



## **Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities**

### **A. What is a Peer Volunteer?**

A peer volunteer provides a confidential link between the person seeking help and the appropriate help or helper.

A peer volunteer is not a counsellor, doctor, or therapist and does not take the place of a professional.

### **B. Primary Roles and Skills**

Primary Roles:

- Support
- Encouragement
- Referral to appropriate resources
- Program awareness

Primary Skills:

- Communication and listening skills
- Setting boundaries
- Knowledge of resources available

### **C. What is Required to be a Peer Support Volunteer?**

- Desire to help other lawyers based on personal experience and strength.
- Ability to be nonjudgmental and to listen empathetically.
- Understand confidentiality and boundary issues.
- Not in crisis at the present time.

### **D. How to Become a Peer Volunteer**

#### **I. Process for Applying:**

- a. Contact Assist and indicate your interest.
- b. Complete an application form and sign confidentiality agreement therein and return to Assist. The information includes two references, so please let them know of your plans before providing their names and contact information. Assist will call them to ask if they support your interest in volunteering.
- c. Individual interview: Once we have received the form we will contact you for a personal or telephone interview to understand your areas of interest and the type of help you could provide, to help us use your skills to the best advantage.
- d. Attend a training session. You will be informed of the next volunteer training opportunity and are expected to participate. The purpose is to learn & share information and experiences. Your participation is important and appreciated.
- e. Review the information package that Assist will give you.

- f. Your name will be added to our list of volunteers.

## II. Administrative Process:

- a. Assist reviews the completed application form.
- b. Related materials are sent to the applicant outlining duties, expectations, and areas of involvement.
- c. A personal interview is scheduled.
- d. Focus of interview:
  - Motivation for becoming a peer volunteer
  - Related experiences – volunteer and personal
  - Areas of interest
  - Expectations – attending training, participation at events, promotion of Assist, feedback
  - Review confidentiality policies
  - Ensure the applicant has peer volunteer materials
  - Understanding and comfort with interacting with participants
- e. Reference check:
  - Length of time reference has known the applicant
  - Observations about interactions with others
  - Comments on suitability to the volunteer role
  - Application reviewed and accepted by Executive Director and Peer Support Program Coordinator
  - Notify the applicant in writing that he/she has been accepted as an Assist peer volunteer
  - Place name on the confidential peer volunteer list
  - Include the volunteer on email list to receive Assist related information
- f. Training:
  - Assist volunteers are expected to make a commitment to orientation and training for roles in Peer Support. Volunteers need a basic understanding of Assist functions and knowledge of community resources. There is a volunteer training session for new volunteers. Volunteers are required to complete this prior to engaging in volunteer work. Ongoing involvement and availability is expected.

## **E. Communication and Protection of Volunteer Information**

Assist maintains a contact list of our volunteers to use when an appropriate match becomes available. This list is confidential to Assist, and is not shared with others (including other volunteers). Volunteers are asked how they wish to be contacted and if it is appropriate to leave a voicemail message and under what circumstances. Inclusion in the group email list for Assist volunteers is optional.

## **F. Roles and Responsibilities**

As a member of the provincial network of volunteers, there are many opportunities and different ways to volunteer your time, and to share experiences of strength and hope.

There are fluctuating demands for help. In some circumstances there may be few calls and in some circumstances there may be many.

When you receive a call for help it is up to you to accept or decline the opportunity, depending on your circumstances and comfort level with the issues presented.

## **G. Duties**

- Keep informed of Assist events and functioning.
- Have information and material about Assist readily available.
- Share experiences and knowledge of resources with Assist and other volunteers.
- Respond to requests for help as soon as possible. If unable to respond let Assist know so another volunteer can respond.
- Attend training and education sessions when possible.
- Inform Assist staff of any changes or if you are no longer able to volunteer.

## **H. Specific Volunteer Activities**

- Respond to requests for help.
- Provide one-on-one telephone support and assistance.
- Work with someone in person one-on-one (i.e. accompany to self-help meeting).
- Work with Assist as a member of a team to assist someone in crisis.
- Write articles for legal publications.
- Present information sessions (local bar association, legal organizations, or law schools).

## **I. Volunteer Guidelines**

Peer volunteers' generous time commitment and dedication ensures that services are delivered to lawyers in distress. The following principles provide guidelines for your role as a peer volunteer.

- I. **Confidentiality:** This is the fundamental component of our program. It is important to explain your commitment to confidentiality to the person you are helping. If they request that you share the information with someone (i.e. a therapist, an employer, or a physician), advise the Peer Support Program Coordinator first and have the participant sign consent to release the information. Inform the participant of your duty under Law Society of Alberta Code of Professional Conduct Rule 4 (See Tab 7).
- II. **Support:** The role of the volunteer is to listen, share related experiences, offer support and hope, assist the caller to contact an appropriate professional or program (such as a treatment centre or self-help group), and follow up to show continued interest and concern. Volunteers are NOT professional counsellors and must be certain that lawyers and others with whom they speak understand this. Do not diagnose a problem or give advice. That is the role of a professional.
- III. **Program Promotion:** You may be asked to speak at meetings and/or write articles for publications. This is a way to help others understand the program. If you are asked to do a presentation, materials will be provided.
- IV. **Training:** Once you are comfortable and confident as a volunteer you may be asked to use your skill in presentation or training to assist in orientating new volunteers.

