

# CRISIS TEXT LINE | RIPPLES OF IMPACT



How the Crisis Text Line volunteer experience helps address the mental health crisis and the loneliness epidemic in the United States



DECEMBER 2024

# Executive Summary

Crisis Text Line provides free, 24/7, confidential text-based mental health support in English and Spanish, helping people in their toughest moments. Since 2013, we've supported over 10 million conversations, offering hope and support to more than 4.6 million individuals across the United States.

At the heart of our mission are our volunteer Crisis Counselors, trained to respond with care and compassion. Over 75,000-strong, our volunteer crisis response training program is one of the largest in the nation. In 2024, we surveyed over 2,100 volunteers to explore how their experience at Crisis Text Line has impacted them, and to uncover the ripple effects of their experience on their communities.

## Four lessons emerged:

### 1 Our volunteers continue preventing crises after their shift is over.

Crisis Counselors report that they are comfortable applying their skills outside of their volunteer hours, and regularly do so among their friends, loved ones, school mates, colleagues, and even strangers in moments of crisis. For every conversation with a texter in crisis, they help someone else in their communities.

### 2 Volunteering as a Crisis Counselor builds resilience.

By navigating challenging conversations and offering empathetic support, volunteers develop essential coping skills that enhance their own emotional well-being.

### 3 Volunteering as a Crisis Counselor reduces loneliness and transforms how people communicate with those around them.

The experience helps volunteers, especially young volunteers, build new connections. It also helps them feel more connected to the people they know, and gives them tools to find the right words when talking to others.

### 4 Crisis Counselors are inspired to join the mental health field, and advocate for change.

Volunteers often share that this experience helps them secure jobs in the industry or gain admission to educational programs in the field.

We've never wanted to be just a revolving-door mental health emergency room in response to the growing mental health crisis in the U.S. We are committed to being part of the solution. This study has proven to us that our volunteers are contributing to this vision, not only through their support of texters, but also in their everyday lives.



# Introduction

## **The U.S. mental health crisis is escalating and there are not enough providers to address it.**

There is a mental health crisis in the United States. Almost 60% of people in the country seek mental health services for themselves or someone close to them.<sup>1</sup> Around 30% of US adults are diagnosed with depression at some point in their lifetime – an increase of 10% in the last decade, the biggest jumps are among women, young adults, and Black and Hispanic adults.<sup>2</sup> Episodes of major depression among young people between 12 and 17 have more than doubled since 2010.<sup>3</sup>

There are many factors contributing to this crisis, including financial barriers to accessing care, a lack of awareness of available support, rigid social stigmas about mental health challenges, and a dire shortage of mental health workers.<sup>4</sup> Around half of the U.S. population live in areas where mental health services are in short supply, a gap that is only expected to widen. By 2036, less than half of the need will be met for mental health providers including psychiatrists, addiction counselors, mental health counselors, and psychologists.<sup>5</sup>

## **There is a loneliness epidemic in the U.S.**

For the past several decades, an epidemic of loneliness and social isolation emerged in the United States, and its effects are closely linked to worsening mental health trends. Today, around 30% of adults regularly experience feelings of loneliness, and 10% say they feel lonely every day. Younger people between the ages of 18 and 24 are more likely to experience these feelings.<sup>6</sup> The rate of loneliness among

young adults has increased every year between 1976 and 2019, and social participation among young people has been declining.

The loneliness epidemic has unfolded in parallel to the mental health crisis, and they are closely connected. Social isolation and loneliness are linked to poor mental health outcomes – people who feel lonely or disconnected are more likely to develop depression or anxiety, or experience worsening symptoms. People who often feel lonely are more than twice as likely to develop depression than those who don't.<sup>7</sup> This is true for younger and older people alike. In children and adolescents, isolation and loneliness increase the likelihood that they will develop anxiety and depression.



<sup>1</sup> National Council for Mental Wellbeing: [Study Reveals Lack of Access as Root Cause for Mental Health Crisis in America](https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/study-reveals-lack-of-access-as-root-cause-for-mental-health-crisis-in-america/) - National Council for Mental Wellbeing ([thenationalcouncil.org](https://thenationalcouncil.org))

## **What is the impact of volunteering as a Crisis Counselor beyond supporting people via text?**

For over a decade, Crisis Text Line has been a key resource to widen access to mental health support and resources in the United States, particularly for underserved communities and youth. Our free, 24/7, service has grown to be one of the largest sources of text-based mental health support in the U.S., with over 10 million crisis conversations supported to date with the help of trained volunteers.

