Volunteers fuel the distress centre movement, and without them we could not have reached this year’s milestone – the fifth annual Spirit of Volunteerism recognition in memory of Rev. Chad Varah. As in previous years, the 2012 nominees embody the values that move the distress line movement forward, by offering an empathetic listening ear and bringing their own unique talents and personalities to their individual centres. This year’s 14 nominees positively impact their centres and the callers who reach out to them. It is our pleasure to introduce the nominees of the 2012 Spirit of Volunteerism recognition.

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

Dr. Gloria Alban | RECIPIENT
Toronto Distress Centres – North York

Gloria became involved with the Distress Centre Toronto eleven years ago, beginning as a regular on the phone lines, then becoming active with the centre’s dedicated line for residents and medical students (PAIRO), and with Crisis Link, the dedicated transit crisis line. In 2004, she became and remains a very active and cooperative volunteer in the Survivor Support Program. The empathetic and supportive Dr. Alban also volunteers with the Ontario Schizophrenia Society, at Women’s College Hospital, in schools, and has tutored disabled students.

“Building connections and supporting others is an important value of mine and because I am able to do that with others, it enriches my life,” she says.

Gloria leads by example, taking on senior distress centre responsibilities, mentoring, and making herself available to support new volunteers. The centre recognizes her compassion and importance to the Toronto DC, noting that “without her, a significant piece would be missing.”

Kyrsten Boucher | RECIPIENT
Young Adult Volunteer
Distress Centre Niagara

Balancing her Psychology studies at Brock University and her volunteer time at DC Niagara, Kyrsten has proved a natural leader within her first year of volunteering. During this short time frame, this young adult volunteer attended her centre’s classroom training, sharing her knowledge, experience, and encouragement with new volunteers, and inside of a year she was promoted to senior trainer. Kyrsten exercises her creativity at her centre, and designed community display boards promoting DC Niagara, one for high schools and one for outreach.

“I knew the first time I met Kyrsten that she would excel as a member of our team,” says her SOV nominator, “Her ability to self-reflect and willingness to keep learning is what makes Kyrsten a superb role model to the rest of her peers at Distress Centre Niagara.”
Jim Brown | RECIPIENT
Distress Centre Durham

Within his first year of volunteering at DC Durham, Jim Brown, a retired Durham region police officer, became a shift mentor to support new volunteers. Jim spent three years on the phone lines offering emotional support, crisis de-escalation, and suicide intervention, and though he attempted to retire from distress line work, he was back 18 months later, and to date has volunteered 700 distress line hours to his centre.

Jim’s knowledge of personality profiling and emotional intelligence - the ability to identify, assess, and control one’s emotions, the emotions of others individually and in groups - is a perfect match to distress line work, and he readily shares his knowledge and resources with his volunteer peers. He has developed a workshop for Durham’s volunteers, and leads the workshops free of charge, giving informative, interesting, and relevant information to distress line volunteers.

Jim is referred to as an “ideal” volunteer, exercising his personal value system of respect, dedication, and selflessness.

Jennifer Campion
Toronto Distress Centres – Scarborough

Jennifer has taken over 900 calls during her four years at DC Toronto-Scarborough, providing callers with emotional safety and the freedom to express themselves without the fear of ridicule, giving kind and compassionate support to those feeling isolated and lonely.

Through her dedication and compassion, Jennifer is a volunteer trainer, acting as a role model, supporting and mentoring Scarborough volunteers. She is involved in the Caller Reassurance Program, an outbound service to people in need of ongoing emotional support; she handles Crisis Link calls from Toronto Transit Control; and also responds to calls from DC Toronto’s partner line with Toronto Emergency Medical Services, supporting suicidal callers before the ambulance arrives.

Jennifer is a “beacon of inspiration to fellow volunteers and staff, known for her acts of kindness like baking treats for the centre, donating office supplies, and always thinking of ways to ensure the centre runs smoothly.”

