Copeland Center
FOR WELLNESS AND RECOVERY

DOORS TO
WELLBEING

Peer-Run Warmlines

Presented By:

The National Peer Support Warmline Council

The National Peer Support Warmline Council

The National Peer Support Council was established in 2021 through Doors to Wellbeing, a SAMHSA funded National Consumer Technical Assistance Center of the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery.

The National Peer Support Warmline Council (NPSWC) emerged from the dedication of a small group of individuals committed to the operation and management of warmlines. With support from Doors to Wellbeing, this group began meeting virtually every other week during the pandemic.

In light of the rebranding of the National Suicide Prevention Line into 988 and recognizing the critical role warmlines play in alleviating loneliness, preventing crises, and providing a nonjudgmental space, the founding members decided to expand the group to include other individuals committed to advancing warmlines.

In the winter of 2021, the NPSWC clearly articulated its mission and officially extended invitations to join the Council. The response was overwhelming, with over 500 United States and Canadian applicants.

Following a meticulous selection process, Laurel Lemke and Anisa Mustafa, both founding members, were chosen to Co-Chair future meetings, guiding the Council toward its aims to enhance, support, and develop peer-operated warmlines, fostering a stronger, more connected peer support community.

The NPSWC officially ended in December of 2023. Throughout it's existence, the council collected a vast amount of information and resources. This information was compiled and is set forth in the remaining document.

The NPSWC also held two webinars through Doors to Wellbeing. The links to the webinars are below:

Beyond Traditional Support – Exploring Peer–Run Warmlines:
https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/3661312080718446610

Beyond Traditional Support – Exploring Peer–Run Warmlines: A Deeper Dive:
https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/2859156179855730432

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The National Peer Support Warm-line Council

Warmline Descriptions	This section outlines how Warmlines are defined throughout the U.S. and its territories.
Funding Sources	Warmline funding sources refer to financial support mechanisms specifically allocated for the operation and maintenance of peer-operated hotlines that provide non-crisis support and assistance to individuals seeking emotional support and connection.
Operations	Warmline operations are the activities and processes involved in managing and running peer-operated hotlines that offer non-crisis emotional support and assistance to individuals in need of connection and understanding.
Human Resources	Warmline human resources refer to the staff and volunteers who manage and operate peer-operated hotlines, providing non-crisis emotional support and assistance to callers.
Marketing & Outreach	Marketing and outreach for warmlines involve promoting awareness and visibility of peer-operated hotlines through various strategies and channels to ensure individuals in need of non-crisis emotional support are informed and able to access these services.
Data Collection	Data collection for warmlines involves systematically gathering and analyzing information related to call volume, caller demographics, and the types of support provided to evaluate and improve the service's effectiveness and reach.
Looking To The Future	The future of warmlines envisions expanding their reach and accessibility through advanced technology, increased funding, and integration with broader mental health support systems to better serve diverse communities in need of non-crisis emotional support.

National Peer Support Warmline Council

NPSWC's mission is to provide national support and networking to advance the benefits, values, and diverse access of peer-supported, peer-operated, and peer-led warm-line services.

This group is organized and facilitated through networking and inclusion of diverse peer-supporters who are working on, developing, and supervising peer warmlines across the nation.

Peer Specialists currently operating, seeking to work on, looking to develop, or simply curious to learn more about peer-supported warmline employment are encouraged to join NPSWC online groups. Each session will focus on working in wellness, networking support, current events in warm line services, and addressing system priorities as defined by the group members.

The group met online every two weeks with the support of Doors to Wellbeing, a SAMHSA funded National Consumer Technical Assistance Center of the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery.

Warmlines

What Is A Warmline

A warmline is a telephone service that provides emotional support, mental health assistance, and peer support to individuals who need someone to talk to but are not in immediate danger or experiencing a crisis. Unlike crisis hotlines, which are designed to respond to acute emergencies, warmlines are meant to offer a listening ear, support, and resources to people dealing with everyday stress, anxiety, loneliness, and other mental health concerns.

Many warmlines are staffed by trained peers who have lived with mental health or substance use challenges. This form of support can create a sense of understanding and relatability that provides hope and empowerment.

