Our volunteers are at the very heart of the work our member organizations do. Every day they are there to support the vulnerable in their communities: those who are experiencing suicidal thoughts, are feeling alone and/or isolated, or are in crisis or distress. We are pleased to recognize some of these exemplary volunteers with the Spirit of Volunteerism Recognition – in memory of Rev. Chad Varah.

This year we recognize 13 committed volunteers who provide leadership in their organizations.

Please join us in congratulating the 2016 Nominees & Recipients

Linda Carter
DISTRESS CENTRE DURHAM

Linda is a dedicated and active volunteer for the past seven years at Distress Centre Durham, over and above having a full time job in finance and family responsibilities.

Since 2009, Linda has donated over 1,000 hours to her centre and has been involved in every distress centre program: on the helpline, Prideline, ONTX, and the 24-hour home-call program. She is now in a leadership position as a team leader who mentors new volunteers. Linda is adaptable and plays an integral role in providing and maintaining the quality assurance that Distress Centre Durham seeks to achieve.

With a strong desire to learn, Linda often updates her knowledge and skillset with DCO webinars and training opportunities such as ASIST, DCIB suicide risk assessment, and ONTX, to better serve callers.

“Linda is a long-term volunteer who is there every time we have needed her,” says the Executive Director of Durham. “We know she has made a difference in the lives of our callers. Her enthusiasm and dedication to fill in for shifts, mentor a new volunteer and to provide emotional support to callers is second to none. We hope to have her with us for many more years to come.”

Ashley Ferreria | Young Adult Volunteer
DISTRESS CENTRE DURHAM

Ashley, a fourth-year Ryerson student in the BSW program, began to volunteer with DC Durham in October, 2015, and has already completed 300 hours as a helpline worker, shift mentor, role-play trainer, and community advocate. Ashley is a warm, engaging person with strong character and integrity. She is compassionate about social work and the pursuit of social justice; she’s ethical, and respects the dignity and individual worth of all people.

DC Durham’s Executive Director explains what a pleasure it is to have Ashley at the centre: “She has insight and maturity beyond her years. She works well independently and takes great initiative in seeking out new challenges and tasks.”

Ashley promotes social fairness and equitable distribution of resources to callers to expand choices for people who may be marginalized, disadvantaged, vulnerable, or have exceptional needs. She upholds service in the interests of others through social justice consistencies and respect for the profession’s purpose, values, and ethical principles.

Her SOV nominator says that Ashley, “strives to succeed in everything she does and puts forth her best effort to ensure that everyone’s needs are met. She is a deeply ethical
individual with great integrity, she is responsible, dependable and honest.”

**David Johnson**
**DISTRESS CENTRES TORONTO - CENTRAL**

As a long-term volunteer with almost 30 years of distress line service behind him, David has taken part in different areas of Distress Centre operations and has shown himself to be a highly dedicated and committed volunteer.

In his early days with the centre, he created a volunteer newsletter and organized an inter-centre softball league. Today, David interviews, trains, and mentors new volunteers, and organizes evening rap sessions to further support volunteers in challenging areas. He is specially trained to answer Crisis Link calls from individuals who are at risk of subway suicide.

As an avid motorcyclist, David has had the opportunity to ride across the country but always makes it back to Toronto in time to take part in DC Toronto’s springtime fundraiser, the B.A.D. Ride. David proudly boasts his participation in every B.A.D. Ride since its inception, and looks forward to the upcoming 19th annual Ride in May.

Outside of his Distress Centre volunteer work, David volunteers for the Red Cross Hot Lunch program offered at St. Andrews, a downtown Toronto church. He has also donated his time to the Red Cross’ Disaster Management Group as a Disaster Management Lead.

**Gail Kramer**
**DISTRESS CENTRES TORONTO - CENTRAL**

“I believe that my entire life has been the preparation for my role as a volunteer,” Gail says.

At a very young age, Gail tried to understand the pain and challenges of life, and then learned to live with depression and anxiety. She cares for her adopted and disabled child, and experienced deep feelings of grief at the death of her best friend by suicide.

When she overcame cancer, Gail became involved with the Canadian Cancer Society as a peer mentor, where she was able to share her story of resilience with others who face the despair that often accompanies a cancer diagnosis.

At the Toronto centre, Gail has donated over 350 hours to the phone line alone; she also volunteers as a group trainer and facilitator, and takes part in PARO, a service dedicated to Ontario medical residents and their families.

Gail is remarkably strong and resilient, yet she says that being in touch with others who suffer is “a humbling experience to realize that pain and suffering is a great equalizer.” She understands that her struggles do not just have to be difficult moments in her history; they can be what drives her to give service to the lives of others.

