

26th August 2003

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Kelly,

Please find attached the Lifeline Australia submission into the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations.

Lifeline has approximately 10,000 volunteers throughout Australia. This submission proposes that the role of the volunteer sector as a pathway to employment be acknowledged and supported through recognition of training and inclusion in traineeship programs. Research conducted by keys urbis young into the role of Lifeline telecounsellor training is used as the evidence basis for these recommendations.

Thankyou for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion paper,

Yours sincerely,

Dawn Smith
CEO
Lifeline Australia Inc



**Lifeline's contribution to
Employment: Increasing participation in paid work
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Employment and Workplace Relations**

August 2003

1. Executive Summary

Lifeline is the largest volunteer based telephone counselling organisation in Australia and currently has 10,000 volunteers either working in local shops or providing counselling. Half of Lifeline's 42 Centres are in rural and regional areas.

Volunteer telecounsellors, the majority of whom are women, undergo an accredited training program which provides them with the skills to staff the Lifeline 24 hour crisis line.

An independent study by Keys Urbis Young (2002), funded by the Office of the Status of Women, into the role that the Lifeline volunteer training and experience has in improving women's employment options, has shown that this experience assists women to obtain employment, further their studies and increase their general work skills.

Lifeline believes that the following measures could be implemented to increase the level of participation in the paid workforce:

- Change current Government initiative "New Apprenticeships" and widen current government parameters to include volunteers as potential trainees.
- Provide resources to enable volunteer organisations such as Lifeline to articulate accredited volunteer training courses into regional universities and TAFES.
- Alter ANTA funding guidelines to assist national volunteer organisations such as Lifeline to apply for vocational education grants on a national, not a state basis.

2. The organisation - Lifeline Australia

Lifeline Australia Inc. is the peak body for the 42 Lifeline Centres around Australia, half of which are in rural and remote areas. These Centres recruit and train volunteers from the local community to provide a national telephone counseling service 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for the cost of a local call. In response to community needs, many Centres develop additional face to face services such as financial, gambling and relationship counseling.

Lifeline Australia Inc is the national governing and accreditation body for the Member Centres and provides leadership, policy development, advocacy, and coordination on national issues and resources. Member Centres join around accredited standards that flow from shared vision, beliefs and values.

Lifeline Centres support themselves by operating a variety of businesses, generally secondhand clothes shops. Lifeline Centres obtain an average of only 15% of their funding from government sources.

3. Lifeline Training

Training has always been the cornerstone of Lifeline and underpins the provision of telephone and other counselling and community services.

Lifeline's 4,500 volunteer telephone counsellors answered 415, 575 calls in 2002, 37% from rural areas and 63% from metropolitan areas. This amounted to over 200,000 hours of listening to the community in one year.

The contribution of Lifeline training to community capacity building in Australian society is significant. Since its inception in 1963 more than 55,000 Australians drawn from local communities have been trained to listen, respond and provide referral options, not only on the telephone but in their workplaces, with their families and amongst their friends. Most Centres will conduct two training courses every year, resulting in a total of 2,500 additional volunteers trained annually.

All Lifeline Centres participated in a strategic plan in 2000 which identified standardized and accredited training as a key goal for the next three years. Lifeline Australia Inc became a Registered Training Organisation in 2001 and an accredited course, Certificate IV in Telephone Counselling Skills was devised and endorsed by ANTA early in 2003. During 2002/2003, 16 Centres participated in a pilot program to become designated RTO sites and there are now 30 sites across Australia.

4. Report into the effect of Lifeline training on women's pathways to employment.

The majority of Lifeline telephone counselors are women. A study funded by the Office of Status of Women and undertaken by Keys Urbis Young into the effect of Lifeline's training on women's pathways to employment¹ found that the training increased women's employment opportunities, opportunities prompted them to participate in further education and enhanced their general work skills.

The group was divided into women who were in paid employment at the time of volunteering with Lifeline, women who were unemployed and looking for work, women who undertook home and family responsibilities, women who were students and women who were retired

The findings are detailed in Appendix A and form the basis of the recommendations listed below.

¹ Pathways to Employment – prepared by keys urbis young for Lifeline 2002, funded by OSW.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Change current Government initiative “New Apprenticeships” to widen current government parameters to include volunteers as potential trainees.

The Keys Urbis study showed that over half of the women not in paid work at the time of volunteering to be a counsellor with Lifeline had obtained work by the time they left Lifeline (keys urbis) The Report repeatedly emphasised the increased confidence in their skills and abilities that volunteering with Lifeline provided.

Lifeline also has many volunteers in its retail shops which could benefit similarly from obtaining a vocational training certificate whilst volunteering.