Warmlines are typically available during specific hours, and some operate 24/7. They provide an accessible option for people seeking support without the intensity of a crisis intervention.

By providing a space for individuals to talk about their feelings and concerns early on, warmlines can help prevent situations from escalating into crises.

Calls to warmlines are usually confidential, encouraging people to speak openly about their struggles without fear of judgment or reprisal.

In addition to offering emotional support, warmline staff can often provide information about local resources, support groups, mental health services, and other relevant community services.

Values & Ethics

Defining your values and ethics upfront will solidify and shape how you do the work and the many decisions you have ahead of you. Your mission and vision will flow more easily from these core principles as you will be grounded in them.

Mission Statement

Your mission statement is a clear and concise declaration of the purpose and primary objectives of your work. It outlines what you aim to achieve, whom you intend to serve, and the guiding principles that drive your efforts. By anchoring your mission in your defined values and ethics, it becomes a compass that directs every action and decision within your organization or project.

Vision Statement

Your vision statement is a forward-looking, aspirational description of the future you are working to create. It should align with and be inspired by your values and ethics, reflecting the positive impact you hope to have on individuals, communities, or society as a whole. A well-crafted vision statement motivates and inspires, helping you and your team stay focused on your long-term goals and objectives.

Funding Sources
Planning & Research

Planning and research are crucial when starting a peer-run warmline to ensure that the service effectively meets community needs and operates sustainably. Thorough planning helps in designing an efficient operational framework, while research informs best practices and identifies potential challenges, leading to better support outcomes for callers.

Identifying the Need	• Community Assessment: Evaluate the needs of your community by conducting surveys or interviews with local residents, mental health organizations, and other relevant stakeholders. • Demographic Analysis: Analyze the demographics of your community to better understand the target population for the warmline and tailor services to their needs.
Researching Existing Warmlines	• Learn from Existing Warmlines: Study other successful peer-run warmlines to understand their structure, services, and best practices. • Identify Gaps: Identify any gaps in the existing support systems within your community that the warmline could address.
Developing A Business Plan	• Mission Statement: Define the mission and purpose of your warmline. • Goals and Objectives: Establish specific, measurable goals and objectives for your warmline. • Service Outline: Describe the services the warmline will offer, including hours of operation and modes of communication. • Operational Plan: Detail the logistics of how the warmline will operate, including staffing, training, and policies.
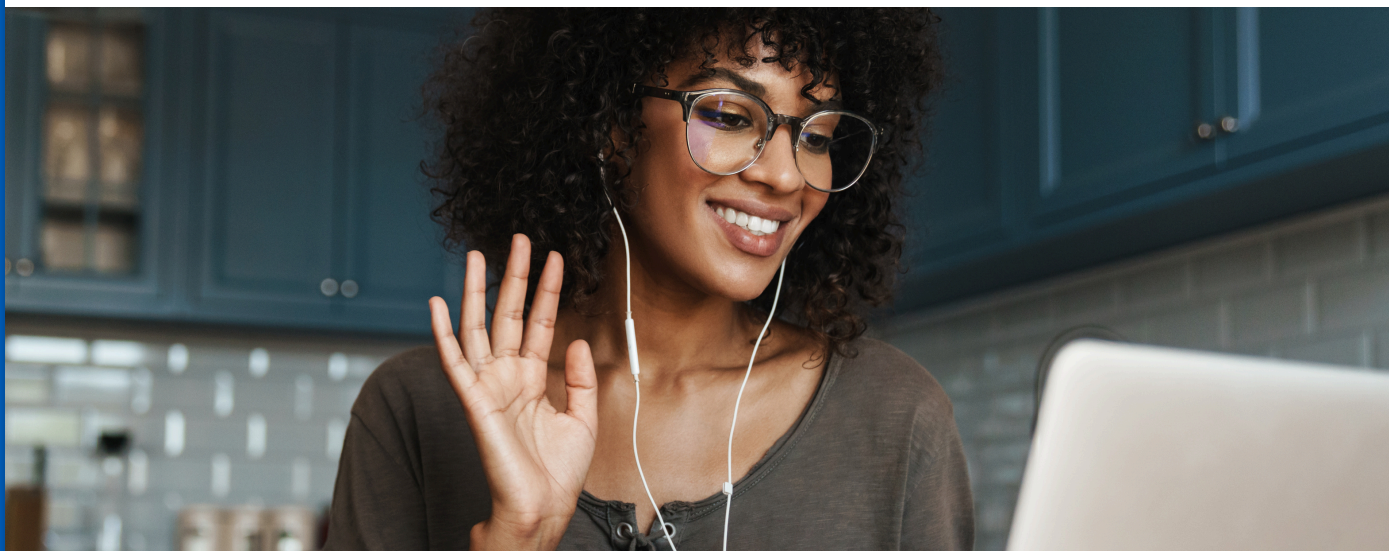
Funding Sources

