Volunteers are integral to our society in general and they are the backbone of our member organizations. Volunteering is a selfless act that enriches our society and brings communities together.

While all volunteers, and the work they do, are important, the volunteers who work with our crisis and distress member organizations bring a particular sense of compassion, dedication and commitment to their work. They help make their organizations and their communities stronger and are at the very core of what we do.

This year, while the number of nominations is down, the quality of nominees is excellent, which made the job difficult for the Committee. It was a close call, but a decision was made and the recipients selected.

It is with great pleasure that we present the 12th Annual Spirit of Volunteerism Recognition nominees and recipients.

Please join us in congratulating the 2019 Nominees & Recipients
Laxmi Aryal | Young Adult Volunteer
TORCHLIGHT

In 2017, Laxmi started her volunteer work with TorchLight in the Student Placement Program, decided to stay on as a call-taker on the crisis lines, and grew to greatly contribute to many of TorchLight’s programs. As a philanthropically-minded, respectful, and hard-working young adult, Lax and has been involved with the Community Outreach and Development program at her centre, attends volunteer fairs, and helps with community fundraising events. Overall, she is a great team player and is self-motivated to take on extra responsibilities and help in any way that she can.

Lax is not only well-spoken but an excellent listener; an all-around great communicator. This is good news for callers who speak to her on the crisis line - callers are fully supported by this professional and empathetic volunteer. Her nominator calls her a “beautiful soul” who is kind, compassionate, and very supportive of callers who experience challenging life circumstances. Apart from her excellence at reassuring callers, Lax handles the Volunteer of the Month program at TorchLight and posts photos and write-ups on the hallway bulletin board for fellow volunteers and staff to be inspired and motivated.

Lax speaks Nepali and has been a peer helper on the Peer Training and Networking Team at the University of Guelph. She has also been President of the Peer Innovation Team. Every year, Lax volunteers with the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada during the MS Walk in Burlington. In the future, Lax intends to become a Genetic Counsellor.

Megan Clemens | Young Adult Volunteer
TELEPHONE AID LINE KINGSTON (TALK)

As an outgoing, compassionate, dedicated, and hard-working Administrative Coordinator at Telephone Aid Line Kingston (TALK), Megan oversees all aspects of policy and disciplinary action within the organization. Within two years of volunteering, she has donated 320 hours to her centre and has become one of TALK’s most senior volunteers. Megan takes calls on the distress and crisis line, mentors new volunteers, and supports all aspects of TALK. In late 2017, Megan stepped into the role of Trainer, coordinating and presenting material to new volunteers.

Recently, Megan took initiative to increase TALK’s debriefing capabilities by implementing monthly debriefing meetings, enhancing the quality of training provided to debriefing members, and encouraging new phone line volunteers to reach out when they have a tough call or need to talk.

“Megan is always available to talk, debrief, answer questions, or have a good laugh with our volunteers,” her nominator says. “This level of enthusiasm and kindness is contagious, with many volunteers looking up to Megan and reaching out for support when needed.”

When she’s not spending time supporting her centre, Megan volunteers for the Sexual Bystander Intervention, manages her third year university studies, works part-time, practices yoga, and is training for a marathon. She intends to pursue medicine, specifically oncology or genetic counselling.

“I am beyond proud to call myself a member of TALK and to have had the opportunity to learn (and laugh!) with these volunteers,” Megan says. “I am ecstatic that they consider me a leader within the organization, worthy of this nomination.”
Holly joined TALK Kingston in the fall of 2016 during her first semester at Queen’s University and has been going strong ever since. She has completed almost 400 hours on the phone line, about 700 hours as a Designated Member on Backup, over 600 hours debriefing with volunteers after difficult calls, and countless hours as a Trainer. Holly is currently the Executive Director at volunteer-run TALK Kingston and advances the ideals of TALK to improve its service every day. Holly has shaped important policies, solved conflicts between members, and touched the lives of countless people in the community. She liaises with the Board of Directors, Executive, and other stakeholders in the organization, and makes herself available for every training session and social. It is truly incredible how this very busy Psychology major manages to dedicate so many hours to her centre while volunteering as a research assistant in two Psychology labs, on the Kingston Sexual Assault Centre crisis line, and as a crisis text responder for the Kids Help Phone.