**Jennifer Lippa | Young Adult Volunteer**
**DISTRESS CENTRES TORONTO - NORTH YORK**

Since June, 2014, while still immersed in her studies to complete her Hons. B.Sc., Department of Psychology, Jennifer volunteered almost 400 hours to DC Toronto, “and shows no sign of slowing down!” her nominator insists.

Before her time at the Toronto centre, Jenn took on other volunteer roles in her community that ranged from administrative to educational, where she interacted with everyone from young children to senior health care professionals.

Jenn takes calls on the distress and crisis lines, and on DC Toronto’s 24-hour 408-HELP Line. For her “exceptional reliability, commitment, and excellent crisis intervention skills,” Jenn was selected for the Crisis Link program, Toronto’s subway system suicide prevention program, created from Toronto Distress Centre’s partnership with Bell and the Toronto subway system (TTC). She was also among the select group of experienced volunteers chosen to attend training for her centre’s new mentoring program.

Jenn’s Senior Manager says of her, “She has a strong connection with the work we do. She exudes warmth, compassion, and a gentle spirit. She is that beacon of hope, that glimmer of sun breaking on the horizon after a long and dark night.”

**Gregory Nitsotolis**
**DISTRESS CENTRE DURHAM**

The staff at DC Durham have nothing but great reviews for Greg, who joined the centre in 2013. He has volunteered nearly 400 hours and has always been able to meet and exceed his monthly volunteer hour commitment, even through planning a wedding and a full-time career with the Toronto Police Service.

Greg has established himself as a diligent, committed, engaged volunteer who knows how to motivate and inspire new volunteers to strive for excellence. He takes on many different roles at his centre and recently joined the shift mentorship program and trained over fifty new volunteers on the distress helpline and on the community call-out
program, a service that offers social outreach to isolated members of the community.

“Greg is the cornerstone of the vibrant volunteer community,” Durham’s volunteer coordinator writes, “His ongoing support of his peers and his dedication to the work is what allows us to support our entire volunteer community. Greg is one of the main reasons why our centre is a safe, comfortable gathering place for volunteers to express their thoughts and explore their skills.”

Chris O’Hagan  
SPECTRA HELPLINE

Chris has donated his time to the phone lines at Spectra for the last two years. In the beginning, during volunteer training, Chris was the volunteer who thought critically about the topics discussed and really considered his role in with the centre. He asked questions about what he could do to make a difference in other peoples’ lives.

Last year, Chris became a volunteer mentor to support new volunteers through training and guides them through taking calls on the helplines. Often, Chris can be seen going from one volunteer task to another: sometimes when he’s completed a Helpline shift, he’ll go straight into calls with the centre’s Touching Base program. When Chris calls his regular Touching Base clients, they pick up where they left off since they last spoke, and there is a sense of comradery between their exchanges.

“It truly is an honour to be nominated for this award,” Chris says, “I have the pleasure of working with a great organization and with some wonderful fellow volunteers. Being able to do the volunteer work and give back to the community is important to me. I get a lot satisfaction out of my volunteer work and it is wonderful to get this recognition. Thank you.”

Elizabeth Pratt  |  Young Adult Volunteer  
TELEPHONE AID LINE KINGSTON (TALK)  

Elizabeth began at TALK as a call responder in early 2015 and has spent many hours on the phone lines with distressed callers. Since then, this Young Adult volunteer has stepped up as the Quality Assurance Coordinator and the Fundraising lead for the Kingston centre, and has already connected with several community partners to support TALK’s services.

Kingston’s Co-Executive Director, says that Elizabeth is an excellent ambassador to TALK. “She helps make volunteering even more enjoyable by organizing fundraisers where volunteers can participate and collaborate,” he says. “Her fundraising efforts have brought the organization together and created an opportunity for volunteers to get to know each other better.”

Giving back to the community has always been important to Elizabeth. In 2011, she co-founded Langley Youth for the Fallen, and helped raise funds to plant a tree for each of the 158 Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan that year.

“It was through this project where I saw firsthand the dedication and selflessness of members of the community, and their desire to make our country a better place,” she explains. “Although my sacrifices are not as profound, the experience taught me the value of community and the importance of taking care of those we live alongside.”

Adam Saib  |  Young Adult Volunteer  
SPECTRA HELPLINE

Adam became a Spectra volunteer in January 2014 and supports their Helpline and outbound programs. He’s good at applying the techniques he learned in volunteer training calls with his clients who appreciate his warm friendliness.