The financial boost to Lifeline Centres that would occur if volunteers could participate as trainees in this scheme, would enable Lifeline to provide accredited training to many more people, thus supporting and encouraging them to participate in the workforce in a paid capacity.

5.2 Provide resources to enable volunteer organisations such as Lifeline to articulate accredited volunteer training courses into regional universities and TAFES.

Volunteering with Lifeline encourages women to participate in further study.(Keys Urbis) If volunteers could utilise their accredited training with Lifeline to articulate into other vocational courses then women, particularly in rural areas, could enter into the paid workforce as a qualified employee.

5.3 Alter ANTA funding guidelines to assist national volunteer organisations such as Lifeline to apply for vocational education grants on a national, not a state basis.

Lifeline currently cannot access ANTA funding because the funds are distributed on a state, not national basis. This has hindered Lifeline’s ability to obtain government support for its vocational education training program.

Appendix A

Pathways to Education and Employment – keys urbis young 2002. A study undertaken for Lifeline Australia and funded by the Office of Status of Women on the role volunteering plays in improving the educational and employment opportunities of women who volunteer as telephone counsellors. (pi-iii)

Keys Urbis Young 2002

Executive Summary

Lifeline undertook to examine the role of Lifeline training and experience in improving the educational and employment opportunities of women who volunteer as telephone counsellors.

A six page survey was distributed in October of 2002 to Lifeline volunteers. Volunteers from five Lifeline Centres across Australia completed the survey. In total 153 completed returns were received.

A variety of women of different ages, employment and educational backgrounds completed the survey.

The results indicate that Lifeline enhanced respondents' general work skills and raised their confidence in their skills and abilities. Many respondents were prompted to undertake further studies and attributed Lifeline with assisting them in securing employment.

Women in Paid employment (64% of the sample)

Over half of this group had been prompted to participate in further education and just under half had undertaken further studies since joining Lifeline. Women from a variety of educational and age levels were encouraged to pursue further studies. This result indicates Lifeline's ability to encourage women from all walks of life to consider further education. The overwhelming majority of these women said Lifeline had *enhanced their general work skills*, in turn bringing benefits to the wider workforce.

One quarter of women in paid employment felt that their training and experience with Lifeline had *assisted them in advancement to more skilled positions*.

Women Unemployed and looking for work (7% of the sample)

Few had undertaken further studies during their time at Lifeline, however 40% said they had been prompted to participate in further education courses since joining Lifeline, which is a significant increase in interest for a group who may need further education to act as a catalyst for future employment.

An increase in confidence in skills and abilities were repeatedly mentioned as a benefit of volunteering with Lifeline. The ramifications of this boost in self esteem in unemployed women could potentially see these women entering the workforce with more assurance of their capabilities.

These respondents felt Lifeline had enhanced their general work skills, including providing them with sector knowledge and office familiarity, making them work ready. Over half the respondents in this group had found employment during their time with Lifeline.

Students (12% of the sample)

Fifty-three per cent of this group had found employment while volunteering with Lifeline, 47% said Lifeline had assisted in securing employment. Lifeline was also seen to assist this group in advancing to more skilled positions, this may be due to the direct relationship between Lifeline experience and their work aspirations.

Women undertaking home and family responsibilities (13% of the sample)

All respondents in this group said their time at Lifeline had raised their confidence in their skills and abilities. For a group who may lack confidence to enter or re-enter the workplace, Lifeline offers a safe place for training and experience that also familiarises women with the workforce and office equipment.

A very high proportion of this group had been prompted to participate in further education (70%). Several had also entered the workforce since joining Lifeline (30%) and over half were prompted to consider paid work (67%).

Retired (3% of the sample)

Women in this group were seen to benefit from Lifeline indirectly. Lifeline provided an opportunity for active involvement in a community, which could be seen to possibly improve health, give these respondents a sense of purpose and increase their quality of life.

Findings

Volunteers were extremely positive about Lifeline's impact upon their employment opportunities and skills. Respondents from all employment situations were assisted in appropriate ways and had their opportunities expanded.

While most women were motivated to volunteer with Lifeline for altruistic reasons, seeking to serve the community and those in need, Lifeline's ability to increase and expand women's educational and employment pathways catering to women from a wide degree of ages and educational backgrounds is highly significant.

The findings demonstrate that volunteering with Lifeline offers a variety of benefits, catering to a wide range of women. All respondents were confident that their experience with Lifeline had enhanced their general work skills, improved their verbal communication and listening skills, developed their crisis counselling abilities and raised their confidence in their own skills. Women also recognised the role Lifeline played in prompting participation in further education and in securing employment.

This study is confident that Lifeline plays a considerable part in enhancing the educational and employment pathways of women who volunteer with Lifeline.

Figure 19: Respondent attitudes to Lifeline’s benefit to skill development (p17)

