



empowering women in times of challenge & change

Administrative Volunteer Manual

A Message of Welcome from the Executive Director

Dear volunteer,

On behalf of The Women's Initiative, I am delighted you have chosen to volunteer with The Women's Initiative. Volunteers provide our organization with vital support as we empower women to discover new wellness skills, new perspectives, and new beginnings. I hope you will find your volunteer experiences with us rewarding and the duties of your particular role fulfilling. This manual will familiarize you with our organization and the roles and responsibilities of our volunteers.

It is my sincere wish that you will find your volunteer experience with us to be rich and rewarding. We cannot function without you and appreciate all your time and efforts.

If you have any questions please contact our Administrative Volunteer Coordinator, Sharon Davis, at (434) 872-0047 extension 100 or sdavis@thewomensinitiative.org.

Thank you for devoting your time and energy to helping women in need in our community through The Women's Initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "E. Irvin".

Elizabeth Irvin, LCSW
Executive Director

About The Women's Initiative

Mission

The mission of The Women's Initiative is to provide effective counseling services, social support, and education to empower women to transform challenging life situations into opportunities for renewed well-being and personal growth.

History

In 2007, Licensed Professional Counselor Bebe Heiner founded The Women's Initiative in response to a profound community need for affordable counseling services for women. The conviction that all women should have access to vital mental health services, regardless of their ability to pay, animates the daily work of The Women's Initiative. In 2012 the agency celebrated its 5th anniversary having served since inception over 4,000 women through counseling and support groups, community workshops, and outreach services. Now serving over 3,000 women annually, the agency has grown to include 10 staff and over 15 pro-bono volunteer therapists – community members who lend professional time to serve our clients. The Women's Initiative serves women primarily in the Charlottesville area, with roughly 15% of women coming to us from outlying counties. The majority of women served are employed, low-income, uninsured, and mothers with young children.

Programs

Our programs include: individual counseling for uninsured or underinsured women of 18 years of age or older, therapeutic and social groups for any adult woman in our community, and education and outreach to the community on topics related to mental health and stress reduction. We have a satellite program at the Jefferson School City Center. In addition, our services are available in Spanish through our Bienestar program.

Funding Sources

The Women's Initiative is funded from several sources, including individual donors, fundraising events, grants, fees for services and sponsorships. Grant sources include the United Way, CACF Endowment Fund, Charlottesville Future Fund and the HUT Foundation, to name a few. We have also acquired sponsorships from many local businesses.

Office Address and Hours of Operation

We have two office locations in Charlottesville. Our main office is located at 1101 East High Street, Suite A, (434-872-0047) and the hours of operation are Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9:00 am to 5:00 pm and Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm. Our satellite office is located at the Jefferson School City Center, 233 4th Street, NW, Room 255-B, (434-202-7692). Please call for hours.

Volunteer Opportunities

There are several ways to get involved with us as a volunteer. Below is a list of possible jobs or tasks available.

- **Front Desk Assistant:** be the welcoming face to clients as they arrive for appointments, answer phone calls, make copies and do other administrative duties.
- **Tabling Events:** attend events in the area and represent our organization by talking with members of the public about our services.
- **Leader of a group or workshop:** bring your creativity to clients and share a passion of yours with the community by running a weekly group or a one time workshop.
- **Pro-bono Therapist:** offer your clinical gifts to women in need by seeing clients either on site or at your private practice.
- **Child Care:** take care of the children of group members or individuals while they are in session.
- **Web-based tasks:** help with updating our website and Facebook page.
- **Development assistance:** help with mailings, execute fundraising events, coordinate public relations strategies, research grant opportunities, and seek donations from community businesses.
- **Database help:** enter client data weekly so that the organization can track the services provided.
- **And much more,** such as putting up flyers around town and helping with annual group mailings...

Volunteer Screening, Eligibility and Terms of Service

Equal Opportunity

The Women's Initiative provides equal volunteering opportunities for all, regardless of age, sex, color, race, creed, national origin, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, political belief, or disability which does not prohibit performance of essential job functions. Volunteers will be accepted and on the basis of their ability to perform a job and their dedication to The Women's Initiative's mission. Current or former clients of The Women's Initiative are not eligible to volunteer as it would create a dual relationship.

Screening

In order to begin, every potential volunteer will complete a volunteer questionnaire, in-person interview, confidentiality form and criminal background check. Once the volunteer completes this process, he/she will work collaboratively with the volunteer coordinator to choose the volunteer opportunities that are best suited to his/her skills and interests.

Training

All volunteers will review this manual and receive basic training related to boundaries and confidentiality. Further training will be conducted for the unique tasks and duties.

Commitment

Volunteers can join us for short, time-limited tasks or longer-term commitments. Depending on the nature of the volunteer task, he/she may be asked to commit to a specific term of service.

Evaluation

Administrative Volunteers will meet or correspond regularly with the Administrative Volunteer Coordinator to evaluate the volunteer experience and will have a chance to provide and receive formal feedback annually. When leaving the volunteer position, the volunteer will complete an exit interview with the Administrative Volunteer Coordinator or other staff member.