John Childs
Toronto Distress Centres – Downtown

John has spent the last 10 years volunteering with DC Toronto, sharing his knowledge with his volunteer peers, and offering tips and techniques for different kinds of calls. He recently completed the Survivor Support program at Distress Centres Toronto and is actively seeing participants. He’s an active, adaptable volunteer on the phone lines who also takes part in other programs such as fundraising, volunteer conferences, and educational events hosted by Distress Centres.

John doesn’t assume he’s an expert when he picks up the phone; he’s a non-judgemental listener who’s open to feedback. So open in fact, that he seeks out feedback when challenged with a particularly difficult call. John’s humility allows him to recognize that there is always more to learn, and he can always improve his skills.

Samuel Chiasson
Toronto Distress Centres – North York

Even before he made it to Toronto, Samuel had completed years of volunteering including assisting with palliative care and suicide prevention in New Brunswick. He began volunteering with DC Toronto North Branch soon after arriving in Toronto and has made an impression on his callers and his peers. In fact, he is thought of as a natural mentor and role model to other volunteers at the centre.

Samuel regularly trains volunteers and supports callers on the phone lines. His nominator says of Samuel, “He is the steady voice and solid presence that callers can count on, whatever their feelings and struggles, to quietly listen, offer support and acceptance.”

Samuel is reliable and freely donates his time. He took part in the pilot phase of Crisis Link, the DC Toronto, TTC, and Bell Canada partnership, which speaks to his commitment to providing life-sustaining emotional support to those in need.

“After eight years, I’m still going strong and loving every minute of my volunteering,” Samuel says.
Dara Eisner Clancy | RECIPIENT

Oakville Distress Centre

Dara received the 2011 Ontario Volunteer Service Award for her outstanding service to Oakville Distress Centre, where for the last twelve years she has been taking calls on the distress line and training volunteers. Oakville’s Executive Director says, “Callers often tell us that if it were not for our volunteers, they would not be alive today. Dara and our trainers ensure that our volunteers improve the quality of life of our callers, and save lives.”

Dara’s compassion, sincerity, generosity, and positive energy make her a natural role model to mentor volunteers. She’s trained hundreds of volunteers to provide crisis prevention and intervention to callers. She is a strong advocate and ambassador for our organization and her compassion and energy always shines through.

“Volunteering with the Oakville Distress Centre has been one of the most joyful, most appreciated and most loved aspects of my past decade!” she says, “I look forward to the next 10 years!”

Alice DeKleer

Distress Centre North Halton

Dutch-born Alice is serious about committed volunteering. She shared her energy with the Georgetown Hospital for the last 26 years, sat on North Halton’s Board of Directors for 23 years, and has volunteered at the Distress Centre North Halton for an astounding 27 years. She joined the agency to make a difference in the lives of callers, to provide a safe and non-judgemental place to talk about what they need to express.

“I give the gift of listening,” she says, recognizing how important it is for people to be heard, “By listening, my life is enriched in so many ways.”

Alice is a compassionate role model and supports her DC’s training program by mentoring and supporting new volunteers. Her great sense of empathy has her actively supporting fellow volunteers by sending cards when they are going through difficult times, and makes gift baskets to be raffled off as door prizes at the organization’s general meetings.

Carol Edgar

Toronto Distress Centres – Downtown

Carol has dedicated much of her life to helping marginalized people. She readily shares her wisdom and experience with callers on the distress lines and has been doing so for almost five years. Carol is dedicated, reliable, and ready to fill in shifts where needed. She takes distress calls from an open and non-judgemental place, often assisting new volunteers not yet comfortable with the position.

Her nominators see her as the personification of the distress line movement - Carol is proactive with callers and uses the experience of rising above her own struggles to help callers face their issues and empower themselves, rather than just giving advice on what she thinks they should do.

