

Can "Second Life, A Virtual World" Play A Role In The Future of Crisis Centers?

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This workshop will explore some possible uses of "Second Life, A Virtual World" in the training of Crisis Line Workers and in providing online resources and "listening" services. This workshop will demonstrate and explore the potential advantages and disadvantages of "Second Life" technology in a crisis center setting.

Crisis Centers, particularly those using volunteers as HOTLINE staff, expend major resources of time and money in recruiting and training volunteers. With attrition, there is a constant need to train new volunteers, year after year. With societal changes, it is increasingly difficult to get volunteers to join classes which meet in person and at specific times. Second Life may provide a viable alternative or supplement to in-person learning, and it would draw young people who freely engage in interactive, game-like technology.

There are many parallels to distance learning in higher education and training done in corporate environments. To quote from Secondlife.net: "Businesses, educational institutions, government departments, and nonprofits use the Second Life (SL) Grid platform to create public and private spaces for communication, collaboration, and training in the 3D online virtual world of Second Life[®]. Organizations such as IBM, Stanford University, NASA, NOAA, and the American Cancer Society operate presences on the Second Life Grid that seamlessly integrate their virtual world activities with their real-world operations."

According to SecondLifegrid.net, hundreds of leading universities and school systems use Second Life in their educational programs. This virtual world enables people from all around the world to be part of a virtual classroom environment. Simteach.com, a rich source of information, lists about 100 current institutions of higher education and around 2600 individual teachers using Second Life.

A discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of Second Life as a new tool for helping people in emotional crisis and distress would address the following questions: How would Second Life be adapted to perform as a Crisis Center where "callers" would talk with "listeners"? What would that be like? What technical and human resources would be required? What changes to current practices would need to occur? Would there be geographic boundaries or would this SL Crisis Center be open to the world? What language and cultural barriers and opportunities would there be? What are the costs involved? How would training be offered to staff including volunteers? And, of course, issues of privacy and security are uppermost in importance.

Also included in the presentation will be short videos about this virtual world and screen shots of various Second Life environments.