Volunteers are a fundamental part — the very heart and soul — of Distress Centres Ontario. There are many amazing volunteers who offer their skills and service and, as always, it was a challenge and a delight to have to decide from among the nominees who should earn the 2011 Spirit of Volunteerism Award given in memory of Rev. Chad Varah. These nominees have all demonstrated commitment to the values of volunteerism through their empathetic listening and skilled interventions as well as engaging in the many activities that keep distress centres functioning, such as: fundraising, mentoring, serving on their local boards and always striving to improve services to callers and the community. Each year, Distress Centres Ontario is proud to showcase our volunteer talent.

Please join us in congratulating this year’s Nominees & Recipients

**Enayat Amiri**
*Young Adult Volunteer, Toronto Distress Centres, Scarborough*

Enayat is an exceptional young adult phone line volunteer who has been with the Scarborough branch for three years. Centre staff receive fantastic feedback from callers regarding his skills, mannerism, and capacity for empathetic support.

Volunteer trainees look up to Enayat as a mentor and role model as he directs them onto a learning path that brings them to the level of stellar volunteers, ready to support the needs of callers. Enayat uses his life experiences to put himself in the position of the caller to understand and empathize to the great benefit of the person he is engaging with. One caller stated, “When you speak to this volunteer, you feel like he is right beside you supporting you and carrying you through this difficult time.”

Branch manager, Kim Watson, recognizes Enayat’s compassion and loyalty, noting his “gentle voice [has proven] to be an asset, one which the callers hold onto during their times of struggle.”

**Russell Baker**
*Community Torchlight, Guelph*

Russell has devoted the last two years to his volunteering role at Community Torchlight and he is involved at the organization on various levels. When he is on telephone shifts, Russell feels strongly about the value of having someone listen and with much caring and sincerity, he listens to callers in a calm and supporting way to help them through their challenges.

His volunteer role quickly branched out in many directions and Russell became a mentor in early 2010 after his first ASIST training. He also helps to support new volunteers and was able to secure a donation for the Distress Line service through his employer, Starbucks’ Partner Match Program. Russell is a member of the Fundraising Committee and has interviewed to become a Community Torchlight board member.

About Community Torchlight, Russell says, “everyone is so passionate with such a desire to give back to the community. We all care so much.”
The Spirit of Volunteerism  
in memory of Rev. Chad Varah

Sheila Boocock | RECIPIENT  
*Oakville Distress Centre*

Sheila has an excellent demeanor for crisis work. During her five years with the Oakville Distress Centre, she has helped agitated callers de-escalate and regain their focus. As a registered nurse with a background in psychology and sociology, Sheila has the ability to hear the words behind a caller’s anger and never takes that anger personally. Instead, she hears the pain and anguish and hears that the caller is often misunderstood, and that their behaviour and words are symptoms of their pain, not a reflection of who they really are.

“Volunteering provides exposure to life and is good for the soul,” Sheila says. She is heavily involved with volunteer community work at the local and international level. With the Oakville Quilters Guild, she made quilts for children who survived the disaster in Haiti through the Red Cross, volunteers with the Crohn’s & Colitis Association’s Heel ‘n’ Wheel-a-thon, and has donated her time to the Salvation Army in Hamilton, and a hospice centre in Florida.

Adam Booth  
*Toronto Distress Centres Central Branch*

Adam is committed to travelling to Toronto twice a week from Hamilton to take phone line shifts and reach out to others in distress. Staff at his centre consider him a leader and a mentor for fellow volunteers, always available for debriefing and providing feedback.

Toronto Distress Centre Manager, Hilla Gutman, recognizes Adam’s extraordinary spirit and his humble and genuine demeanour, saying that “he always enters the Distress Line phone room with a smile on his face... and it is evident that his heart is in the right place, as Adam spends as long as necessary with callers in order to ensure they are in a safer and happier place than when they first called the TDC.”

He has become involved with the Salvation Army’s Suicide Prevention Services Crisis Line in Hamilton, is certified in the Canadian Red Cross’ First Aid / CPR, works to recruit new volunteers to the Toronto Centre, and enthusiastic to offer help wherever he can.

