

Scheduling Round Table – Information Services Vancouver October 2, 2007

Background:

1. Information Services Vancouver does not yet run a 211 service although we are all set to do so when government funding is forthcoming.
2. We currently operate **five, 24 hour/7 day a week, I&R phone lines** – one comprehensive, four specialized (for substance abuse, problem gambling, for victims of crime and for youth dealing with violence). All I&R staff answer all lines.
3. We have **9 full time** (35 hours a week) and **9 part time I&R staff**, no casual/relief staff currently.
4. We get an average of 165 calls a day, 5000 a month and 61,000 calls a year. Peak hours are 9am-4pm – highest volume 10-11 am.
5. All I&R staff rotate through the various shifts, except when they are exempted due to medical reasons. We are a unionized workplace. Although scheduling is a management prerogative we have a duty to accommodate existing employees' needs, generally being unionized does not make scheduling more difficult. Occasionally there will be a situation where we have to follow the letter of the contract and thus increase our staffing costs.
6. This organization of the schedule is the employees preference – largely to share the overtime reasonably equally. Breaks are scheduled in a “loose” way - adaptable to call situations; meal breaks are designated times.
7. We moved to a “**Block**” type of scheduling using Excel. We post the whole 8-week schedule, 2-4 weeks prior to the start of the period. This is a rotating pattern of shifts which the staff member was responsible to work and by having a set block for part timers we are guaranteeing them a minimum set number of shifts/month. Previously our “part time” staff were actually scheduled as though they were casual – if they didn't want to work for a couple of weeks or months, they just announced that they weren't available. We found this unpredictability difficult.
8. The shift blocks were initially picked by seniority; the days and hours of work were fashioned around current staff preferences. The shifts blocks are permanent now, so an I&R staff member can plan well into the future. Coverage of vacation, sick time, conference attendance etc. is by scheduling part time staff (that want the extra hours) by seniority.
9. All staff are discouraged from working more than 35 hours a week (excepting standard OT); this does happen on occasion due to lack of available staff.
10. We considered changing the whole I&R schedule to one with a 9-day, 70 hours in a 2 week period, with extended hour days. The full time staff were keen but the part time staff were not – it was proposed that the Part time staff should get overtime for working the extended hours as compensation for not getting a day off every other week. Since this was against the existing collective agreement, we refused, so the Extended Hour proposal did not go ahead.
11. Manager is not included on schedule although she does overflow phones – she works a 9-day fortnight extended hour days (M-F, M-TH).

12. We do not have Casual/relief staff because the costs of training them seem to outweigh the cost savings of having them (i.e. benefits). We like to encourage our staff to stay as long as possible to offset the training costs. We find that people have to be in the office regularly to keep up-to-date and have the knowledge-base active and “in the front of their minds”. This would be hard to maintain for Casuals.

Scheduled Shifts in a week: 56

Monday-Friday: 9 shifts

7am-3 pm	(x1)	1 hr.meal break	3pm-11pm	(x1)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break
7:30am-3:30pm	(x1)	½ hr. meal break	3:30pm-11:30pm	(x1)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break
8am -4 pm	(x1)	½ hr meal break	11:30pm-7:30am	(x1)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break
8:30am -4:30pm	(x1)	½ hr. meal break			
9am-5 pm	(x1)	½ hr. meal break			
9:30am-5:30pm	(x1)	1 hr. meal break			

Saturday and Stats: 6 shifts

7:30 am-3:30 pm	(x1)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break	3:30pm-11:30pm	(x2)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break
8 am -4 pm	(x1)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break	11:30pm-7:30am	(x1)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break
9 am -5 pm	(x1)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break			

Sunday: 5 shifts

7:30 am-3:30 pm	(x1)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break	3:30pm-11:30pm	(x2)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break
8 am -4 pm	(x1)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break	11:30pm-7:30am	(x1)	pd 1 hr. OT in lieu of meal break

Isobel Curtis and Pany Aghili

Isobel@communityinfo.bc.ca

Panteha@communityinfo.bc.ca

Extended Hours Scheduling Round Table

Distress Centre Background

The Distress Centre runs the 211 Calgary service in partnership with Calgary and Area United Way and the City of Calgary. Our 211 is a 24/7 service and in the past year we have managed approximately 44,000 calls.