Identify potential funding sources that align with your mission. These sources could include government agencies, foundations, corporations, and individual donors. Consider the following options:

Government Grants	We offer a range of high-performing computer accessories in a minimalist style.
Foundations	Research foundations that fund mental health, well-being, and community support initiatives. Many have specific focus areas and grant opportunities.
Corporate Sponsorships	Some businesses offer grants, donations, or employee volunteer programs to support community initiatives.
Individual Donors	Explore opportunities for crowdfunding, online fundraising, or connecting with individuals who are passionate about your cause.

Craft a Compelling Proposal

If you're targeting grants or foundation funding, research specific application guidelines, deadlines, and requirements. Ensure that your proposal aligns with their priorities and interests.

Grants and Foundation Applications

If you're targeting grants or foundation funding, research specific application guidelines, deadlines, and requirements. Ensure that your proposal aligns with their priorities and interests.

Develop a Strong Case for Support

Highlight the unique aspects of your warmline and why it's essential. Use data, statistics, and personal stories to illustrate the impact of your work. Emphasize the benefits to the community.

Network and Build Relationships

Attend conferences, meetings, and community events related to mental health and crisis intervention. Building connections with potential donors, partners, and supporters can open doors to funding opportunities.

Funding Sources

Remember that securing funding for a warmline may take time and persistence. Building strong relationships with potential funders and demonstrating the impact of your work are crucial steps toward success. Be prepared to continually assess and refine your funding strategy to ensure the sustainability of your warmline.

Online Crowdfunding and Fundraising Campaigns
Consider creating online crowdfunding campaigns through platforms like GoFundMe, Kickstarter, or Indiegogo. Engage your community and supporters through social media to raise funds.

Collaborate with Mental Health Organizations
Partner with mental health organizations and nonprofits in your region. They may offer resources, referrals, or grant opportunities that align with your mission.

Seek In-Kind Donations
Don't overlook the value of in-kind donations. These could include free or discounted services, software, or support from local businesses or technology companies.

Create a Sustainability Plan
Alongside seeking initial funding, develop a sustainability plan. Explain how you intend to maintain and expand your warmline's services in the long term. Diversify your funding sources to reduce dependence on a single donor or grant.

Apply for Government Contracts
Sometimes, government agencies may contract with nonprofit organizations to provide mental health and crisis intervention services. Explore these contracting opportunities.

Be Persistent and Adaptive
Funding can be a competitive and ongoing process. Be persistent in your efforts and adapt your approach as needed. Consider feedback and adjust your proposals accordingly.
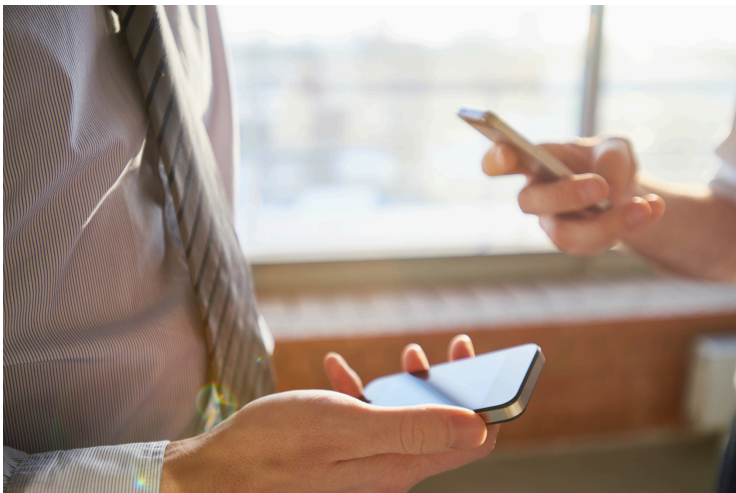
Operations

Operations in a peer-run warmline encompass the management of organizational structure and staff processes, service delivery protocols, and quality assurance to ensure effective and empathetic support for callers.

