Blackburn Center was started by a group of volunteers in 1976, and volunteers have continued as a vital part ever since. Their support enables us to offer more services to more people in more corners of the county.

Our volunteers average hundreds of hours of service annually, doing tasks such as answering hotline calls, distributing literature at health fairs, reading to children at shelter, educating the community through our speakers’ bureau, and helping with administrative work.

Each person has a different reason for becoming a volunteer. Sometimes it includes having a personal experience with violence, but for most, the reason is simply that it is the right thing to do for our community.

Most of our volunteers do not have backgrounds in mental health or social work. They are teachers, business professionals, nurses, students, home-makers, or retirees. What they all share is the desire to help callers by being available to listen in times of crisis. Our training provides the additional background needed.

Our comprehensive training program focuses on development of active listening skills and an understanding of issues commonly raised by victims of domestic or sexual abuse. Each lesson includes a topic presented by a staff professional with small group focusing on its application to our work. Topics include domestic violence, sexual abuse, other crimes, legal issues, listening skill development, safety planning, agency policies including those on confidentiality and ethics.

Volunteer Assignments

1. Taking a shift on our 24 hour hotline
   Hotline counseling typically consists of:
   - Identifying and normalizing the caller’s emotions
   - Exploring the current problem
   - Presenting strategies that may solve or defuse the problem
   - Discussing ways to cope and providing community resources that can offer support
   - Developing a plan of action (including safety planning)

2. Helping at our shelter
   Our facility is temporary emergency shelter of victims of intimate partner violence and their children. Assisting there can include anything from organizing donations to using crisis counseling techniques with shelter residents.

3. Responding to a medical advocacy request
   Medical advocates meet victims and their families at the emergency room of any Westmoreland county hospital, 24/7, to provide support during medical examinations and information about resources and options available.

4. Participating in our education programs
   Blackburn Center provides education across the county to deepen community understanding of the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence, and availability of services. Volunteer can distribute agency information at health and wellness events and/or give brief talks to local community groups as part of our speaker bureau.

Interested working with us but do not have time for the training? Like us on Facebook, follow us in Twitter, YouTube. Check out our special programs - Future Advocates of Blackburn (FAB) and Fearless Advocacy for Men’s Engagement (FAME).