Volunteers are at the core of the work that our member distress and crisis organizations do for their communities. The dedication and commitment that they give continues to amaze. This year we had 16 of these wonderful volunteers nominated for the 2018 Spirit of Volunteerism Recognition, and we are pleased to recognize five as this year’s recipients.

Please join us in congratulating the 2018 Nominees & Recipients

**Julia Biamonte | Young Adult Volunteer**  
DISTRESS CENTRE NIAGARA

Over the last three years, Julia has managed full-time Psychology studies at Brock University (and received an award of academic achievement for being in the top 15 percent of her faculty), while volunteering with Pathstone Mental Health Supervised Visitation program for children and adults, and the Distress Centre Niagara.

At her centre, Julia takes calls on the Distress and the Mental Health and Addictions lines, providing support, screening, information, and referral to local services. On both lines she demonstrated great respect for callers and upholds the quality of service and philosophy for which the Niagara agency strives.

When she’s not on the phones, Julia is a mentor/trainer for new volunteers on the phone lines, where she offers support and insight so that volunteers can increase their wisdom and experience when handling distress calls from community members. Julia also promotes Distress Centre services to community health fairs and demonstrates her dedication, leadership, and admiration to her centre.

Her nominator calls her a kind-hearted, considerate, and natural caregiver, and “a good role model not only to the Distress Centre but to the community--Julia is awesome.”

**Valerie Brosseau**  
DISTRESS CENTRE DURHAM

Valerie is devoting her life to helping others with mental illness. She talks openly about her own mental illness struggles, shares her story on Instagram, writes and shares her poetry online, and takes every opportunity to end the stigma and inform and engage.

She joined DCD in early 2013 and has completed more than 850 hours on the Helpline and over 1,000 hours in other areas at DCD. In her five years at Durham, she has been a Role-Play volunteer at trainings, a Call Report Feedback volunteer, an ONTX volunteer, and a Homecall Relief Team member, taking calls on weekends and overnight hours where volunteers need support. Valerie’s empathy and active listening skills were recognized early on, and she was asked to become a mentor. She has dedicated herself to learning and building on her skills to better serve the community by partaking in every training made available by DCD and is very active at the centre.

Valerie has won many awards at her centre including Volunteer of the Year in 2016, and the Life Saver Award in March of 2014. She acts as the Canadian Ambassador and Social Media Manager for #SubmitTheStigma, a not-for-profit organization that uses jiu jitsu as a platform to talk about mental illness.

**Iti Dookie**  
DISTRESS CENTRES TORONTO - SCARBOROUGH

After 22 years of service, Iti continues to come to her centre for her weekly shifts, helps fill gaps in the volunteer schedule, and supports multiple programs at the Scarborough branch. This honest and genuine volunteer has taken over 1,000 calls on various centre lines since 1996 and participates in programs like the national suicide line and the PARO helpline to support medical residents and their families.

Especially with challenging calls, Iti helps new volunteers grow and become comfortable in their roles. She also participates in centre conferences and supports agency initiatives such as RAP sessions, new training and services, and helps with fundraising.

Iti is a special volunteer because of her ability to shine a light on a caller’s strengths and bring them into the forefront so the caller can recognize that despite their situation, they are still incredible people. Our dedicated and compassionate vol-
Ayah Ellithy  
**DISTRESS CENTRE HALTON**

After completing her training in early 2015, Ayah has proved herself an extremely dedicated volunteer who consistently meets or exceeds her monthly volunteer shift commitment on the phone lines and in the Telecheck and Text & Chat programs. In only five months, Ayah completed her one-year commitment of 144 volunteer hours which has never been done in the history of DC Halton. To date, Ayah has completed an amazing 705 volunteer hours and was presented with the Top Contributor Award in recognition for the most shifts completed within a year. Ayah has completed certifications in Distress Centre Halton’s Professional Development workshops and safeTALK and became a distress line mentor at her centre in early 2016.

Ayah finds the time to further support her community as a Crisis Line Counsellor and Outreach Volunteer with Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services of Halton (SAVIS), donates time to the Centre for Addiction & Mental Health (CAMH) where she provides support to youth during the orientation and intake process for mental health and addiction programs, and volunteers two days a week at the Credit Valley Hospital.

All of this while studying at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto!

Luis Gallardo  
**Young Adult Volunteer**

**SPECTRA HELPLINE**

Since 2015, Luis Gallardo has provided over 425 hours to Spectra and supports multiple programs which provide much-needed support to members of his community. This warm, friendly, and professional volunteer has been involved with outreach events, the Spectra Helpline, Spectra’s outbound Touching Base program, Canada Suicide Prevention Service (CSPS), and ONTX, the Online Chat & Text program. For his commitment to the latter two services, Luis was promoted to volunteer mentor to help his peers support clients who deal with mental illness and suicide ideation, and those in crisis.