Warmline Service Models

In-House Calling Only	Remote Calling Only
• Staff take calls in an office environment • Direct access to resources and supervisors • Enhanced communication and mutual support	• Staff work from home • Reduced need for physical infrastructure • Easily expand the workforce, as needed
Hybrid-Calling	**Call Back**
1. Combines remote work convenience with in-house support 2. Offers both on-site resources and remote flexibility 3. Balances expansion needs with infrastructure efficiency	• Calls are arranged at convenient times for users • Reduces wait times and optimizes staffing • Allows users to be ready for the call
Virtual	**Text/Chat**
• Allows for a more in-person feel • Chat, video, and voice options are easy to implement • Serves users beyond local areas	• Ensures user privacy and comfort • Easy to use from any device • Immediate support without voice calls

Operations

Technology and Documentation

Technological Platforms & Options

A telephonic platform is a system that facilitates voice communication over phone lines or internet connections, enabling services like call centers, automated customer service, and voice-based support lines.

Twillio	Provides a cloud communications platform that allows developers to integrate voice calling and messaging capabilities into their applications.
Ring Central	Provides a comprehensive communications platform that includes voice, video, messaging, and conferencing solutions for businesses of all sizes.
Talkdesk	Offers a cloud-based contact center platform with features like intelligent routing, real-time analytics, and integrations with CRM systems.
Genesys	Provides omnichannel customer experience and contact center solutions, including voice, chat, email, and social media interactions, to help businesses deliver seamless customer service.
Zoom Phone	A cloud-based phone system offered by Zoom Video Communications, providing voice calling and conferencing features integrated with the Zoom Meetings platform.

Operations

Call Documentation Pros & Cons

Ultimately, the decision to take call notes for a warmline should consider the balance between the benefits of improved continuity of care and quality assurance and the potential drawbacks related to privacy, time investment, and user perception. Implementing clear policies and procedures for call note-taking, ensuring adherence to privacy regulations, and providing appropriate training and support for peer supporters can help mitigate some of the associated risks.

PROS	CONS
Improved Continuity of Care: Call notes provide a record of previous interactions, allowing subsequent peer supporters to understand the caller's history and provide more personalized support.	**Privacy Concerns:** Maintaining detailed call notes raises privacy concerns, as sensitive information about callers may be recorded and potentially accessed by unauthorized individuals.
Enhanced Follow-Up: Notes can include action items or follow-up tasks, ensuring that unresolved issues are addressed in subsequent calls and that users feel supported over time.	**Time-Consuming:** Taking thorough call notes can be time-consuming for peer supporters, potentially detracting from their ability to focus on active listening and providing immediate support during calls.
Documentation for Quality Assurance: Call notes serve as documentation for quality assurance purposes, helping to assess the effectiveness of the service, identify trends, and make improvements.	**Risk of Misinterpretation:** Call notes may not always accurately capture the nuances of a conversation, leading to misinterpretation or incomplete understanding of the caller's needs and experiences.
Legal and Ethical Compliance: Call notes can serve as documentation in case of legal or ethical inquiries, ensuring that the warmline operates within established guidelines and protocols.	**Data Security Risks**: Storing call notes electronically or in physical form poses data security risks, including the potential for breaches or unauthorized access, especially if proper safeguards are not in place.
Training and Supervision: Notes can be used for training purposes, allowing supervisors to review interactions with peer supporters and provide feedback for improvement.	**User Perception:** Some users may feel uncomfortable or mistrustful knowing that their conversations are being documented, potentially impacting their willingness to seek support from the warmline.