We have trained over 75,000 volunteer Crisis Counselors since 2013, making this one of the largest mental health volunteer training programs in the country. These trained volunteer Crisis Counselors support thousands of conversations with people in need, 24 hours a day, every day, across every state in the country.

This gave us a unique opportunity to understand how volunteering as a Crisis Counselor impacts people at scale. Building on earlier research<sup>2</sup>, in 2024, we launched this study and surveyed 2,129 recently active volunteers to learn about two key questions:

***How has volunteering with Crisis Text Line impacted our volunteers personally?***

***What societal benefits have our volunteers generated for others beyond volunteering with Crisis Text Line?***

What we learned far exceeded our expectations.

<sup>2</sup> Witters, 2023. Gallup. [U.S. Depression Rates Reach New Highs \(gallup.com\)](https://www.gallup.com)

<sup>3</sup> Crisis Text Line, 2024. [What Do Young People in Crisis Need from Their Communities? \(crisistextline.org\)](https://www.crisistextline.org)

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF: [Access to Mental Health Services in the U.S. | UNICEF USA](https://www.unicef.org)

<sup>5</sup> HRSA, 2023. Behavioral health workforce. [Behavioral Health Workforce 2023 Brief \(hrsa.gov\)](https://www.hrsa.gov)

<sup>6</sup> American Psychiatric Association, 2024. New APA poll: One in three Americans feel lonely every week. [Psychiatry.org - New APA Poll: One in Three Americans Feels Lonely Every Week](https://www.psychiatry.org)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Surgeon General: [Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation](https://www.hhs.gov)

<sup>8</sup> Crisis Text Line: <https://www.crisistextline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Volunteer-Voices-The-Impact-of-Volunteering-at-CTL.pdf>





## Crisis Text Line volunteers prevent crises in their communities.



We asked volunteers whether they have supported others outside of the platform, how often this has happened in the last six months, who they supported, and where this support happened. The results are remarkable, showcasing a broad and profound impact at home, school, work, and beyond.

### Due to their volunteer experience at Crisis Text Line:

**98%**

can provide mental health support outside of volunteering; of these, 88% have done so more than once recently, and 44% do so regularly.<sup>9</sup>

**95%**

spread knowledge and reduce stigma about mental health and wellbeing; of these, 100% have done so more than once recently; 54% do so regularly.

**91%**

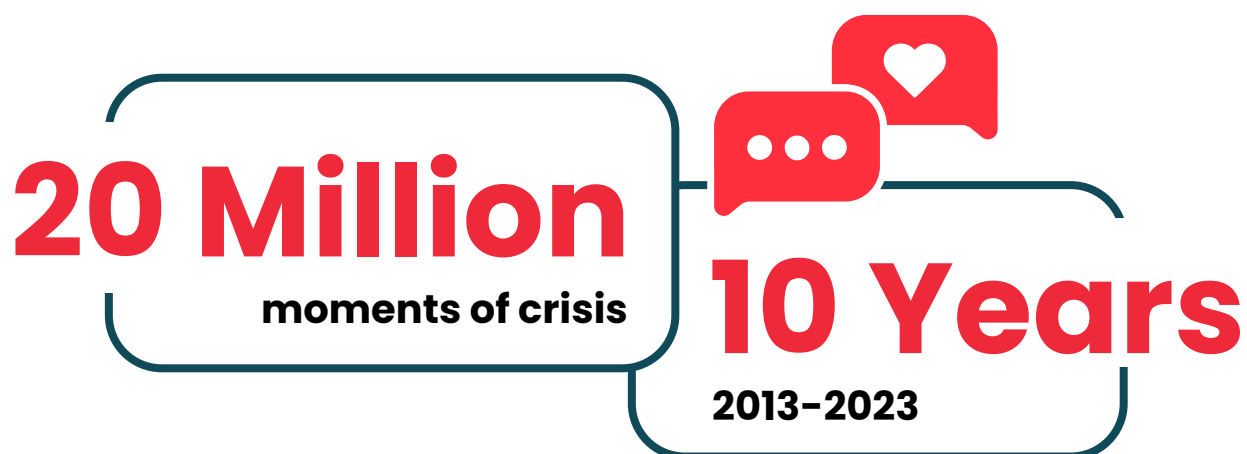
can de-escalate tense situations outside of volunteering; of these, 100% have done so more than once recently; 30% do so regularly.