Termination

Volunteers are eligible for termination if they do not adhere to the policies and procedures outlined in this manual.

Volunteer Policies

Volunteers add significantly to the high quality of service we provide and create a warm spirit of community at The Women's Initiative. As the host agency for your volunteer experience we commit to providing a safe and supportive environment in which you can contribute while developing your skills. In return, we ask our volunteers to:

- Honor your volunteer commitment with honesty and reliability.
- Respect our clients, our staff, our facilities, and our community.
- Act with integrity and responsibility in all aspects of your work.
- Keep confidential all client information.

Attendance

We ask that you respect our time, as we will respect yours, by attending all committed events and/or shifts. Should you need to cancel a commitment, we ask that you give us at least 24 hours' notice, if possible. Please be punctual to all commitments. If you are running late, we ask that you call us to let us know.

Expense Reimbursement

Volunteers must have their volunteer coordinator's written authorization before incurring an expense on behalf of The Women's Initiative. To be reimbursed for an authorized expense, an expense report accompanied by original receipts must be submitted.

Parking

There is limited parking located behind The Women's Initiative's office, so we ask that you utilize parking on the street that is not permit parking. The Women's Initiative does not assume liability for loss or damage to vehicles parked in our parking lot or on the street.

Confidentiality

All volunteers must sign The Women's Initiative's Confidentiality Agreement and comply with its contents in all aspects of their volunteer work. The Women's Initiative zealously protects the privacy of our clients. Any sensitive client information learned by a volunteer in the course of working for The Women's Initiative must remain private at all times.

In the event that a volunteer encounters a client outside of the office, the volunteer should not approach the client or give any indication of an acquaintance. If the client initiates a conversation with the volunteer, it is fine for the volunteer to interact with the client, but a volunteer should never initiate an interaction with a client in public out of respect for the client's privacy.

The Professional Boundary

As a mental health agency, it is imperative that our clients have safety and clear boundaries when they enter our office. Volunteers must be able to respect the professional boundaries of a mental health agency. These include:

- No sharing of personal information with the clients (such as your home phone number or address).
- No providing favors or requesting favors, such as money and transportation.

Further Explanation about Professional Boundaries

Boundaries are designed to promote a sense of safety and predictability for clients, staff and volunteers. They allow for people using our services to experience us as the professionals we are. Boundaries ensure roles are clear so as not to set up false expectations and misunderstandings. Boundaries ultimately protect clients who may sometimes have a hard time knowing what is appropriate to expect and how to read cues appropriately.

Why these boundaries are important:

1. **We are professionals.** It becomes a blurring of roles to nurture what may be perceived as a friendship with the people we serve. We can be friendly, but not friends. If we begin to talk as friends at some point we will be forced to draw a boundary if someone invites us to go somewhere, asks for advice on a difficult issue, shares something of a concerning nature, or asks for help directly. While this is unlikely to happen in most cases, it is important to be consistent. Be prepared to articulate your role if necessary.
2. **Boundary rules ensure clients feel safe.** Clients know there are different rules for professional relationships – rules that make them feel safer. For example, they know confidentiality will be respected.

Please note that our waiting room is **not** confidential, so we discourage people from beginning to share confidential information in this space.

3. **We want people to share their concerns about therapists with their therapist or the clinical director.** This is the most direct route for solving problems. We also want people to discuss their emotions with their counselors. Some women are so overwhelmed that they need support to keep from “spilling over” in inappropriate spaces.

If a client tries to share too much with you: You can listen and let the client know that you are glad they will be able to talk to their therapist about whatever concerns them. This kind of redirecting is very helpful to people because it guides them to share their needs with those in the best position to support them. So, for example, interrupting them if necessary, to say: “I am so glad you will be able to talk to your therapist about that.”

4. **The nature of the front desk work makes it difficult to be consistently available to people.** If we are talkative and friendly one week, it may create hurt feelings the next if we are not available because of other work demands. This may undermine the experience of consistency associated with the clinical hour.

It is best to remain professional and polite during interacting with a client at the front desk but not overly chatty or talkative.

Some clients will not want to be talkative and friendly in the waiting room with staff, and it may be uncomfortable for them if other people are talking in a way that makes them feel like an outsider.

5. **Recommending upcoming programs is best done by the therapist.** This prevents people attending programs that are not in their best interest (for example, a person with delusions attending guided imagery).

EXAMPLES OF APPROPRIATE, FRIENDLY INTERACTION WITH CLIENTS

- Asking questions about the drive in, commenting on the weather, mentioning we have a water machine, saying "It's nice to see you," or "I hope you have a nice day."
- Answering a direct question: "Do you have the phone number for SARA?" You can say yes and provide it, but do not add any comments about the agency, service, etc.
- Redirecting to the therapist:
 - ✓ "That's a great question. You should ask your therapist."
 - ✓ "I'm glad you will be able to talk to your therapist about that today."
 - ✓ "I want to support you as you share this information, but I think the best person to hear this is your therapist."