Kay Burke  
*Distress Centre Peel*

Early in 2009, Kay began volunteering at the Distress Centre Peel and with her strong leadership qualities, quickly became an outstanding senior volunteer. With her gentle and compassionate demeanour and excellent listening skills, Kay guides new volunteers to be effective listeners and callers often comment on her focus and empathy.

Kay explains why she began volunteering: “I wanted to help others to give back what has been given to me - in the hope that if my kids or friends needed to talk to someone... that there would be someone out there for them and so I, in return, could be there for others.”

Beyond being an excellent volunteer, Kay’s commitment to Distress Centre Peel cannot be denied - seeing that furniture was in need of repair, Kay arranged replacement chairs through her employer and outfitted Peel’s phone room with better equipment, making the environment more comfortable for volunteers.

Beth Carr  
*Durham Centre Distress*

Beth has volunteered with the Durham Centre Distress since 1991 and contributed almost 5,000 hours of service. She was recently granted a Lifetime Members Award for her 20 years of service. Beth is a warm, compassionate, and “beloved” member of the Durham volunteer team.

As a highly regarded volunteer with an amazing and outstanding history with the agency, Beth has taken on a large range of roles from spending time with callers on the phone line to training to administrative tasks, and serving on the Board of Directors to developing the Durham Distress Centre’s Homicide Support Group. She received Durham’s Volunteer of the Year award in 1996 and the Outstanding Volunteer Award in 1998. In 2004, Durham recognized Beth’s commitment and continued education and created the Beth Carr Bursary, an award presented to a volunteer who expresses the same level of commitment to the Durham Centre Distress and higher education in the social services field.
Caitlin Dollar  
*Young Adult Volunteer, Windsor Distress Centre*

Caitlin is a young adult volunteer who uses her logic, leadership, and dedication on the phone lines and at board level, and has clocked an amazing 376 volunteer hours on the phone lines, 65 training hours, 84 support leader hours, plus extra volunteer time as a Volunteer Board Representative over her two and a half years at the Windsor Distress Centre.

A sometime representative of her distress centre at community events, Caitlin has also been involved with fundraising and team building, and is recognized as an excellent addition to the centre’s Training Team, and a valuable asset to the Board of Directors at the leadership level, as the solid voice representing volunteers.

“Caitlin is there with a willing spirit and infectious smile, ready to help in any way she can,” says Windsor Executive Director, Rukshini Ponniah.

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John Freeman  
*TALK Kingston*

John has been volunteering with TALK Kingston for the past eight years and is something of a mentor for all volunteers, both new and existing. John has taken on a “buddy” role and contributes upwards of twenty hours with each new volunteer to the agency, introducing them to the office, and helping them to build and hone their skills before they begin their work on the phone lines.

As a dedicated volunteer, John has racked up the largest number of hours in TALK’s history by any one volunteer (a very impressive 791.5 hours) and has served on TALK’s executive as a scheduler and a fundraiser while working professionally as an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education and Director of the Social Program Evaluation Group.

Besides mentoring TALK volunteers, John helps at the office in a role called “Door Opening.” For this, he prepares the desks, stocks supplies, and cleans to make volunteer shifts more comfortable for everyone. John is considered a friend to everyone at the Kingston organization.

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Victoria Freeman  
*Recipient*  
*Young Adult Volunteer, TALK Kingston*

As a young adult volunteer at TALK Kingston, Victoria has found herself in many roles: Executive Assembly in the position of Volunteer Liaison, Office Administrator and Vice Coordinator of Quality Assurance, and informally filled the positions of Community Relations, Fundraiser and Recruiter.

Complimenting her psychology studies at Queen’s University, Victoria has volunteered at TALK Kingston for three years, logging 280 phone line hours, offering callers an empathetic and non-judgmental ear, mentoring volunteers, fundraising, and being active on the executive. She was elected into a Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation* (VCQA) position, and was voted by the general assembly to become TALK’s Coordinator and the public figurehead of TALK.