Luis will participate as a mentor in Solution-Focused in-class trainings to offer a practical guide for new volunteers to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively support clients during calls. He always supports clients’ efforts to empower themselves and help them focus on the positive and guides them to access appropriate resources.

Luis continuously promotes social change, empowerment, liberation, and problem-solving in human relationships to enhance and support the well-being of Spectra’s clients. He displays leadership qualities in his work and his fellow volunteers enjoy speaking with him regarding various topics around policies or personal interests.

Desiree Homolka  
**Young Adult Volunteer**

**DISTRESS CENTRE NIAGARA**

This busy, compassionate, flexible, team-oriented, and good-hearted person has been with Distress Centre Niagara for two years. Desiree has been one of the centre’s most dedicated, helpful, reliable and consistent volunteers; she is a senior trainer and mentor and encourages new volunteers and provides good feedback to them. In turn, new volunteers feel appreciated and respected by Desiree.

Desiree provides support on Niagara’s 24-hour crisis line and the Mental Health and Addictions line where she helps callers develop their own coping mechanisms. As a distress line advocate, Desiree has helped her centre’s service promotion, fundraising, recruiting and training via social media.

Outside of her centre, Desiree volunteers with Start Me Up, Niagara’s Out of the Cold program, and with Big Brothers Big Sisters Niagara’s Go Girls mentorship program. This flexible young woman is in her first year of a Master of Arts in Critical Sociology at Brock University.

Inge Khayyal  
**Young Adult Volunteer**

**DISTRESS CENTRES TORONTO - SCARBOROUGH**

About two years ago, Inge took her first shift on DC Toronto’s 408-Helpline and has taken 1,000 calls since then. She finished her first-year volunteer commitment in less than a year and became involved with the ONTX program supporting over 300 text chats to support youth and young adults who are in crisis or distress. She’s also involved with the PARO helpline and has in the last six months volunteered an astounding 500 hours. Since that time, this warm, witty, energetic mother of three has been involved with centre fundraising and has been promoted as a volunteer mentor. Inge is so dedicated to her centre’s work that she even checks in when she’s on holidays!

Her background in life skills, counselling, and a certification in CBT or Cognitive Behaviour Therapy certainly helps her when speaking to and supporting callers – Inge takes calls in her centre’s phone room and coordinates multiple lines including the CAMH Transfer Line, the 408-Helpline, EMS Warm Transfer line, the Crisis Link hotline, and the CSPS line. She has a way of cultivating hope with callers so they can move to a place where they can believe in themselves and overcome obstacles in their life.

David Lai  
**SPECTRA HELPLINE**

After 25 years as an educator at the Dufferin-Peel District Catholic School Board, David began volunteering with Spec-
Eager and always ready to help, Lauren has earned the nickname the “Ever Ready Bunny” because she really doesn’t stop! Since the fall of 2015, Lauren has completed more than 850 hours on the Helpline, Community Call-Out Program, Prideline, and ONTX programs. Her achievements as a placement student and as a volunteer are incredible. She exudes positivity and a passion for life; on the phones, she often has once-upset callers laughing by the end of their call.

As a placement student, Lauren raised community awareness about DCD’s work, the centre’s Helpline, ONTX service, and Durham’s dedicated Prideline for the LGBTQ community; she completed the monthly newsletter for several months, updated resources in iCarol to better help volunteers and service users, helped raise money for the United Way and her Durham centre, and brought in mental health professionals to speak at her centre’s Volunteer Education Day—among many other things.

As a volunteer at DCD, Lauren focuses on her own learning and development by attending and completing many internal and external training opportunities. This dedication to mental health and learning has helped Lauren to better support Durham’s service users, their volunteers, and the community.

Lauren Palmer | Young Adult Volunteer
DISTRESS CENTRE DURHAM

Claire Pecora | Young Adult Volunteer
TELEPHONE AID LINE KINGSTON (TALK)

Abigail Peristy
SPECTRA HELPLINE

Abigail has been a valued Spectra Helpline volunteer since May 2017 and in less than nine months, has dedicated over 230 hours to her centre. She supports multiple programs at Spectra and has provided support on their Helpline, the outbound Touching Base program (where she has been invited to become a mentor), the Online & Chat Text program, and on the Canada Suicide Prevention Service line. Her easy-going, laid back approach lets callers open up to her easily and feel comfortable in a safe non-judgemental environment.
Abigail is always willing to take on extra duties and is very committed to support individuals that are most vulnerable in her community. She is approachable, reliable, outgoing, and often will debrief with new volunteers. She is certainly in the right field—Abigail is currently pursuing a master’s degree in Counselling Psychology.

