DCO recognizes the importance of volunteers to our crisis and distress organization members, and the impact they have on their organizations and their communities. The dedication and commitment they give is beyond compare. They are the core of the work we do and again this year we had a wonderful group of twelve nominees. On this special 10th Anniversary of the *Spirit of Volunteerism Recognition*, we are pleased to recognize six of these wonderful volunteers as recipients.

Please join us in congratulating the 2017 Nominees & Recipients

**Barbara Balthazar**
**SPECTRA HELPLINE**

Over her six years with Spectra, Barbara often volunteers for overnight shifts on the Helpline and will take up to an astounding fifteen shifts per month. This dedicated volunteer credits her successful career in finance for many of her gifts, and graciously gives her time and support to those in the community who need her.

Speaking to callers who are considering suicide, Barbara always takes extra time to remind them of their hope and strengths in coping. Having lost her brother to suicide, Barbara says, “Losing my brother helps me understand how important it is to take some extra time with callers who are at risk for suicide; I never want to get off the phone unless I know I did my best.”

When not on the Helpline, Barbara offers her time volunteering with the Credit Valley Hospital as part of the Spiritual Care Team, where she provides company to patients in critical care. Barbara is also an active member of her church and volunteers with Eden for Change and the Kerr Street Mission, where she helps to prepare warm meals for people in the community. Barbara also acts as part of the Pastoral Care Team providing peer support to members of the church.

**Victoria Bucciarelli**
**Young Adult Volunteer**
**SPECTRA HELPLINE**

“No” is not in Victoria Bucciarelli’s vocabulary. This competent, caring, and dependable Young Adult Volunteer is always open to new learning and support opportunities. She assists in the day-to-day operations of Spectra’s database and iCarol management, she can always be counted on to fill in to ensure proper coverage on the phone lines, she is a very patient and encouraging volunteer Mentor, trainer, and leader, and consistently looks for ways to improve volunteer training. Victoria takes on so many responsibilities at her centre, that her nominator calls her “my personal bottle of Tylenol.”

With a tranquil and charming voice, Victoria befriends regular callers and reliably supports them. Volunteers feel heard and respected by this non-judgemental young woman. She has a knack for getting people to open up and share their fears, and she is a cheerleader at finding ways to have callers find their own solutions to their worries. “She has this friendliness that is so rare nowadays,” one caller says. “She makes me feel that she’s interested to talk to me, interested in what I have to say; that it isn’t a job or a chore to sit with people on the phone. It’s so easy to talk to her.”
Aisling Curtin
DISTRESS CENTRES TORONTO - NORTH YORK

Aisling demonstrates cooperation, creativity, enthusiasm and reliability, and over her 2.5 years volunteering at Distress Centres Toronto, she has been involved with almost every program the Distress Centres has to offer.

For over a year, Aisling almost exclusively chose to do the 6 a.m. and overnight shifts to support callers, and as a Mentor, she regularly supports trainees during their phone training shifts with a friendly and easy-going manner that puts new volunteers at ease. Her nominator calls her “a natural” with above average abilities.

This well-rounded volunteer successfully balances a full-time job and family commitments with her volunteer work. Aisling was invited to be trained as a Crisis Link volunteer, a pioneering suicide prevention service partnership between Distress Centres Toronto, Bell Canada, and the Toronto Transit Commission. Aisling also takes calls from emotionally vulnerable people at risk of suicide on the EMS Warm Transfer Line, and was selected as a PARO (Professional Association of Residents of Ontario) volunteer to offer confidential emotional support and crisis intervention for medical students, residents, and their families.

“It is an honour and responsibility to support people on the help line,” Aisling says.

Anthony Daly
DISTRESS CENTRE DURHAM

Most volunteers donate an average of 200 hours during their first year at their centre. During Anthony’s first year, he volunteered an astonishing 600 hours and solidified his commitment to his centre and the callers who rely on people like him for support. He is a man who stands by his word and follows through on his promises.

Tony immigrated to Canada from Ireland in the 1950s. After losing his young wife to early-onset Alzheimer’s, Tony began volunteering at the Oshawa Senior Citizen’s Centre, providing peer support for people with difficulties. Currently, Tony sponsors two underprivileged children, one in Ukraine and one in Africa, supports World Vision, and Precious Blood Fathers, a Niagara organization that builds windmills to help get precious water to villages in Tanzania.

