



Provincial Recognition of Distress Centre Volunteers National Volunteer Week — April 19th to April 25th 2009

2009 Spirit of Volunteerism Award *Nominees and Recipients*

We live in increasingly complex and challenging times. As the recession unfolds, Distress Centres Ontario can expect the demand for our services to increase. There are many amazing volunteers who provide these services and it was a difficult, but wonderful problem to have to decide from among the 13 nominees who should earn the 2009 Spirit of Volunteerism Award given in memory of Rev. Chad Varah. The nominees have all demonstrated commitment to the values of volunteerism through their empathetic listening and skilled interventions as well as through their overall support of other volunteers, staff and the board. Many have represented their centres to the public, engaged in fundraising, mentored others, served on their local boards and initiated projects extending and improving services to callers and the community.

Please join us in congratulating this year's Nominees and Recipients

Nicole Cabral — Recipient — Young Adult
Distress Centre Durham

Nicole Cabral is a “Young Adult Volunteer” with the Distress Centre Durham where she has diligently and joyfully given of herself for over two years, logging 500 calls during that time. Nicole began her association with the centre in November 2006 as a placement student from Sir Sanford Fleming College, working to fulfill requirements for the Social Service Worker Diploma. Nicole distinguished herself from the start with her natural ability to listen empathetically. Her warmth, energy and dedication made her a “delight to work with.” During this time she researched, developed and implemented the “hugely successful” Community Contact Call-Out program. It made the centre’s services more accessible to callers and increased overall calls for 2007 by 40%. Not surprisingly, she earned the Distress Centre Durham’s “2006 Student Placement Achievement of Excellence Award.”

Nicole continued to volunteer on the phones after her placement ended and became a Shift Supervisor as soon as she was eligible, earning the high regard of her fellow volunteers and staff. In 2007 the Board of Directors wanted to diversify its membership by including younger members. Nicole was recruited based on her “dedication, commitment, maturity, exceptional volunteer helpline work and her phenomenal work as a placement student.” Nicole filled this position while maintaining her 16 hour per month helpline commitment

and mentoring role. In 2008 Nicole accepted the position of Treasurer for the Board, despite having no prior experience. Engaging the help of a bookkeeper, Nicole learned about the world of finance for not-for-profit organizations.

Nicole eagerly helps out – she has co-presented the Teen Suicide Awareness Program, represented Distress Centre Durham at the DCO conferences and regularly takes on administrative tasks when special projects or tight deadlines require it. As well, she participates in fundraising events, team meetings, social functions and is always willing to fill in on shifts at the last minute.

Leslie Evans
Distress Centre Peel

Being a telephone volunteer with Distress Centre Peel “is very satisfying work,” says Leslie Evans – it must be since she has been at it since 1999! Leslie’s life experiences enrich her contribution to the centre. Having lived in Australia, worked for Air Canada and operated her own business, her contributions go beyond the empathetic voice, caring heart and nonjudgmental attitude she uses to help distressed callers.

“She provides positive, constructive feedback to the trainees,” says Training Coordinator, Candy Wiklund, and Leslie mentors new volunteers when they start on the phones. Between 2004 and 2006 Leslie joined the Distress Centre

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Peel Board of Directors. Willing to help out any way she can, Leslie has transported displays promoting the distress centre movement to malls, community centres and libraries. Her commitment to volunteerism includes nine years of driving for the Peel Children's Aid.

Carol Edgar

Toronto Distress Centre

Carol Edgar has a heart for the marginalized and suffering. For the thirty years before she retired, her chosen profession involved working with addicts, youth in crisis, and victims of assault, oppression and prejudice. Carol's volunteerism is a common thread throughout her life. Embodying the ideals of the distress centre movement, she has contributed time and energy to individuals and to organizations such as Big Sisters, UNICEF, and the Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre and, for the past year and a half, Distress Centres (Toronto).

Carol has had a dramatic effect on the volunteers, staff and culture of Distress Centres. Carol lost most of her eyesight as an adult, but has triumphed over this limitation to reach out to others, and in doing so, provides inspiration to those around her. Carol believes that "trust must be developed with the caller so that the caller feels genuinely cared for" and demonstrates it with her tremendously empathetic listening style which makes her able to handle any crisis call.

Bill Jarvis — Recipient

Toronto Distress Centre

For five years Bill Jarvis has exemplified the qualities of a great volunteer, supporting the values and operations of the Distress Centres (Toronto) with kindness, patience, creativity and enthusiasm. Volunteerism comes from the heart and can transform both the volunteer and those he or she serves. This is the case for Bill, who until his retirement from a successful career in business and the military, had not volunteered "for anything meaningful" in his life. Bill says, "my family and friends have all commented on the personal growth I have shown as I have learned to become more empathetic and less judgmental in my personal life."