Vidhya Prentice
DISTRESS CENTRES TORONTO - NORTH

As an extremely flexible and dedicated volunteer, Vidhya has volunteered for over 925 hours on the DC Toronto help lines and taken on almost every role available to Distress Centres volunteers. She’s involved with the Survivor Support Program, helps with B.A.D. Ride, DC Toronto’s biggest annual fundraiser, participates in ongoing educational opportunities, and regularly supports new volunteers with phone training shifts as a mentor.

With strong crisis management skills and exceptional reliability, Vidhya was invited to become a Crisis Link volunteer, a partnership between DC Toronto, Bell, and the TTC. She responds to calls on the EMS Warm Transfer Line, where people are typically at risk of suicide and alone when they call, making them very emotionally vulnerable. On DC Toronto’s core service, the 408-HELP Line, Vidhya consistently demonstrates excellence in all areas of active listening. Her warm, relaxed, non-judgemental approach reassures callers and creates a very comfortable environment for people to express thoughts and emotions, as well as explore options at their own pace.

Her nominator says that Vidhya lights up the room with her presence and brings warmth and comfort everywhere she goes. This gracious, humble, respectful, and nurturing volunteer is greatly appreciated by her peers and the leaders of her centre.

Fraser Pringle | Young Adult Volunteer
DOWNTOWN MISSION DISTRESS CENTRE
WINDSOR-ESSEX

As a former security officer for Windsor Regional Hospital, Fraser has a strong foundation in mental health. When he began to volunteer in the fall of 2017, his centre knew he was a stand-out with exceptional skill development and impressive dedication to his centre.

Fraser actively seeks ways to sharpen his skills to improve interactions with callers and quickly moved up the volunteer ranks to mentor status. He regularly leaves motivational and uplifting messages for the helpline responders in the phone room to inspire them to “spread positivity and be kind,” as one of his notes said. For this years’ Coldest Night of the Year charity walk, Fraser championed a Distress Centre team that ultimately raised $350, with part of those proceeds directly benefitting the Windsor Centre.

On the phone, Fraser is incredibly compassionate and non-judgemental even with the most negative callers. On one occasion, he took a call from a man full of intolerance and hate but found acceptance and patience to offer this caller, which truly speaks to the measure of Fraser’s integrity. His reaction in that moment perfectly exemplifies what the Downtown Mission wishes to provide as a service: compassion above all.

Ann Pritchard
TORCHLIGHT

Sometimes it’s a volunteer’s soft skills that stand-out and make us take notice. From the beginning of her time with TorchLight three years ago, staff there knew that there was something very special about Ann Pritchard and her quiet, skilled, kind, and compassionate commitment to the community and to the values of TorchLight. With a background in life coaching and an interest in motivational speaking, Ann speaks with great compassion, truthfulness, and conviction so that all with whom she speaks are truly affected in a positive way.

Ann can handle delicate and sometimes highly sensitive situations with kindness and understanding, and she is gentle and respectful throughout each interaction. She considers all options, takes time to listen, understands the impacts of her words, uses sound judgement, and is very logical and practical in her interactions. She is stable, resilient, and focused with the ability to de-escalate high risk situations. Ann is a remarkable mentor for new volunteer candidates; she is an excellent listener, sets a good example, and is valued by each member of the volunteer team, the staff and the Board of Directors at her centre.

Susan Robinson
SPECTRA HELPLINE

Susan has been a dedicated volunteer with Spectra Helpline since January 2017. In just over a year, she has contributed over 204 hours of service to her community. She is part of an elite volunteer team, the Seniors Supporting Seniors (SSS) team, who provide safety checks, medication reminders, and social calls to clients in the TeleCheck for Seniors Program. As a mature adult herself, Susan shows great empathy and compassion during every interaction with clients and has become a mentor and trainer for new TeleCheck volunteers.

This warm and gentle soul is very reliable and engaged, and often takes over eight times the number of shifts required for the SSS program – her nominator says that Susan is the only volunteer she knows who will always answer her phone call and will always take morning shifts when asked.

When offered a small gift for her time and dedication to her program, Susan refused and said, “I come here because I want to and I enjoy the work. The conversations are “treat” enough for me.”