Operations

Hours of Operation

Understand User Needs	• Conduct surveys, focus groups, or interviews with potential users to understand their preferences regarding when they are most likely to seek support. • If available, analyze existing data to identify patterns in call volume or user activity at different times of the day or week.
Consider Demographics and Time Zones	• Consider the target audience's demographics, including their age, occupation, and lifestyle preferences, as these factors can influence when they can access support. • Consider offering staggered hours or rotating shifts to accommodate different time zones if serving a geographically diverse population.
Assess Resource Availability	• Evaluate the availability of staff members who will be responsible for answering calls during operating hours. • Consider factors such as scheduling preferences, shift lengths, and staffing requirements to ensure adequate coverage.
Balance Demand and Capacity	• Balance the anticipated demand for the service with the available capacity to respond to calls effectively. • Start with a conservative schedule and adjust based on actual call volume and resource availability over time.
Offer Flexibility and Accessibility	• Consider offering extended hours or 24/7 availability to ensure accessibility for users needing support outside of traditional business hours. • Explore the possibility of providing support through multiple channels, such as text messaging or online chat, to accommodate diverse preferences and accessibility needs.
Monitor and Adjust	• Continuously monitor call volume, user feedback, and resource availability to evaluate the effectiveness of the chosen hours of operation. • Be prepared to adjust the schedule as needed based on changing demand patterns, staffing constraints, or user preferences.
Communicate Hours of Operation Clearly	• Clearly communicate the hours of operation through various channels, such as the warmline's website, social media, promotional materials, and community outreach efforts. • Provide information about alternative support options for users who may need assistance outside of operating hours.

Operations

Call Handling Protocols

Deciding whether a Warmline should implement call time limits involves careful consideration of various factors to ensure effectiveness and efficiency while meeting users' needs:

Assess average call duration
Evaluate call volume management
Consider service nature and caller impact
Balance support depth and boundaries
Align with mission and user feedback
Ongoing evaluation and policy refinement

Deciding whether Warmline staff should use aliases or real names during calls requires considering privacy, authenticity, and user comfort:

Staff privacy and boundaries
Caller sense of safety
Trust and authenticity
Alignment with values and policies
Staff preferences and user feedback

Quality assurance is crucial for ensuring a Warmline's effectiveness, reliability, and integrity by implementing measures like:

Call monitoring
User feedback surveys
Regular service reviews
Maintaining high care standards
Adhering to protocols
Identifying improvement areas
Addressing training needs
Enhancing service experience

Linguistically appropriate services are crucial for ensuring accessibility, inclusivity, and effectiveness in Warmlines by:

Reflecting diverse backgrounds
Breaking down barriers
Fostering understanding and trust
Offering multilingual support
Providing translated resources
Promoting equitable access
Demonstrating cultural responsiveness

Human Resources

Recruiting & Hiring Staff

Diverse Recruitment Sources	• Utilize diverse channels to attract candidates from different backgrounds and communities. • Partner with community organizations, universities, and social media platforms to broaden the applicant pool.
Inclusive Job Descriptions	• Craft job descriptions that emphasize inclusivity and welcome applicants from diverse backgrounds. • Use inclusive language and highlight the organization's commitment to diversity and equity.
Bias-Free Screening Processes	• Implement blind screening techniques to remove bias based on demographic information. • Focus on skills, experiences, and qualifications relevant to the role.
Peer Specialist Interview Training	• Provide specialized training to interviewers on assessing peer support skills and lived experience. • Offer guidance on asking sensitive questions and evaluating candidates' ability to provide empathetic support.
Structured Interviews	• Conduct structured interviews with standardized questions to ensure fairness and consistency. • Train interviewers on recognizing and mitigating unconscious biases.
Diversity in Hiring Panels	• Include diverse representation on hiring panels to offer multiple perspectives and reduce bias. • Ensure interview panels reflect the diversity of the communities served by the warmline.
Transparent and Inclusive Decision-Making	• Communicate transparently with candidates about the hiring process and timeline. • Provide feedback to candidates, regardless of the outcome, to support their professional growth.