Bill uses his considerable gifts for the benefit of the callers, volunteers, staff and board of the Distress Centres. Program Coordinator, Alex Shendelman, says Bill is "an ideal example of an empathetic listener. He has a very calm and gentle manner on the phones." These qualities extend to the other volunteers and have made him a sought after mentor and effective trainer.

Near to his heart is Bill's involvement with the Survivor Support Program, which offers counseling and comfort to people bereaved through suicide or murder. Having lost a loved one to suicide, gives Bill a special motivation to provide support for others going through a similar heartbreak.

As a Board Member, Bill has put to use his business training, an MBA from the University of Western Ontario, and his leadership skills, honed during over ten years as C.E.O., Chairman of the Board and President of Gartner Group Canada and The Transition Group Inc. During his three years as Secretary of the Board, Bill focused his attentions on volunteer recruitment, an important issue facing Distress Centres.

Finally, Bill's ongoing commitment to the spirit of volunteerism is seen not only in large projects but also in the small but important activities that promote and support the Distress Centres, including speaking on behalf of the centre at functions, participating in fundraising and attending training workshops, always "keeping our ideals front and centre."

Marc LaChance

Telecare Distress Centre (Brampton)

The Telecare Distress Centre got far more than it bargained for when Marc LaChance joined the Board of Directors in 2006. His initial focus was to help upgrade the technology used to support Telecare. However, his biggest contribution has been to help bring the organization to the next level of efficiency and professionalism. Using his expertise, Marc introduced process improvements and a proactive approach to management. The result has been an increase in productivity and a more efficient use of limited resources.

Marc regularly walks the extra mile in order to support new projects. He shows empathy and compassion, not only towards those served by the Telecare Distress Centre, but also towards the staff, volunteers and Board Members who struggle under the stress of limited resources to provide the best care possible.

Jennifer Lindley

Distress Centre Niagara

It is for good reason that Stacy Terry, the Program Manager who nominated her, calls Jennifer Lindley "an ambassador for Distress Centre Niagara." Jennifer started in 1996 as a volunteer on the crisis lines; the experience opened her eyes, impacting her personally in a very positive way. She has maintained this initial enthusiasm throughout the years,

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sharing her skilled support, interest and respect for callers by becoming a senior phone line trainer and, more recently, by joining the Board of Directors.

Although currently serving as Vice President of the Board, Jennifer continues to volunteer on the crisis lines. Her Training/Human Resources background has no doubt helped her to be an excellent leader and team player. As well, Jennifer's involvement in fundraising has helped secure donations and gain exposure for the centre.

Christine Moore — Recipient *Oakville Distress Centre*

Christine Moore began her association with the Oakville Distress Centre in 2002 as a distress line volunteer and quickly distinguished herself by showing empathy, patience, insight, warmth and humour in her dealings with callers. Her words echo the feelings of many committed volunteers, "Being able to interact with so many different people and learn about the various challenges in their lives has brought about an enhanced understanding of humanity, which has been a wonderful opportunity for personal growth." Callers responded to Christine's authenticity and she easily connected with them, staying calm even when the most difficult callers became angry or afraid.

In 2006, Christine joined the Board of Directors, taking on the role of Board Treasurer. As a Certified Management Accountant with twenty years experience, Christine's leadership in this area met a significant need for strong financial leadership. Working closely with the Executive Director, Christine identified cost savings and revenue opportunities, advising on investments and ensuring that financial components were in good shape. She created a Board Metric and Report Card that assists the board in meeting the needs of volunteers, the community and the callers. Her ongoing participation in the Strategic Planning Committee has also been invaluable.

As you might imagine, her eye for detail, sense of humour and excellent people skills have drawn her into involvement with fundraising and community awareness events. Most notably, she acts as team-lead in running the ongoing Bingo fundraisers, receiving high praise by one and all.

Marilyn Oldham *North Halton Distress Centre*

With 36 years of service under her belt, Marilyn Oldham was there when the North Halton Distress Centre, or Contact

Centre as it was called then, began in 1973. Marilyn worked with the key community leaders who opened the centre, and she was one of its first volunteers. Despite the lack of funding, Marilyn remembers those days as being full of excitement and anticipation with everyone pitching in to help. She worked on the training program for the first six months, but her true passion was the Distress Line. Gail Cartwright, Executive Director, says, "Marilyn's kind and gentle manner soothes and reassures the people who call our Centre."

An important part of her life, Marilyn's dedication to the centre has been an inspiration to the other volunteers, and she sees no change to this in the foreseeable future.