At Distress Centre Durham (DCD) Tony spends time on the phone with callers, he attends Team Meetings, the Christmas potluck dinner, and Volunteer Education Day. Tony genuinely cares for the entire DCD family. His nominator says that people at the centre can’t have a bad day when Tony is around.

“I find distress line work interesting and challenging; I like making a difference in the lives of our callers and find the work very satisfying,” the 81-year old volunteer says. “There are so many people who need support in the community, and I have plenty of time.”

Ashley Grant
TORCHLIGHT

“There is virtually no role that Ashley has not taken on full-force with her total heart and soul,” her nominator wrote in her nomination form.

Ashley has been with Torchlight for over two years and when she first began volunteering, she completed a year’s worth of volunteer hours in just a few months. She has taken on many responsibilities for her centre and has become adept in all programs and is an invaluable asset to the Torchlight team. Ashley takes calls on the phone lines, acts as a volunteer Mentor to support new phone line volunteers, responds to messages on the Online Text Crisis and Distress Service (ONTX), and works in the outbound calling CONNECT program at Torchlight.

Through her varied roles at her centre, Ashley feels it an honour to provide such amazing services to the people in her community. By incorporating a strength-based approach and active listening, Ashley assists people in need to make a positive contribution to their lives, and has been able to incorporate these skills into her own life. Ashley knows that her passion for helping people will carry through for the rest of her life.

Jessica Nash | Young Adult Volunteer
DISTRESS CENTRE DURHAM

Before Jessica got involved with DC Durham, she was already an active community volunteer. She was a skating instructor for the Special Olympics Rising Stars, helped with the Adult Special Olympics, worked with Autistic children, and acted as a soccer coach.

In 2013, Jessica began to experience mental health issues that would change her perspective and enable her to give back. After her diagnosis with Bipolar Disease, Jessica says, “I am a different person having gone through what I went through. I had to check my own privilege and recognize how fortunate I am to have the family and resources I do. I also had to recognize how those without these supports have to function day-today with mental illness.”
This engaging, passionate Young Adult volunteer has been with DC Durham for three years and pours positive energy into her various roles at her centre. Jessica is experienced as an ONTX volunteer and with Prideline training; she is a volunteer Mentor, and was recognized as the Volunteer of the Month in January, 2016. Calm and collected during an emergency, Jessica is an effective phoneline volunteer and a capable medical dispatcher – she studied to become a 911 operator at Durham College and is now an Onstar Medical Dispatcher.

“I approach volunteering as being 100 percent fully present and engaged. Grateful for the callers, grateful for the experience, grateful for the friendships. The sky’s the limit with what you get back with the more you put in,” she says.

Hollie Rowlands
Young Adult Volunteer
TORCHLIGHT

In her five years with Torchlight, Hollie has taken a significant leadership role that spans a wide scope of administrative and statistical duties and policy-making areas. She provides precise and detailed call reports and collects data that is imperative to her centre’s operations, funders, and partners, and useful toward potential grant applications.

Hollie is an above-average communicator and provides high caliber communications feedback and support. She contributes to The Grapevine, her centre’s internal newsletter, where she keeps a record of special recognition dates and ensures that all critical contact information for volunteers is updated and remains current.

She provides mentorship and coaching to new volunteer recruits and, on the phone lines, Hollie responds to each caller with a high level of skill, active listening, compassion, and a calm, steady demeanor. Hollie is well-versed in community resources available to callers and understands when and how to present these options. She is in touch with the demands of her role as a volunteer and what is required to maintain a healthy work-life balance in order to provide quality feedback and support.

Michelle Sava
DISTRESS CENTRES TORONTO - CENTRAL

In her nine years with DC Toronto’s Survivor Support Program (SSP), Michelle has listened with profound empathy to stories of unbearable pain from survivors of suicide and homicidal loss. Her nominator understands that it takes special people to volunteer in this program, and Michelle, who has internalized the program’s values and advances the ideals of the caregiving movement, certainly falls into this category.

She is considered an outstanding and cooperative volunteer who consistently exceeds the minimum volunteer time commitment, takes on extra duties, and always “goes the extra mile.” Besides donating her time and energy to this challenging support role, Michelle mentors and gently guides new SSP volunteers into the program and offers supportive encouragement and debriefing opportunities.

In addition to her SSP support role, Michelle has added the responsibility of group facilitation and helped during large-scale community events. At the downtown centre, she also takes time to assist with conferences and fundraising activities.