In order to man the 211 lines 24/7, we require 8 FTE staff and a pool of approximately 15-20 relief staff.

We do not use any scheduling software – we use a fairly simple scheduling form and it's a Word document.

Our full-time staff work 19 shifts per month, when the average office staff work 21. We do this to compensate the staff for them having to work shift work and also because they do not receive regularly scheduled breaks. They take breaks when they can, and just negotiate this with their co-workers. Because we have no more than 4 staff on shift at one time, this has worked for us.

The shifts worked are as follows:

Monday-Friday

8am-4pm (x2)

9am-5pm (x1)

12pm-8pm (x1)

4pm-12am (x1)

12am-8am (x1)

Saturday, Sunday and Stats

8am-4pm (x1)

4pm-12am (x1)

12am-8am (x1)

Peak call volumes are 12pm-4pm Monday-Friday and we have 4 staff on during this time.

Current Scheduling

Currently, we have full-time coverage for the 12am-8am shift. The only time we rotate the other 211 staff through the overnight shift is when the overnight staff are on holidays or are sick. This has worked for us because we found that rotating staff through all of the shifts confused their sleeping patterns too much and several of them had a really tough time with it.

We also currently have a full-time staff who prefers to work the 4pm-12am shift, so that has helped us to keep the shifts somewhat consistent for our staff. However, they know that things can change at any time and they would be expected to be able to work any of the shifts that may be required.

The rest of the staff mainly rotate through the 8-4, 9-5 and noon-8 shifts. I try to accommodate some requests as much as possible to help improve staff happiness and retention. For example,

Findhelp Information Services

211 Toronto

Background

On June 13, 2002 Findhelp Information launched 211 Toronto in partnership with the United Way of Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto. In the past five years call volume on the 211 service continues to increase from 91,000 calls per year before the launch to 422,000 calls in 2006.

There are currently 25 full time Information and Referral specialist who respond to inquiries in the call centre on: 211, Street Helpline, Victim Support and Central Access. On a monthly basis, the I & R Specialists answer approximately 39,000 calls for all services combined and 211 receiving 32,000 of the total calls. On an individual basis, I & R Specialist are currently handling 1,560 calls per month.

Scheduling

The schedule is done on a four week rotation and is solely based on service levels requirements and adheres to the Collective Agreement of unionized staff for a seniority based schedule. I & R Specialists submit their schedule preferences 14 days after a new schedule is posted and management posts the schedule one week before the current schedule expires.

The work week is 35 hours however hours of work per day vary. Most I & R Specialists work 7 hours per day (half hour lunch/dinner and two 15 minute breaks) over the course of 5 days while others work a compressed work week of 8.75 hours per day (half hour lunch/dinner and two 15 minute breaks) over the course of 4 days. The overnight shift is 9.5 hours and generally they do three overnight shifts in a row (sometimes 4 but no more than 4) followed by three days off consecutively.

The schedule is done in excel with all the service level requirements built in to ensure adequate coverage on a daily basis. Most of our services (with the exception of the Victim Support Line) are 24/7 every day of the year. However, the highest call volume is experienced Monday to Friday between the hours of 9:30am to 3:30pm. There are spikes in call volume generally at 10:00am and 2:00pm but spikes are not always predictable and not factored in scheduling.

Factors taken into account:

- staffing coinciding with call volume for all services combined
- funding or service level agreement expectations such as language requirements (in our case, the Victim Support Line is bilingual and operates 7 days a week 8:00am to 10:00pm and someone needs to be on the lines that can speak English/French during this time)
- Compliance with provincial employment standards and/or bargained agreement in unionized work place especially if staff will be working longer hours and/or working during statutory holidays.