In each of these cases, the circumstances of our volunteers' engagement followed a similar pattern: the vast majority took place among friends and family. Sometimes, they involved strangers. These interventions happened most frequently at home, but almost as likely at work and at school.

<sup>9</sup>For all of these metrics, the question specified "in the past 6 months" as a timeframe. We used the word "regularly" to mean multiple times a month, a week, or day.



**For every crisis that our volunteers support through our service, they prevent another one in their communities.**



Based on conservative estimates, Crisis Text Line volunteers have provided support in approximately 20 million moments of crisis over 10 years. The actual multiplier might be significantly greater than this.

2

## Volunteering as a Crisis Counselor makes people more resilient.



**Volunteering at Crisis Text Line has made volunteers better equipped to handle their own mental health challenges.**

**Among Crisis Text Line volunteers...**

**96%**

have developed personal resilience – even more among the youngest volunteers under 25 (98%).

**95%**

can better deal with their own mental health challenges or stressors.





3

**Volunteering as a Crisis Counselor makes people feel more connected to others.**

**Crisis Counselors feel more connected to others, and find it easier to connect to new people.**

Volunteers are part of families, communities, and workplaces. The survey results show that our trained volunteer Crisis Counselors are more connected to the people around them, and find it easier to build new relationships, as a result of this specific volunteer experience.

**Among Crisis Text Line volunteers...**

**91%**

feel that volunteering at Crisis Text Line provides them with a sense of community

**87%**

feel that volunteering at Crisis Text Line has strengthened their ability to connect with young people in their lives

**80%**

have stronger quality work relationships because of volunteering at Crisis Text Line

**74%**

find it easier to meet new people and make friends thanks to their Crisis Text Line experience – even more among volunteers under 25 (78%)



In light of the loneliness epidemic in the United States, we were especially moved to find that 94% of volunteers feel more connected to other people as a result of their experience. We were further inspired that people, especially young people, feel it helped them meet new people and make friends – and develop even stronger

quality work relationships. Crisis Counselors also reported that their volunteer experience helped them better understand members of a different generation. (87% said that volunteering at Crisis Text Line has strengthened their ability to connect with young people in their lives.)

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## **Volunteers develop better communication skills that they often apply in their day-to-day lives with people around them.**

The Crisis Text Line experience profoundly shapes how volunteers communicate with the people around them. Volunteers are trained to develop empathetic communication skills, to recognize when people are in crisis, and to safely de-escalate stressful situations. Due to these new skills, volunteers feel more confident in their abilities, and recognize their own personal growth.