Michelle is a master of both empathy and time-management; she works full-time, volunteers for DC Toronto as a grief facilitator in the SSP, and as an Auxiliary Police Constable in the Auxiliary Policing Services Unit with the Halton Police Services, where she has been active since 1999.

Kirsten Shody
TORCHLIGHT

After completing her studies in Criminal Justice and Public Policy, Kirsten chose Torchlight as a volunteer environment where she could grow and share her organization, communication, problem-solving skills to help those in need. She is a well-rounded young woman with a strong sense of equity and fair-mindedness to support marginalized people and those at risk.

Kirsten takes calls on the distress line, responds to ONTX messages at her centre, and is fully committed to people who find themselves experiencing challenges and difficulties. She recognizes that as a responder, she is not there to “fix” a caller’s circumstances, but offer a platform and an authentic and compassionate listening ear for the caller to voice their needs and struggles.

Outside of her work at Torchlight, Kirsten is involved with an array of volunteer positions and varied studies. She is a key contributor to the University of Guelph’s “Safe Walk” program to accompany students on campus and make them feel safe and secure; she is a lead soccer coach for young children in Guelph, she exercises and socializes shelter dogs and is involved with animal adoptions at the Guelph Humane Society, and she’s soon to graduate from the American Sign Language program at Conestoga College to earn a certificate from the Canadian Hearing Society.
Alexander Tran | Young Adult Volunteer  
SPECTRA HELPLINE

Alexander began volunteering for Spectra in 2015 and after only a year and a half, this Young Adult volunteer has already donated over 500 hours of volunteer time to the helpline, the online text and chat (ONTX) program, and training new call responders. For his commitment, his enthusiasm, and his genuine concern for people in his community, Alexander is considered an “exemplary member of the Spectra team.”

His tremendous and empathetic support helps clients feel heard, understood, and validated. Callers know that they are not alone when Alexander walks them through their challenges and at the same time, helps them focus on what they want in life instead of dwelling on the negative aspects of their lives. In many cases, Alexander acts as a guide for callers to create effective goals and encourages them to achieve what they want in life.

Alexander inspires his fellow volunteers and Spectra staff with empathetic eagerness, willingness to help, compassion for others, and a strong work ethic and responsibility to Spectra and the people it supports.

Dinesan Varendran  
Young Adult Volunteer  
DISTRESS CENTRES TORONTO – SCARBOROUGH

After 800 hours and 1800 calls, Dinesan continues to work with the same enthusiasm and desire to support the needs of people in his community as he did when he started in the fall of 2013. He finds purpose in changing the lives of others.

His nominator praises Dinesan’s adaptability to tailor his support to meet the unique emotional and practical needs of his centre’s diverse service users, his active listening abilities, effective communication, and his ability to establish and maintain long-term relationships with his callers. Administratively, Dinesan captures call details to file clear and concise reports, and communicates to centre staff about the needs of service users and the effectiveness of strategies used.

There is almost nothing this visually-impaired volunteer cannot do: Dinesan takes calls on DC Toronto’s 24/7 crisis support line (408-Helpline), the EMS Warm Transfer Line, which provides support to high-risk suicide callers until emergency services arrive, the Caller Reassurance Program that provides outbound services for seniors, the TTC Crisis Link line, and PARO, the medical resident support service. Over and above this, Dinesan is also a shift supervisor.

Dinesan relishes his work at his centre and explains that he recognizes that everyone struggles with problems, “but by sharing experiences or even by simply listening, those problems become smaller or slowly dissipate.”

Victoria West | Young Adult Volunteer  
TORCHLIGHT

Victoria is a well-rounded volunteer and a critical and analytical thinker with sound judgement who has donated her time and energy to Torchlight since 2015. With a varied background and a strong, ethical compass, she provides the highest level of support to people in need in her community. Victoria constantly develops her skills in active listening and solution-focused approaches in her role at her centre.

Her nominator describes her as mature, respectful, and dependable; someone who takes initiative and offers excellent listening abilities to callers in need of support. When dealing with challenging scenarios with callers, Victoria is calm and skilled, and uses her training to provide a safe space for the caller to share difficult circumstances in his/her life.

Victoria studied Family Relations and Human Development at the University of Guelph and has volunteered for over ten years as a Big Sister, where she assumes a demanding and challenging commitment to a girl in need of a strong female role model to guide her into the future. With these skills and this experience, Victoria offers her active listening abilities and solution-focused approaches on the phone lines, and as a skilled Mentor and coach for new volunteers at her centre, to whom she can impart her wisdom and experience.