“The volunteers at TALK are ridiculously lucky to have Holly as a support for the organization,” her nominator says. “She promotes teamwork through organizing and facilitating, and at times mediates the discussions of the Executive Committee.”

Holly’s work at TALK has been the most challenging, fulfilling, and rewarding volunteer experience of her university career. “I am continuously thankful for the skills I have honed and stories I have experienced from volunteering on crisis lines. Volunteering with TALK holds a special place in my heart.”

Mike made a solid commitment to the Ottawa Centre nine years ago. To date, he has clocked an astounding 6000 hours as a Crisis Line Responder, Mentor, past Board President, and past Board member. Mike volunteers at DC Ottawa several times a week, makes sure that the phone room shifts are covered, and the volunteer schedule is full. He has received the Key to the Distress Centre for his first 1500 hours and has taken a staggering 13,000 calls since starting his role with DC Ottawa in 2010.

Working with fellow volunteers at the Ottawa Centre, Mike acts as a Training Mentor for new volunteers and helps them feel confident on their calls. Volunteers often turn to Mike for peer support who readily shares his knowledge and experience. Mike is “exemplary at demonstrating active listening, providing affirmations and confirmations, and really empowers those he supports,” his nominator says.

“I think that DC Ottawa has given me purpose,” Mike explains. “I volunteer because of gratitude, for what has been done for me over the years; I’ve been through a lot and received such great care. This is my way to give back.”

Beyond all the hours donated to his centre, Mike also volunteers on the Patient Advisory Committee at the Ottawa Hospital and sits on several subdivisions of this committee, namely, mental health, patient education, advisory, research proposals, peer support groups, and nephrology (kidneys). He also assists with finance and scheduling at the Ottawa School Board the Ottawa Music Festival.
Isadora Nezic | Young Adult Volunteer
TORCHLIGHT

Isadora, or Issy, came to TorchLight as a summer student in 2017 and has left an “indelible mark” at the Guelph centre. This talented and creative young woman has taken on many responsibilities at TorchLight including calm support on the crisis lines, producing social media outreach and promotional pieces for her centre, updating and redesigning her centre’s website, leading the new TorchLight Volunteer Advisory Board, engaging in Volunteer Training Support, providing input and mentoring to new trainees and call responders, and supporting the Community Development Coordinator to volunteer fairs and community outreach events like the Annual Rotary Duck Race.

With a strong and admirable work ethic, Issy strives to give back to her community. Though her time is divided between university studies, her family, and other volunteer commitments, she can always be relied upon to fill in extra shifts at her centre. On the phone lines, she is skilled in communication and reframing delicate situations. She can think on her feet and maintains a professional presence while actively listening to ensure that people are safe and receive the support they need.

Issy also donates her time to the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and works with parents of children with developmental disabilities. At the CMHA, she learned how to approach and speak about sensitive topics, and how to be a worthy role model to others.

Though TorchLight will miss Issy’s presence and input, she is moving her education forward in a new community so she can focus on her studies to work in a field where she can directly improve the lives of others.

Bill Snow
DISTRESS CENTRE NIAGARA

When Bill started his volunteer training at Distress Centre Niagara (DCN) two years ago, his eyes were opened to the supportive culture of the centre, the connection with callers, and the people at his centre. He has proved to be a great team player with a fantastic sense of humour and a calming presence.

As a volunteer crisis worker, Bill provides support on the Distress Line and the Ontario Text and Chat (ONTX) service. He demonstrates great respect for callers and upholds his centre’s philosophy and the quality of service offered to the Niagara community. Bill recognizes the potential for ONTX and consults and locates funding for the program. He’d like to see it operate 24-hours a day. Bill is very much a DCN supporter and endorses his centre at public events to promote the centre’s services and encourage volunteer recruiting.

“I take every opportunity to tell people about the ways that volunteering at Distress Centre Niagara has changed my life for the better,” he says. “I spend time supporting people on the distress line and ONTX. I’m a passionate advocate of the ONTX program.”

Bill inspires everyone at the centre. “He is a role model to his peers and callers, and also to the staff at DCN,” his nominator says. “He is a great reminder of what hard work, dedication and compassion can do for our community and Distress Centre. I am so proud to nominate Bill for this award as he had a huge impact on all of us.”