**100%**

report enhanced listening skills that they attribute to this experience

**99%**

say they can respond more empathetically to others

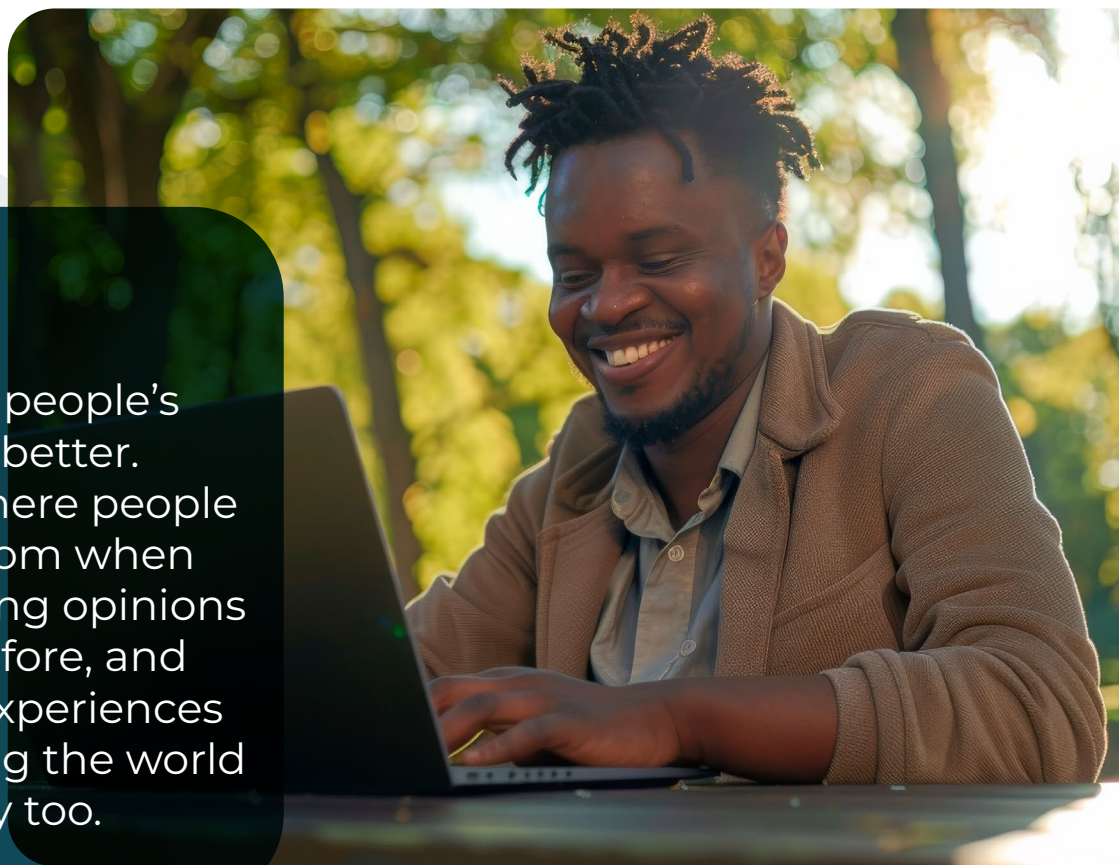
**99%**

have enhanced communications skills during stressful moments



“

I have learned valuable listening skills, learned how to not give advice, but help others find solutions. It helps me realize how judgements and bias come out in language and thoughts and it has made me more aware of not being judgmental.



“

I understand people's viewpoints better. I understand where people are coming from when they have differing opinions more than before, and some of their experiences lead me to seeing the world differently too.

4

**Crisis Counselors want to join the field of mental health, and influence positive change.**



**Volunteering at Crisis Text Line has influenced the educational and career trajectories of many Crisis Counselors. Younger Crisis Counselors in particular are accessing jobs and educational programs because of this volunteer experience.**

**As a result of their Crisis Text Line volunteer experience...**

**89%**

want to work in a field where they can help people (95% of volunteers under 25)

**45%**

are inspired to change careers

**42%**

believe that volunteering with Crisis Text Line helped them get a job (50% of volunteers under 25)

**41%**

believe that it helped them get into an education or training program (50% of volunteers under 25)



Participants reflected on the value that volunteering with us has contributed to gaining experience and exposure to mental health fields, developing key skills to facilitate mental health care, and adding this experience on their resumes:

Great opportunity for mental health careers and volunteering. Great to gain experience.

It has given me a great foundation for working in mental health services.

