

Volunteer helpline

A telephone helpline where people can have questions answered, receive emotional support and obtain referrals or signposts to professional services from trained volunteers who have overcome debt problems.



User benefits

- + The helpline would be an **easily accessible 'first port of call'** for people with money challenges
- + Volunteers would **provide answers to queries** and signpost or refer individuals to other organisations when they need professional help (e.g. debt advice)
- + This could help callers **navigate the complex advice sector** and obtain the help they need – both financial and non-financial
- + The service would most likely be used by those 'during crisis' for **immediate help and reassurance**
- + However, if its positioning also attracted people 'before crisis' it could be a good opportunity to **increase early engagement with debt advice**



Challenges

- ? Identifying volunteers and **encouraging or incentivising** them to participate
- ? Anticipating the **types of queries** that callers are likely to have
- ? **Providing training** that equips volunteers to respond effectively to these queries and to provide reassurance when callers are distressed
- ? Training volunteers to identify and **deal with emergency issues** quickly and sensitively
- ? Ensuring that callers **follow up on referrals** (if not immediately transferred)
- ? Marketing the helpline in a way that **makes it stand out** and encourages people to call it 'before crisis'
- ? Delivering a service that caters for those who are **unavailable during the working day**



Service design

- The telephone number should be free and would ideally be **available in evenings and weekends**. It could also operate overnight to cater for those unable to sleep
- The service would ideally **allow callers to be anonymous**
- Most contacts would be one-offs, with callers receiving the information and/or reassurance they require (including any necessary referrals or signposts) **in a single call**
- The service could also **provide callbacks** for those in particular distress, or with particularly complex needs
- Referrals should be **immediate and seamless** to maximise take-up
- Depending on numbers and locations, volunteers could **work in a call centre or remotely**
- Some '**matching**' of callers to volunteers with similar experiences would ideally occur, if numbers make this possible

Example scheme:

The Pituitary Foundation

A telephone peer-support line for people suffering with pituitary gland problems, or their partners or loved ones. Phone line operators are all trained voluntary peer supporters who are managing pituitary conditions. People (usually the newly diagnosed) call a helpline, and then get 'matched' with a peer with similar experiences. Peers offer practical tips, share their own experiences, provide encouragement and support people in making informed decisions. Follow-up phone calls can be arranged.

🌐 www.pituitary.org.uk/support-for-you/peer-support/

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The fact that they're volunteers, they're giving up their time and they might've been through something similar, the information and advice has got to be more meaningful

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I would call the helpline after receiving one of those scary letters – see what I should do and just talk to someone about it

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If it's anonymous, it would reduce the embarrassment, and make you more comfortable

Key BCTs (Behaviour Change Techniques)

- **Reduce negative emotions:** advise on ways of reducing negative emotions to facilitate performance of the behaviour
- **Social support (practical):** advise on, arrange, or provide practical help (e.g. from friends, relatives, colleagues, 'buddies' or staff) for performance of the behaviour
- **Instruction on how to perform a behaviour:** advise or agree on how to perform the behaviour