Human Resources

Policies & Procedures

Attendance/Schedules

Policies should not cause harm to Peer Specialists

- Creative scheduling for staff who are receiving benefits (SSI, SSDI, TANF, etc.)
- Self-scheduling or shift swaps support staff who have unexpected availability changes
- When possible provide remote or hybrid work options to enhance accessibility and work-life balance
- Offer full-time, part-time, or split shifts to accommodate diverse needs
- Peers should be paid a livable wage for their emotional labor
- Volunteers can be added, although paid staff is preferable

Supervision & Feedback

Regular meetings/debriefing provide ongoing support

- Supervisors must maintain open lines of communication with staff
- Debriefs at the end of shift or challenging calls are recommended
- Supervisions should be scheduled regularly and be collaborative discussions
- If possible, Supervisors should be trained Peer Specialists
- While group discussions are helpful in Warmline settings, it is best to set aside time for one-on-one supervisions
- Continually review the supervision process and outcomes, and pivot if necessary

Career Development

Create career pathways for Peer Specialists

- Transparency in the promotion process can help build trust, improve communication, and increase employee engagement
- Develop and implement mentorship programs specifically for Peer Specialists
- Discuss career goals and implement a plan of action
- Offer regular workshops, webinars, and certifications on warmline and peer support
- Provide financial assistance for staff pursuing relevant degrees or certifications to further their education and career prospects

Boundaries & Ethics

Professional boundaries and ethical behaviors are key to providing support

- Provide training and feedback on maintaining professional boundaries with callers
- Do not involve Peer Specialists in coercive practices, such as forced treatment, or medication compliance
- Train staff on HIPAA and the difference between confidential and anonymity
- Consider using role-playing exercises
- Encourage staff to attend support groups specifically for Peer Specialists
- Remember the intention and purpose of peer support by utilizing the National Practice Guidelines from the National Association of Peer Supporters (N.A.P.S.)

Human Resources

Training & Ongoing Support

Training plays a vital role in preparing peer specialists to provide compassionate, informed, and effective support to individuals in distress on warmlines. It ensures that they have the necessary tools and knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of callers while also taking care of their own well-being.

Suggested Training Courses for Warmline Peer Specialists

Intentional Peer Support (IPS)	Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP)	Emotional CPR (eCPR)
Cultural Competency	Active Listening	Setting & Maintaining Boundaries
Peer Ethics	Handling Challenging Calls	Alternatives to Suicide
Harm Reduction	Advocacy	Recovery Principles
Trauma-Informed/Affirmative Care	Effective Communication	Grief & Loss
Self-Care for Professionals	Community Resources	Mandated Reporting/Duty To Warm/Duty To Protect
Inclusive Language	Isolation & Loneliness	System Navigation
Avoiding Peer Drift/Co-Optation	Peer Practice Guidelines	Youth & Young Adult
Forensic/Justice-Involved Peer Support	Older Adults	Co-Occurring (Mental Health & Substance Use)

Marketing & Outreach

Marketing Your Warmline

Warmlines require a targeted and thoughtful marketing plan to effectively reach its audience. Here's a comprehensive marketing plan for starting or expanding a warm line.

Market Research

- Understand who your primary users are (e.g., individuals seeking mental health support, people in recovery, caregivers, etc.).
- Determine the specific needs of your target audience that your warm line can meet. Identify any gaps in existing services that you can fill.
- Research other warm lines and mental health services in your area to identify what they offer and how you can differentiate your service.

Branding & Messaging

- Create a name, logo, and tagline that resonate with your target audience and convey the supportive and non-judgmental nature of the service.
- Develop key messages that communicate the benefits of your warm line, such as confidentiality, peer support, and availability. Ensure your messaging is consistent across all platforms.

Marketing Channels

- Create a user-friendly website with clear information about the warm line, including operating hours, the types of support offered, and how to contact. Optimize your website for search engines to increase visibility.
- Use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn to reach a broader audience. Share stories, testimonials, mental health tips, and updates about the warm line. Engage with your audience through comments and messages.
- Build an email list of potential users, mental health professionals, and community partners. Send regular newsletters with updates, success stories, and mental health resources.
- Utilize local newspapers, radio stations, and community bulletin boards to reach people who might not be active online. Consider press releases and interviews to spread the word.

