
Counselling Policy

Policy #19

Date: July 17, 2023

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to support the mental wellness of volunteers who have been affected by traumatic experiences while engaged in medical response or fire related duties. It is the intention of this policy to ensure that counselling services are timely, accessible, appropriate, and acceptable for volunteers seeking assistance.

SIFPS supports a respectful workplace culture that is free from stigma and is compassionate towards all who may have a mental health condition.

Policy

Volunteers may access short term counselling services through HomeWood Solutions for a wide range of issues including the impact of experiences while engaged in medical response or fire related duties. Volunteers can access these services directly and confidentially. Chiefs will ensure that volunteers have the information about the available counselling services and how to access them.

If, following the available short-term counselling, a volunteer identifies, or if the Chiefs recommend *to the volunteer* that additional mental health counselling may be beneficial, then a list of trauma experienced counsellors will be provided to the volunteer. Volunteers may approach the Chiefs or a designated individual on the board to access these additional counselling services. Ultimately, it is then up to the volunteer to initiate counselling services to preserve confidentiality.

Counsellors may be licensed psychologists, therapists, counsellors or social workers with a good understanding or training in the first responder environment. Peer support may also be utilized where requested.

Confidentiality is essential. Volunteers who participate in counselling need to be assured that all communication with a counsellor, peer or designated board member will be kept private and confidential.

Counselling may be in person, by telephone or via video. If a volunteer selects in-person, off-island counselling, ferry travel will be paid by the volunteer or through a special counselling fund initiated by the Firefighter's Association or a special SIR account.

Counselling fees will be paid for by SIFPS through the designated board contact via the following options:

- 1) Reimbursements upon submission of counselling services receipt; or,
- 2) Arrangements directly with the service provider to invoice SIFPS via the designated board member or treasurer.

Volunteers will inform one of the chiefs or the designated board member as to their preferred option.

This additional counselling benefit will cover up to a maximum of 10 counselling sessions per event.