Mary Hogan

Toronto Distress Centres – North York

During the last thirteen years volunteering at the Distress Centres Toronto North Branch, Mary became known for her can-do attitude. She is one of the 20% who do 80% of the community service. Mary is a prized volunteer; warm, patient, and non-judgemental on the distress lines, soothing agitated callers, and empowering callers to find their own answers.

Mary, a former teacher, regularly supports the DC membership by mentoring and supporting new volunteers. She was one of the initial volunteers selected to participate in Crisis Link, the partnership between DC Toronto, the TTC, and Bell Canada to provide life-saving services to at-risk individuals in the Toronto subway system. Because Mary is exceptionally reliable and often goes beyond the call of duty, she was asked to be a PAIRO Helpline volunteer (Professional Association of Interns and Residents of Ontario), which she takes on with much enthusiasm and compassion.
Iona Lobb
*Distress Centre North Halton*

Iona immigrated alone as a young girl from India to Canada almost fifty years ago. Along the way, she met people who helped her build a life in her new country, and she wanted to give back that kindness to others. For 29 years and almost 6000 hours, Iona has volunteered at Distress Centre North Halton, bringing an empathetic ear to callers in need.

In the early days, Iona took part in the centre’s Call-Out program, reaching out to callers in their homes. Centre clients looked forward to Iona’s calls and she enjoyed the interaction and helping them with their struggles.

During her 35-year working life, Iona was a well-loved teacher and managed to find time to volunteer at Red Cross Blood Donor Clinics, and spent twenty-five years volunteering at the Georgetown Hospital. Now, the warm and friendly volunteer likes to take a regular morning shift at her agency, listening to callers with an open heart.

Steve Raff
*Distress Centre Niagara*

Nine years ago, Steve wanted a new challenge, away from the logic and the numbers of his engineering trade, and began volunteering with DC Niagara. His volunteer work, approximately thirty-two hours a month, has taken many forms over time. Steve is a senior trainer at the centre, ensuring that new volunteers get the proper attention, support, and encouragement needed to succeed on the crisis line.

This left-brained engineer reached to his creative side and started painting, donating pieces to the distress centre, including one depicting owls for the night owls that take overnight shifts on the phone lines. Further to his creativity, Steve takes on the role of editor of Niagara DC’s quarterly newsletter, reminding readers in a creative and humorous way that they are a part of something much bigger than call-taking - they are a vital part of the community.

Daniela Ronca
*Distress Centre Peel*

Though she's only been volunteering at DC Peel since 2010, Daniela is known as nothing short of extraordinary. She takes calls on the distress lines and has the ability to put herself in the caller’s shoes, offering her empathetic support to those in pain. Daniela assists with volunteer training and has become a mentor to new volunteers – a responsibility usually given to senior volunteers with coaching abilities.

Daniela suffers from mental illness and is a champion advocate for people with mental health issues. She promotes the distress line in the community, telling people how helpful it is, in the hopes that more people will use Distress Centre Peel’s line for support whenever they are depressed or feel suicidal.

“I do not volunteer because it looks good on a resume,” Daniela says, “I volunteer because I truly feel like it’s a calling, and my skills are of great use at the Peel Distress Line. “

Chester Rozen | **LIFE TIME ACHIEVEMENT RECIPIENT**
*Telecare Distress Line Cambridge*

A light has been shone on Chester’s commitment to Telecare Distress Line Cambridge. He has been involved, headed, and performed every role the centre required for the last twenty years. This centre would not be in operation if it weren’t for Chester and his undying commitment.

He is extremely dedicated: a full-time volunteer on the phone lines, organizer of the centre’s bingo fundraising and always available to fill in volunteer shifts. Over the last two decades Chester has sat on the Board of Directors and/or chaired it. He handles the centre’s finances and attends all major meetings to make sure obligations and processes are met.

His nominator notes that “Chester believes so passionately in the help we give, that he will and has sacrificed his own personal life to ensure that operations continue for Telecare Distress Line Cambridge and that someone is there for our callers.”