Current schedule for Findhelp Inquiry Services

Weekdays	Weekends	Statutory Holidays
7:00am – 2:30pm (2)	7:00am – 2:30pm (2)	7:00am – 2:30pm (2)
8:00am – 3:30pm (1)	8:00am – 3:30pm (1)	8:00am – 3:30pm (1)
*8:00am -5:15pm (2)	*8:00am -5:15pm (1)	*8:00am -5:15pm (1)
9:00am - 4:30pm (2)	9:00am - 4:30pm (1)	9:00am - 4:30pm (1)
*9:00am -6:15pm (1)	*9:00am -6:15pm (1)	*11:45am -8:15pm (1)
9:30am -5:00pm (1)	*11:45am -8:15pm (1)	2:30pm -10:00pm (2)
*11:45am -8:15pm (1)	2:30pm -10:00pm (2)	^9:00pm – 7:00am (1)
2:30pm -10:00pm (2)	^9:00pm – 7:00am (1)	^9:45pm – 7:45am (1)
^9:00pm – 7:00am (1)	^9:45pm – 7:45am (1)	
^9:45pm – 7:45am (1)	on-call Saturday	on-call for stat holiday
	on-call Sunday	
I & R Specialists = 14	I & R Specialists = 11	I & R Specialists = 10
126 hours of coverage per day	87.25 hours of coverage	78.5 hours of coverage

* extended shift 8.75 hours in length

^ overnights 9.5 hours in length

I & R Specialists not scheduled to work on the weekend will be assigned one on-call per month

The schedule is aligned with payroll therefore there are 13 schedules per year and each schedule consists of 28 days

Collective Agreement Compliance for scheduling in Inquiry Services

- There must be 12 hours between scheduled shifts
- No one shall work alone overnights
- No one shall work more than 8 evening shifts per schedule
- No one shall work more than 7 overnight shifts per schedule
- Two weekends per schedule off
- The hours between midnight and 6:00am – considered “black out” and no one will be scheduled to come in or leave during this time.

The Collective Agreement does not prevent anyone from working more overnights, evening shifts, or working exclusively weekends (since everyone’s personal needs vary). However, in order to do so, the arrangement must be documented and supported by both the individual and management.

Challenges that have been encountered

The biggest challenge to date has been the extended shifts – they worked when we first launched 211 in 2002 when the Inquiry Service had a compliment of 33 I & R Specialists. However, five years later with funding decreases and call volume remaining relatively steady we have not been replacing all I & R Specialist as people leave. Therefore, the extended shifts are now no longer viable and we are currently in the process of phasing out these shifts.

I & R Specialists have been accustomed to submitting schedule requests with their preferences for certain shifts which makes it a challenge every time the schedule needs to be done on a monthly basis since these preferences are not always consistent but may also be trumped by seniority. A fixed schedule would resolve this issue however it would require a part time pool to fill in the gaps when I & R Specialists take time off.

one of my staff works only the 8-4 shift on Mondays so she can go to an exercise class she enjoys on Monday evenings.

For the most part, the staff end up only having to work 1 weekend every couple of months. We utilize relief staff as much as possible for the weekend shifts. Every month, we have on average 15-20 relief shifts to fill for the 211 lines.

The Distress Centre also runs the city's main 24/7 crisis lines. We have a staff person on that side of the phone room 24/7 as well who are primarily there to support the volunteers answering the crisis line calls (we call them Phone Room Coordinators, or 'PRC's'). The 211 staff and PRC's are all cross-trained.

The PRC schedule allows for an additional 20-25 relief shifts, which when added to the 211 relief shifts equals at least 40-45 relief shifts per month. This is why we require about 15-20 relief staff. We require that our relief staff be available for a minimum of 4 shifts per month, however we do not guarantee them any certain number of hours. Relief staff are assigned shifts a month in advance, but also pick up last minute shifts if someone is sick or wants to take a lieu/holiday day.

Pros for having relief staff

- Having a good relief pool enables us to deal with periods of low staff coverage (e.g. A staff person gives 2 weeks notice. Due to our required training program, it can take 1.5 months to get a new staff person onto the 211 lines after they're been hired)
- Enables staff who choose to leave the agency for another job to have the opportunity to continue working for the agency (staff are already trained = win/win!)
- They tend to be less expensive because they don't receive benefits

Cons for having relief staff

- Subject to the schedules of relief staff – they can 'pick and choose' when they want to take shifts – so holidays/long weekends can be challenging at times
- They sometimes do not feel as much 'ownership' or 'responsibility' for their shifts
- May not be cost effective, depending on your agency
- Can be challenging to ensure staff are up to date on call centre happenings, but we have several things in place to assist with this (update page, staff e-mail address, team meetings etc,)