Marketing & Outreach

Marketing Your Warmline

Community Engagement

- Collaborate with mental health organizations, healthcare providers, schools, and community centers to promote your warm line. Offer to conduct presentations or workshops about the benefits of your service.
- Host or participate in community events, health fairs, and workshops to raise awareness. Provide informational materials and engage with attendees directly.
- Ensure that your volunteers and staff are well-trained and able to provide high-quality support. Their positive interactions will help build your warm line's reputation.

Content Marketing

- Publish content related to mental health, wellness tips, and personal stories of recovery and support on your website. This can help attract visitors and improve your SEO.
- Create videos that explain what a warm line is, share success stories, and provide mental health advice. Host webinars on relevant topics to engage with your audience live.
- Share testimonials and success stories from individuals who have benefited from your warm line. This can build credibility and trust. Remember to respect confidentiality.

Monitoring & Evaluation

- Monitor website traffic, social media engagement, call volumes, and other relevant metrics to assess the effectiveness of your marketing efforts.
- Regularly gather feedback from users, volunteers, and partners to understand what's working and where there is room for improvement.
- Based on the feedback and metrics, adjust your marketing strategies to better meet the needs of your target audience and achieve your goals.

Budgeting

- Determine your budget for marketing activities and allocate resources accordingly. Consider both financial and human resources needed for implementation.
- Explore funding opportunities, grants, and donations to support your marketing efforts and the overall operation of the warm line.

Data Collection & Evaluation

Quantifying Your Results & Outcomes

Collecting Data for Funding Sources

- Detailed records of call volumes, caller demographics, issues addressed, and outcomes demonstrate warmline impact.
- Funders require data to justify investments and ensure efficient use of funds.
- Compelling evidence of benefits and reach helps build a strong case for continued or increased funding.
- Data collection aids in identifying community trends and needs, informing future funding requests, and developing programs.

Collecting Data to Better Serve the Community

- Understanding user demographics and issues faced helps tailor services to community needs.
- Data reveals service gaps, emerging mental health trends, and intervention effectiveness.
- Insights enable continuous adaptation and improvement of warmline services.
- Data-driven information fosters partnerships with other community organizations for coordinated support.

Looking To The Future
The Next Steps for Warmlines

Disrupting the Industry

These innovations have the potential to transform warmlines into dynamic and responsive support systems that leverage technology and collaboration to meet the evolving needs of individuals with mental health challenges.

Development of a Peer Warmline network that connects Warmlines across the country to share experiences and facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration among peer specialists, fostering innovation and best practices in peer support delivery.

Establishment of a universal three-digit national warmline number, providing easy access to immediate peer support for individuals in crisis across the country.
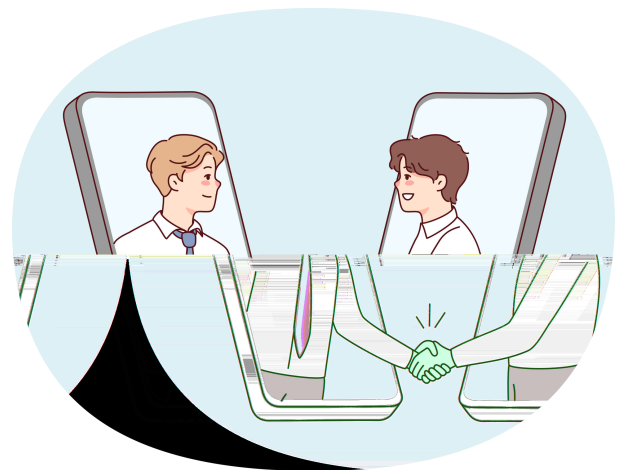
Integration with telehealth platforms to provide seamless transitions between virtual support services and professional mental health care, ensuring continuity of care and holistic support for individuals seeking assistance.

Implementation of data analytics and predictive modeling tools to analyze call data, identify trends, and anticipate peak demand periods, enabling proactive resource allocation and service optimization.

National Peer Support Warmline Council

www.copelandcenter.org