Cindy Slavik — Recipient *Distress Centre of Windsor-Essex County*

Cindy Slavik's accomplishments since she began volunteering with the Distress Centre of Windsor-Essex County in March 2008 are truly stunning and have "made a difference in the lives of our Volunteer base," significantly improving the service provided to the community. From the beginning, Cindy's skills on the phone were so comprehensive that the training team invited her to become a trainer, waiving the one year of service normally required. Training is a part of Cindy's chosen career, so it is not surprising that she quickly excelled in this role. By March 2009, Cindy had given the centre and community 196 hours of phone service, 38 hours of training, 30 hours promoting the centre through speaking engagements, and has just become a Home Support Leader with a future commitment to provide 84 hours / month of home service.

Cindy's commitment to the centre has gone above and beyond from the start. Seeing what needed to be done, she began her campaign of improvement by taking on small administrative tasks like updating charts and cleaning up. It didn't stop there. In July, 2008, Cindy took it upon herself to create and publish the centre's first internal newsletter. She continues to produce the well-received publication on a regular basis. The newsletter gives recipients information about new volunteers, recent accomplishments, and announcements of upcoming events.

In September, Cindy made a proposal to the Board of Directors. She wanted to renovate the centre! With their OK she assembled a team of volunteers, obtained donations to cover expenses, and organized the work to be done over one weekend. Quite the surprise for Executive Director Rukshini Ponniah who had no idea what Cindy was up to,

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“The new flooring, painted walls, new furniture and fixtures and decorations, it all looked like it was straight out of a magazine.” A comfortable, welcoming environment goes a long way to relieving the inevitable stresses of crisis phone line work and has really boosted morale.

Cindy shows, through her leadership, vision, creativity and determination, that it is possible to change things for the better. “She truly is someone who is not only able to lead others, but also empowers them to start working making their own dreams a reality too.”

Sandy Small Proudfoot

Community Torchlight, TeleCheck Dufferin

Sandy Small Proudfoot has been a volunteer with Community Torchlight Telecheck Dufferin since April 2004. When she isn't calling to check up on the seniors of Dufferin County through the TeleCheck program, she is operating The Farmer's Walk Bed & Breakfast. A graduate of the Ontario College of Art & Design, focusing on teaching quilters' colour theory, she writes articles for *Canadian Living* magazine on a volunteer basis. Sandy volunteers with Aussie Rescue Ontario, an organization which rescues Australian Shepherds.

Sandy does not take adversity lying down. When a friend was shot and killed accidentally by a hunter, she advocated for stricter gun laws and now notifies her neighbours when hunting season starts. When problems in her own life threatened her well-being, she looked outward and became a volunteer with TeleCheck. She says, “Volunteering...is more than reciprocal in that I am continually uplifted by my contact with our TeleCheck clients.”

Harpreet Priya Sandhu

Telecare Distress Centre (Brampton)

Harpreet Priya Dandhu has been a cherished volunteer with Telecare Distress Centre (Brampton) since she joined in 2006, contributing over 480 hours to date. Her ability to connect with callers through her empathetic listening soon won her the position of an on-line trainer which she performed “outstandingly.”

Priya's enthusiasm and genuine concern have been evident from the beginning and extend beyond the callers to the staff, the other volunteers and the centre itself. She is known for her small acts of kindness, such as bringing cookies in

for the volunteers. In 2008, she organized the agenda and silent auction portion of a fundraising event. Further, she has recently joined the Volunteer Committee, proving that “no matter how busy Priya's life gets...the Telecare Distress Centre has a special place in her life and heart.”

Faren Hale Vokey

Telecare Distress Centre (Brampton)

Faren Hale Vokey has been nominated as a Young Adult Volunteer. She joined the Telecare Distress Centre as a placement for a class at George Brown in April 2008. Faren has a natural gift for reaching out to the callers and was quickly able to take on the role of online trainer. When her stint was completed, she returned for the summer as an Outreach Assistant working with Peel Regional agencies, informing them of the Telecare Distress Centres' services and looking for funding and volunteers.

Faren continues to dedicate many hours at her centre, and volunteers for the Annual Volunteer Christmas Appreciation Dinner. She has expanded her commitment by joining the Volunteer Committee and developing a new training session on Violence which she will also facilitate.

Nicholas White

Toronto Distress Centre (North Branch)

With a PhD in Psychology and sixteen years experience working in education, Nick White is well equipped to support the callers, staff, volunteers and goals of the Distress Centres. This he has faithfully done since 1993, volunteering in three capacities. Starting on the crisis line phones, within a year he began working as a peer trainer, a mentor and as a co-facilitator for training workshops with Lori O'Neill, the current Volunteer Coordinator. For the last two years, Nick has volunteered in the Survivor Support Program, counseling people who have lost a loved one through suicide or murder.

Nick communicates with respect, empathy, and patience, providing callers with emotional support, crisis intervention and suicide prevention. As a skilled educator, Nick delivers information in an easy, informal manner. He leads by example, supporting the protocols of the centre, attending all training sessions and treating everyone with kindness and respect. Lori O'Neill sums it up, “it is a pleasure and an honour to work with Nick.”