Canada leads the development and dissemination of innovative programs and tools to support the mental health and wellness of Canadians.	mentalhealthcommission.ca
	The Family Guide to Mental Health Recovery Project “The Family Guide to Mental Health Recovery” is an interactive documentary project that will provide new hope, insight and guidance to the whole family, as they begin a journey of recovery.	www.familyguidetomentalhealth.com

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Questions to ask before engaging the volunteer

Are you considering having a discussion with the volunteer about their performance? By asking yourself these questions before engaging in a conversation with the volunteer, you can prepare for the discussion by considering your needs and perspectives of the situation.

CONSIDER YOUR OWN NEEDS

- Do I have the time to do this properly or I am pressuring myself to rush through this?
- Am I responding to hearsay or speaking about known facts?
- Am I in the right frame of mind to do this or should I be rescheduling for another day?
- Am I considering my role in the situation or believing that I have no need to improve?

APPROACH THE ISSUES WITH A FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS

- Am I looking for solutions or just rehashing the problem? *Listening for Understanding* helps you to understand the perspective of the employee before discussing solutions.
- Will this approach bring about new behaviour or focus on old behaviour?
- Will this approach bring about long-term improvement or only short-term results?

EXPLORE POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON THE VOLUNTEER AND OTHERS

- Am I seeing the bigger picture or just this particular situation?
- Will the potential solution provide energy for the volunteer or drain them?
- Can I preserve the dignity of those involved or will someone feel *shamed or blamed*?
- Does this approach encourage the volunteer to take control and responsibility for their well-being and success or am I retaining all control?
- Have I adequately addressed the fears and concerns of others or will I create unease by ignoring them?

HELP THE VOLUNTEER ACHIEVE SUCCESS

- Can the volunteer and I develop a shared plan for success or will we hold separate ideas of what success will look like?
- Am I supporting my volunteer to be successful or am I primarily focused on either personality issues or task concerns?
- Will I monitor and *follow up* or do I think one conversation will be the end of it?

CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

- How do you usually communicate direction? Do you know if your *communication style* works for your employee?
- How do you usually give feedback? Do you know how your style impacts your employee?

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When you're working with a volunteer to develop a workplace plan consider periodic reviews to help create an objective measure of performance, assess workload, and set priorities.

The Productivity Review form developed by the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace on the next page is a resource that you can use to address and follow up on a specific task where performance may be a concern.

Productivity Review

Primary Job Expectations/Responsibilities

Name: _____
Reviewed with: _____
Date review started: _____
Date for review follow up: _____

Completed in discussion with volunteer at start of review

Newly assigned or ongoing task

What is required to accomplish this successfully?

Volunteer's estimated time required: _____ **Due:** _____ **Actual time taken:** _____

Completed in discussion with volunteer at start of review

What supported or got in the way of success?

Discussion and planning with the volunteer at follow up

Maintaining success and/or taking corrective action