EXAMPLES OF INAPPROPRIATE INTERACTION WITH CLIENTS

- Asking "How are you feeling today?"
- Stating "You seem tired/better/sad/, etc. today."
- Sharing information about your personal life (family, activities, and interests) as this may lead to a blurring of roles and exchanges that are better for the therapy space.
- Referring someone to another service, "Oh, you should try X, they are great with that issue."

Despite your best efforts to have professional boundaries, there will be times when people share information or make requests that feel outside the bounds of the relationship. You can gracefully let them know that it is not your role, and encourage them to discuss it with their counselor. Then, please discuss this situation with a staff member.

Conflicts of Interest

Volunteers are often busy people who have many connections or volunteer for more than one organization at the same time; it is therefore not unusual for volunteers to find themselves in a situation which may present a conflict of interest. If you suspect a conflict of interest has developed during the course of your work for The Women's Initiative, please contact the Clinical Coordinator immediately.

Client Crisis Protocol

In the event of a life-threatening emergency, call 911 first, then find a clinician.

If a client or prospective client calls or comes in the building and is distraught or expressing intent to harm self or others:

1. Try to locate the person with a **RED DOT** next to their name on the sign-in board and interrupt them to come to your aid.
2. If that person is unavailable, find any staff clinician in the building (Kirsten, Elizabeth, Ingrid, or Hilary).
3. If they are inaccessible, then look for any pro-bono therapist in the office.
4. Lastly, you can find or call an administrative person on staff: Elizabeth, Amy, Sharon or Liz.

If you do not want to alert the person in distress that you are seeking support, you can intercom anyone in the building and say, ***"I forgot to tell you Mrs. Robinson called for you."*** This will alert a staff member to come to the front office and join you.

If you feel you cannot put the person on hold or leave them unattended, either call down the hallway to get someone or use your cell-phone to call for support. If the client hangs up or leaves and no staff is available, contact 911 so they can try to locate the person to do a safety check on them. Later, debrief the incident or call as soon as possible with the Clinical Director, Volunteer Coordinator, Program Director and/or other staff member.

Volunteer Self-Care

On occasion, interacting with clients who are experiencing traumatic life circumstances may result in stressful feelings for volunteers. If this occurs, we strongly encourage volunteers to contact the Clinical Services Director, Volunteer Coordinator or other staff member to schedule a debrief session about their experiences. In the event that immediate support is needed before someone can be reached, please call Region 10's hotline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 434-972-1800 or 1-866-694-1605.

Drug-Free Workplace

All volunteers are expected to understand and comply with the following guidelines regarding the use of drugs or alcohol in the workplace:

1. We prohibit the unlawful use, possession, distribution, sale, or manufacture of a controlled substance on our premises.
2. We prohibit all volunteers from being under the influence of drugs or alcohol while on the job. Exceptions for medicines are made on a case-by-case basis.
3. Failure to follow the Women's Initiative's drug-free workplace policy will result in termination.

Smoking

In consideration of the health and safety of all our staff members, we maintain a smoke-free environment.

Harassment

Harassment of others is not acceptable at The Women's Initiative. Harassment includes making derogatory remarks about physical characteristics, making jokes about ethnic or other groups, and other verbal, physical, and visual behavior.

Any volunteer who feels harassed has the right to file a charge with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and with a state agency. Before doing so, we ask that you first speak with the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is not an appropriate person, speak with a Board member, so that appropriate internal action may be taken. It is the responsibility of the Executive Director to listen to such complaints and to refer them to the appropriate authority. We will not retaliate against any volunteer who makes a claim of harassment.

Complaint Procedures

As a matter of general policy, personnel at all levels will provide an open door for discussion and a receptive ear and will review all volunteer suggestions or complaints concerning our work practices and procedures.

If a volunteer wishes to make a formal complaint, it should be done within a reasonable time after the incident has occurred or the issue has arisen. We consider an open discussion between volunteer and appropriate staff member as the first step in the complaint procedure. The appropriate staff member must respond to the complaint in a timely manner. If the appropriate staff member does not resolve the complaint within a reasonable time frame or if the involved party(ies) disagrees with the appropriate staff member's solution, the volunteer may appeal directly to the Executive Director. At this point, the executive director will discuss the nature of the grievance with all related parties. The executive director will investigate the complaint and notify the involved parties of a decision within a reasonable amount of time.

As a last resort, a volunteer may take a complaint to the Chair of the Board. The Board's decision constitutes the agency's final word on the matter.

In the interest of maintaining a positive and professional working atmosphere, both volunteers and staff members are expected to limit discussions of personal or professional conflicts to those volunteers and staff members whose participation is required to address the conflict.

Safety Precautions

First aid supplies are located in the cabinet at the front desk and in the office supply closet.

In the event of a life-threatening emergency, call 911. Brief emergency instructions are posted inside the Front Desk Procedures Manual.

Feedback

We welcome your feedback about your volunteer experiences with The Women's Initiative. If at any point you would like to share your thoughts with us, please schedule an appointment with our Volunteer Coordinator, Sharon Davis, by contacting her at either (434) 872-0047, extension 100 or sdavis@thewomensinitiative.org.