

Crisis Line Important Information January 2008

The Oxfordshire Crisis Line service is coming to an end. The purpose of this information sheet is to provide you with detailed information about this change. If you want to know more after reading this please contact Oxfordshire Mind or Oxfordshire PCT Joint Commissioning Team. Full contact details are provided at the end.

About the Crisis Line

The Crisis Line is an Oxfordshire based telephone helpline. The service is run by a team of volunteers trained, supervised and supported by a part time manager. For the last few years the service has run from 7pm to 1am in the evening. The service receives funding from Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust and Oxfordshire County Council. The service has been managed by Oxfordshire Mind.

Why is the service ending?

There are three reasons why we have decided to bring the service to an end.

1. Level of use

The level of use of the Crisis Line has steadily dropped over the past three years despite extensive work publicising the line. In 2004 there was an average of over six calls per night. This dropped to three calls by 2007. When the service was set up in 1998 there were very few services available in the evening and fewer places for people to turn to for help. Over the last few years more services have extended in to the evenings and there are new services available to some people in crisis including the NHS Crisis and Early Intervention Teams. The Oxford branch of the Samaritans now have a permanent base on Magdalen Road in Oxford where they can see visitors as well as running their helpline.

2. Difficulties with volunteer recruitment

The Crisis Line is run by a team of volunteers provided with professional training, supervision and support. Volunteer recruitment has always been challenging but over the past 18 months it has been particularly difficult. Despite strenuous efforts we have been unable to recruit a full team of volunteers and this has had a knock on effect. Towards the end of 2007 this meant that we were unable to run a full 7 day-a-week service.

3. Inappropriate use of the service

There has always been a low level but persistent number of abusive callers, inappropriately sexual callers, and hoax callers. This is inevitably one of the challenges of managing a telephone service but it significantly adds to the difficulty at a time when volunteer numbers are stretched.

Have other alternatives to ending the service been considered?

Yes. Mind and the PCT Joint Commissioning Team have looked at reducing the level of service (for example to just weekends) and trying new strategies for recruiting

volunteers. However our view is that neither step would tackle the underlying difficulties or retain a sufficient level of service.

Is the service being ended because of funding cuts?

No. The service is ending because the three reasons listed above. None of this is because of problems with the funding.

When will the service end?

The service will come to an end at the end of March 2008.

What about the volunteers and staff?

We are very grateful for the commitment of all our volunteers. We will be working with current volunteers to see if they would like to use their skills and experience in other mental health settings. We are also extremely grateful for the skilled work of the Crisis Line manager who has led the service and ably recruited, supervised and supported many volunteers over the years. The Crisis Line manager post will come to an end shortly after the service ends.

Where else can people get help?

There are several services that exist to help people in distress and in a crisis. Some are services anyone can use (Oxford and Banbury Samaritans, NHS Direct, Out-of-hours GP services, www.omhi.org.uk). Others may require some sort of referral (like the NHS Crisis Resolution and Early Intervention Teams).

To help people needing to talk to someone in the evening or weekend we will be producing a special information booklet which will give full details and contact points. This will be available and distributed from March 2008.

How can you help?

You could help by passing this information to others who may be interested – and also by helping distribute the new 'Help In A Crisis' booklet as soon as it is available in early March 2008.

How can I get more information?

To get information on mental health services call OMHI (Oxfordshire Mental Health Information) between 9.30am and 4.30pm on 01865 247788. If you have access to the internet then full information about services is available at www.OMHI.org.uk

If you want more information about the Crisis Line specifically then contact Jen Cothier / Patrick Taylor at Oxfordshire Mind on 01865 310830 crisis.line@oxfordshire-mind.org.uk or Chris Wilkinson at PCT Joint Commissioning Team on 01865 336775 chris.wilkinson@oxfordshirepct.nhs.uk