- V. Conflict of Interest: While acting as a volunteer, do not act as a lawyer for the person seeking assistance. Clearly distinguish your role as a volunteer from other professional activities.
- VI. Records: Do not maintain files, records, or any identifying information about a participant. This protects the privacy of both parties involved. Only keep contact information if the peer client wants you to and gives you their consent by voluntarily providing it to you.
- VII. Statistical Information: Assist needs to be aware of the activities of volunteers to provide non-identifying information to the Board of Directors and funding organizations. Volunteers will be asked to report how much time was spent on the activities for Assist to prepare annual reports and budget requirements. You will be asked to provide this information annually.
- VIII. Monetary Matters: Do not accept compensation or gratuities for your services. Do not provide financial advice or manage money for the person you are assisting.
- IX. Support and Assistance: If you have questions or doubts, contact the Peer Support Program Coordinator or Assist Executive Director.
- X. Golden Rule: Work with Assist staff and experienced peer volunteers. The situations that volunteers are asked to help with are sometimes difficult and confusing, and there may be no easy solution. It is important to discuss situations you are dealing with for feedback, guidance and support. When discussing a situation, keep in mind the importance of confidentiality and do not use identifying characteristics. Perhaps it may be necessary to discuss a situation with a peer volunteer who is situated in another area to protect anonymity.

## **J. Processes and Procedures**

- I. One-on-One Assistance
  - a. Upon calling Assist, an individual will be welcomed and supported. Assist will discuss the professional counselling services available and the Peer Support program.
  - b. The Assist Peer Support Program Coordinator will then determine if assigning a peer volunteer would be helpful. Assist's Peer Support Program Coordinator will contact the peer volunteer.
  - c. An initial match between peer volunteer and participant is attempted on certain commonalities – gender, location, type of practice, size of practice, and other factors that might help with identification and comfort. The volunteer will be asked to contact the participant. If the volunteer is available and agrees, he/she will be provided with whatever information is available about the nature of the problem. Every attempt will be made to make a connection that will meet the needs of the participant and match the areas that the peer volunteer has experience or knowledge with. If, for any reason, the peer volunteer feels uncomfortable with the request, they will not proceed (i.e. personal acquaintance, the issue is not in area of experience, etc.). Another peer volunteer will then be contacted.

## II. Initial Telephone Contact and Support

- a. Tell the participant that you are contacting him/her and that Assist has asked for your help as a peer volunteer.
- b. Remind the participant of the confidentiality of the process.
- c. Emphasize that your purpose is to help.
- d. Listen.
- e. Remember to keep healthy boundaries.
- f. Avoid arguments, threats, power struggles, judgments, and diagnoses. A volunteer does not confirm the participant's own assessment or diagnosis and does not attempt treatment or counselling.
- g. Determine what the participant might find helpful.
- h. Offer suggestions based on your ability to help (i.e. meeting for further discussion, telephone contact, attending a self-help group together, information about resources or treatment programs).
- i. Follow through and take action as soon as possible, either personally or by referral. Advise the Peer Support Program Coordinator of your actions and/or referral.
- j. Obtain permission before disclosing any identifying information to others.
- k. Listen to the response to your suggestions. Be flexible in methods of help.
- l. Consult with Assist for further suggestions.
- m. Keep Assist informed of the progress and the plans for follow-up.

## III. Publicity

Many members of the legal community are not aware of Assist and its services. Promotion is an important and ongoing task. Volunteers may be asked to contribute articles or stories for publication in law related journals (especially those in your local bar association). Volunteers may participate in seminars, conferences and continuing education events to help educate lawyers about health issues and resources. A volunteer's role in helping to publicize Assist may include:

- Speaker presentations to law firms and law schools
- Writing articles for publication in local law journals or other media
- Participation in other functions to discuss/describe Assist services
- Review and/or preparation of educational materials
- Participate/present at training events, or be on a panel
- Committees and Task Forces: From time to time Assist may set up committees or task forces to assist with programs or specific tasks. Volunteers may sit on task forces, chair a committee or assist with the organization of special interest events.

## **K. Resources and Resource Information**

It is important to know how to respond to crisis situations and to be aware of resources in your area. Up to date knowledge of programs & their contact information is provided. An extensive list of resources can be found under Tabs 5 & 6, and on the Assist website.

## **L. Prevention**

The goal of Assist is to prevent small problems from becoming large issues that affect a lawyer's practice and personal life. Volunteers help achieve this by providing support and information and by encouraging lawyers to seek help early.