

**Customer Service Orientation:  
Developing & Evaluating a Standard of Excellence in a Suicide Hotline**

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For the past year, Volunteers of America Western Washington, Care Crisis Response Services (CCRS) has worked on improving program services through an emphasis on developing our Customer Service Orientation and Silent Monitoring Program. We spent the first half-year developing goals, the tools, and introducing key concepts to staff, and the second half-year implementing and measuring these changes. The result has been qualitative improvements in our program services and customer satisfaction ratings.

This workshop presentation will convey the theoretical framework, development strategy, and measurable tools for implementing and evaluating a program of excellent customer service at a crisis/suicide hotline, in support of best practices.

The presentation will include a detailed definition and several illustrations of “Customer Service” as it applies specifically to a mental health crisis/suicide hotline. The workshop will also detail the specific strategies we have found most effective with dispelling myths and instilling and maintaining a strong Customer Service Orientation culture among program staff.

Drawing on AAS Quality Assurance best-practice tools, we designed the “Silent Monitoring Evaluation Form,” a qualitative, standardized measuring and evaluation tool to help ensure quality customer contacts. With the technical introduction of a silent monitoring system to our telephone equipment, this monitoring is done in a non-intrusive manner, both for our staff and customers.

The presentation includes the overall objectives of the Silent Monitoring Program. We also provide participants with a detailed description and printed handouts of the measuring tool, along with strategies for effective implementation and potential pitfalls to avoid.

At the conclusion of this workshop, participants will be able to:

Define the core concepts and discuss the advantages of developing a comprehensive Customer Service Orientation and measurable Silent Monitoring Program in a crisis/suicide hotline;

Distinguish strategies for success from potential pitfalls in implementation;

Summarize a description of the tools and resources available to make such a program effective and successful.

Methods will include a dynamic PowerPoint presentation, facilitated group interaction and discussion, role-plays to highlight and dramatize key concepts, and printed take-home materials including the program outline and measuring tools to apply the approach at other hotlines.

By providing workshop participants with the concepts, tools, and strategies to fully implement a Customer Service emphasis and Silent Monitoring Program in a crisis/suicide hotline, participants develop the skills and obtain the resources to enhance their own programs’ standards for excellence in customer care.