Victoria is keen on promoting suicide awareness and shared her knowledge with a third year class at Queen’s which received much positive feedback. She also promotes TALK through networking and other community organizations to which she volunteers her time.

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John Harper  
*Recipient*  
*Toronto Distress Centres Central Branch*

John is a truly dedicated volunteer at the Toronto Distress Centre. He is very involved with the promotion, logistics, and delivery of the Bikers Against Despair Charity Ride (B.A.D. Ride), the centre’s major source of funding. John can also be found offering an empathetic ear to angry and troubled callers on the distress lines.

John is a kind and dependable volunteer, always happy to fill in for open shifts. He’s also rather handy and likes to keep things in working order for the comfort of staff and volunteers at the TDC, repairing and doing maintenance in the office and the phone room.

A warm, friendly, and genuine person, John has given back to society in many ways: in his native Scotland as an Assistant Scout Master with the Boy Scouts, and in Toronto with the Good Shepherd Homeless Centre, the Toronto East General Hospital, and the Canadian Shooting Sports Association.
Dominic Mitges
*Community Torchlight, Guelph*

Being nominated for the Spirit of Volunteerism award after volunteering at Community Torchlight for just over a year speaks volumes about Dominic’s commitment to the distress line movement. He is recognized as a valued member of Community Torchlight and is seen as the “go to” person for survivor advocacy and is on the front lines fighting the stigma surrounding suicide.

Dominic supports callers and new volunteers at the centre and has quickly moved into mentoring positions and classroom trainings. He has taken an outstanding part in a special ASIST training, engaging youth in meaningful discussions about suicide and his family’s experience with suicide.

Dominic will be involved in a new program in the Hospice - Suicide Survivor Program of Guelph Wellington, and besides volunteering at Community Torchlight, he has donated his time to the Guelph Food Bank, the International Languages Program as a teacher’s helper, and has been part of the Speakers Bureau for the United Way.

Madeleine Staffieri
*Young Adult Volunteer, Community Torchlight, Guelph*

At Community Torchlight, Madeleine is thought of as all-round “Super Star”, inspiring staff and fellow volunteers by her drive and commitment to the agency. In 2010, she contributed almost double the minimum number of hours for volunteer commitment on the distress line (358 hours!) and donated an extra 150 hours of time in classroom training of new volunteers, staffing at information booths for volunteer and awareness fairs, and promotional marketing distribution at churches, health and community centres.

Madeleine became a mentor after completing her ASIST training last year and has helped to mentor over 30 new volunteers since her promotion last fall. She is always willing to help new volunteers and answer the call for open volunteer shifts. Currently, Madeline provides ideas and strategies to help the newly-structured Fundraising Committee reach its goals.

Nick Taptelis
*Distress Centre Peel*

Nick Taptelis is very active in his community, chairing hospital-based committees both with the Peel District Health Centre and the Canadian Mental Health Association, and he has been committed to the Distress Centre Peel board of directors since 2005. Nick has excellent facilitation skills, which complimented his educating fellow board members about Policy Governance for the new board model, using the spirit of inclusion, openness, and discovery. He is active in board governance and successfully implemented a new model for the board with the full cooperation of all board members.

As a clinical leader at the Community Treatment Orders Program at the Trillium Health Centre, Nick provides case management services to people, including the homeless, with chronic and severe mental illness, and has a good understanding of Distress Centre work and its value to the community. He often refers his clients to the distress centre for help and support.

Carol Thompson | RECIPIENT
*Toronto Distress Centre, North Branch*

During her four years at the Toronto Distress Centre North Branch, Carol has been recognized as a very enthusiastic and reliable volunteer. She allows her schedule to be flexible to fill in for open shifts, and for years has happily filled the difficult 6 am shifts in the phone room.

Carol regularly supports the membership at the North Branch by mentoring and supporting new volunteers on the crisis line, and helping out staff by monitoring volunteers. She’s got a great sense of empathy, compassion, respect, and humour that puts volunteers and callers alike at ease.

After months of planning, Carol and her husband undertook “The Ride for Mental Health”, an amazing cross-Canada journey in 2009, an initiative that they founded and organized from start to finish.