Last summer, Adam approached the ONTX Program Manager because he was interested and passionate about the program and wanted to connect and support clients in this new format. There is no doubt that Adam is passionate about this mode of support. From June to August last year, he consistently covered many late night shifts (9 p.m. – 2 a.m.) which made a huge impact to Spectra’s overall coverage. To date, Adam has clocked 243 hours with the ONTX program.

The ONTX Manager at Spectra says, “One of Adam’s best skills is his ability to constantly brainstorm new ideas and his vision in making the ONTX program bigger and better.”

Tandeep Sidhu  |  Young Adult Volunteer  
SPECTRA HELPLINE

Tandeep is an incredibly driven individual who very much cares about his community. His passion is to become a Peel Police Officer. In the meantime, he spends some of his time going above and beyond what is necessary on the Helpline and in outbound programs at Spectra, where he has volunteered since the end of 2014.

People at his agency wonder when he has time to sleep, because he regularly takes more shifts than expected, will help out with last minute shift cancellations, and
can often be counted on to help with the 10:30 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. ONTX time slot – a difficult time to be on the chat, as many of the visitors are depressed or medium to high risk. Considering that Tandeep volunteers with other organizations, works with the Peel Police department, and is always helping his friends, the amount of time he is able to donate to Spectra is astounding.

For his commitments, Spectra recognized Tandeep’s work in 2015 with a “Dedicated Service Award” at Spectra’s Volunteer Recognition Event.

Amanda Solyom | Young Adult Volunteer
SPECTRA HELPLINE

Amanda first started volunteering at Spectra Helpline during the summer of 2013 and quickly became a dependable addition to the Spectra volunteer team. During her first month volunteering, Amanda went above and beyond her monthly volunteer time commitment to the agency; she was in the call centre several times per week to cover any gaps in coverage to ensure that there was always someone here to answer the phone. When answering calls, Amanda’s calm confidence comes through and callers open up and talk about their most vulnerable experiences.

Amanda was one of the first long-standing volunteers to be asked to join Spectra’s Mentorship Program at its inception in 2015. As a Mentor, Amanda not only guides new volunteers on the phones but also provides support while she facilitates volunteer class training. Early this year, Amanda became Spectra’s very first Certified Mentor, a leadership role for other Mentors, to help foster a tight community of Spectra’s Mentorship team.

In February of 2016, Spectra was incredibly proud to provide a strong reference for Amanda in her pursuit of becoming a police officer, and the new Police Constable Solyom will undoubtedly use the skills she’s learned at Spectra in her police work.

Diane Tucker
DISTRESS CENTRES TORONTO - SCARBOROUGH

The Scarborough branch is proud to say that Diane “truly represents the agency in her ability to be personable and provide a non-judgmental listening ear, validate emotions, normalize experiences, and celebrate differences between herself, those she works with, and those she cares for.”

Eight years and a thousand calls later, Diane still carries the same excitement and contagious energy that a new and freshly-trained volunteer has, each time she comes in for a shift. Her presence brings feelings of joy and revitalization to centre staff members.

Diane has earned an Honours Bachelor of Arts Degree with Distinction in Literature but first taught English as a second language to adults, and has coached University of Kabul students in English through the Alliance for International Women’s Rights.

“I have been so fortunate to find mentors in my life who have helped me when I badly needed assistance, that I am compelled to do the same for others wherever possible,” Diane says.

Her centre says that what sets Diane apart, is her compassion towards seniors with physical or mental disabilities. She has been instrumental in shaping the Caller Reassurance Program for seniors, and was chosen for several programs at her centre, including the 408-Helpline, EMS, Caller Reassurance, and PARO.

Dana Wolanski
DISTRESS CENTRE NIAGARA

Though she has been with the Distress Centre Niagara for only a year and a half, centre staff say that “Dana has been one of our most dedicated, helpful, reliable, and consistent volunteers.”

Despite living with depression and anxiety for most of her life, this single mother of three boys is very much a multi-faceted volunteer who donates much time and energy to her centre. The ever-flexible Dana consistently helps out on the phone lines and often fills in for last-minute shift cancellations, and really shines during the Christmas holiday period when shifts need to be filled - even overnight slots.

She is always interested to further develop and improve her skills and expand her knowledge. Dana takes part in additional training like community information sessions, ASIST, and Niagara’s Safe Talk, that connects people at risk for suicide to a first aid intervention caregiver.

Dana is involved with the Health and Safety committee and helps out with fundraising for Distress Centre Niagara. For the last year, Dana has contributed two days a month to the centre’s Bingo fundraising initiatives. She has also been on the social committee and has planned and facilitated game nights for staff and volunteers.