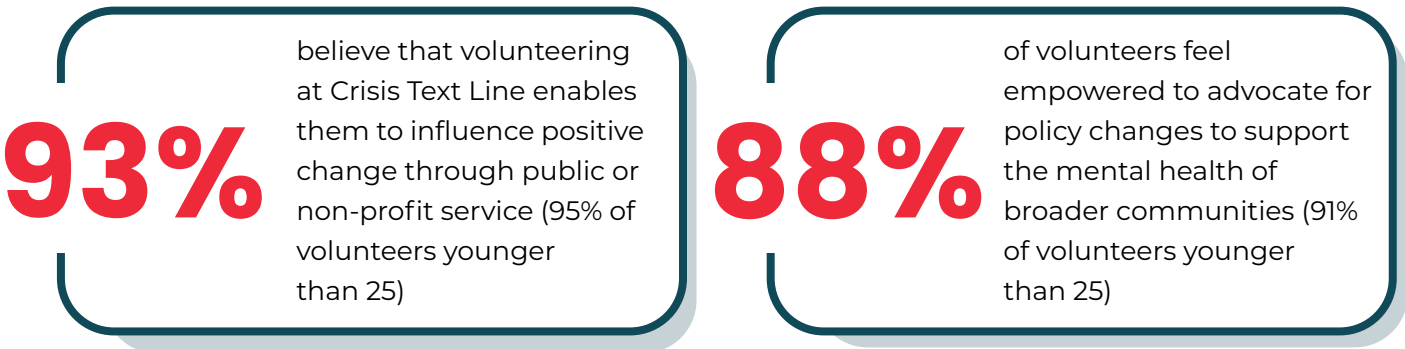
Helped me to solidify that helping others is a career choice that I want to make and I am now in school to become a mental health counselor.

As a student studying psychology and who wants to go into counseling, crisis counseling is a great internship place to start. I think it will be great for my resume.

**Crisis Text Line volunteers feel empowered to influence positive social change.**

Volunteers are using the knowledge, skills and competencies they have gained through Crisis Text Line to support those around them. They often share Crisis Text Line resources with others and many are actively advocating for mental health awareness in their communities, thereby normalizing mental health challenges and asking for help.

**Among Crisis Text Line volunteers...**



## How are Crisis Text Line volunteers advocating for mental health awareness in their communities?



I've told all of my friends that they should keep the number on their fridge for themselves or their kids.



I have a sister who has a kid that deals with anger issues. I thought it was really cool I could help by offering guidance and relying on resources.



I've shared some resources with coworkers regarding anxiety.



It's helped me educate others and destigmatize mental health in conversations with friends and family.



I make a point of sharing the Crisis Text Line number as I am out in the community; I do a lot of volunteer work with the elderly, poor Hispanic immigrants, queer and farming communities.



I grew up in an immigrant family that didn't necessarily view mental health as a valid thing to protect. Crisis Text Line has taught me how to gently navigate these barriers to mental health within my family without forcing help upon someone by teaching me to initiate open-ended conversations across different generations of people.

## **There is a mental health crisis and a loneliness epidemic in the U.S. Volunteering as a Crisis Counselor might provide solutions to both.**

We now know the training and experience to help people in their darkest moments has life-changing implications not only for texters, but for Crisis Text Line volunteers and the people around them.

**Crisis Text Line volunteers contribute to mental health crisis prevention at scale.** They themselves become more resilient, and take their skills back to build stronger communities. They routinely recognize mental health distress and de-escalate them in their everyday lives – at home, at work, at school, and beyond. For every crisis that they support during their shift, our volunteers prevent or de-escalate another one, typically involving someone they know. On the flipside, they are responding to the crises that are already happening to people they don't know – by volunteering, but also by joining the mental health workforce and addressing a dire shortage of mental health professionals in the country.

**Volunteering at Crisis Text Line fundamentally changes the way people interact with others.** It helps volunteers find a language that helps them connect to other people, and the skills to support others in moments of crisis. Volunteering with Crisis Text Line helps them meet new people and make new friends, feel a stronger sense of community, and build stronger work relationships. It inspires volunteers to pursue careers where they can help people, and creates opportunities for them to do so – especially among younger volunteers.

Crisis Text Line envisions a world where empathy prevails and no one feels alone. Our volunteers are advancing this vision every day, whether they're providing support to a stranger through text with us or offering a listening ear to a loved one, classmate, colleague, or someone else in their community.



# CRISIS TEXT LINE |



If you are interested in making a difference in people's lives, you can sign up [here](https://www.crisistextline.org) to become one of our amazing volunteers.

Crisis Text Line is a nonprofit organization that provides free, 24/7, confidential text-based mental health support and crisis intervention in both English and Spanish for anyone in the United States and Puerto Rico. Since our launch in 2013, we have supported over 10 million conversations and helped more than 4.6 million texters in the United States.

[www.crisistextline.org](https://www.crisistextline.org)