



distress and crisis ontario  
détresse et crise ontario

moving forward through partnerships | aller de l'avant grâce à des partenariats



2015-16

annual report

# report of the chair of the board

The helpline sector, locally, provincially and nationally, continues to experience ongoing and emerging challenges, along with the real possibility of exciting, new opportunities. In 2015/16, Distress and Crisis Ontario (DCO) once again provided important leadership in the creation of a vision, system design and implementation of a strategy of integrated services.

As a vibrant, forward-thinking organization, it provided its members with the means to not only participate in Ontario and Canada-wide suicide prevention discussion and planning tables but also to partner for program innovation. This has also been enabled by DCO's commitment to capacity building initiatives within our sector. Through educational events, the Learning Forums, networking, environmental scans and best practice discussions, the Association has been working to support our organizations in positioning themselves not only to respond to a changing environment but, more importantly, to work together to help define that environment.

This past year, the Board was pleased to support our Executive Director, Elizabeth Fisk, in prioritizing the soft launch of the ONTX online chat and text partnership. We've had a full year of learning how to best deliver support in this new service stream and the opportunity to create templates for the onboarding of new partners. The project to date has exceeded our expectations.

We were also solidly behind her efforts to get the Canadian Distress Line Network's (CDLN's) Canadian-wide 1-800 Suicide Line closer to becoming a reality. It was her significant efforts, with the support of our Association, that have brought it closer to fruition this past year than in the 10 preceding years.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to recognize and express our appreciation to Liz and her devoted team for the many accomplishments they have achieved through their responsiveness to members and commitment to excellence.

It has been a privilege to serve as President of the Board of DCO. I would like to thank my fellow Board members for their contributions in working on behalf of the Association and the wisdom and fellowship that they have shared throughout this process. I am also grateful to have had the opportunity to engage with the leadership of many of our Association members as we have joined together to further our mission.



Karen Letofsky, C.M. | Chair of the Board

## Calls answered continue to increase

2013 **263,500**

2014 **282,800**

2015 **302,700**

### SOUTHWEST

**36%**  
**111,000**

Windsor  
London  
Waterloo  
Niagara  
Wellington

### CENTRAL

**44%**  
**133,100**

Peel  
Oakville  
North Halton  
Durham  
Toronto

### EAST

**19%**  
**56,600**

Ottawa  
Kingston  
Lanark, Leeds  
& Grenville

Thunder Bay

## # of responders across the member organizations

**1,846**

## # of hours volunteered by these responders

**215,455**

Welli

Wind

## A vital service

*In 2015 the member agencies of Distress and Crisis Ontario (DCO) provided support to over 302,700 callers – a seven per cent increase since 2014. DCO member organizations receive 40 to 90 suicide-related calls a day. Responders provide support to individuals with many complex challenges and in 2015, were able to deescalate 98 per cent of all suicide-related calls. Those are calls handled without the involvement of emergency services including 911, police or emergency room visits - which reduces the demand, and the associated costs, for those services.*

**Bottom line: calls diverted from emergency services to distress and crisis lines help to reduce provincial expenses.**

NORTH  
**1%**  
**2,000**

Thunder Bay

# of minutes of support offered to individuals in 2015-16

**12.927**  
**million**

# of new responders completing training in 2015-16

**781**



Each year, as DCO’s annual general meeting approaches, we review our previous year’s activities and I continue to be impressed by our Board, staff and members. Our association successfully provides significant capacity building support to our membership on what many associations would consider a minimal budget.

We have developed an association model that is nimble, focused on the needs of our member organizations and aligns all programs with DCO’s strategic priorities. Being a ‘virtual’ organization has allowed us to maximize our human and organizational resources most efficiently. We do not have expensive infrastructure costs, our staff often work from home or alternate locations, and we have knowledgeable individuals offering services based on their expertise, as and when needed.

Our Board of Directors must be commended for their strong commitment to the helpline sector and keeping their fingers on the pulse of the many changes, challenges and opportunities that are before us. It is a forward thinking board that looks at the big-picture and willingly allocates in-year resources for a project that will benefit individuals nationally, not just provincially.

The Ontario Online & Text Crisis Service is a shining example of what can be accomplished cooperatively, while learning from each other and enhancing existing service delivery platforms. The four centres who offer text and chat services have built a framework that incorporates each organization’s current service delivery infrastructure, training and supervisory resources into a province-wide service. We look forward to extending this partnership to other DCO members within the next year.

The National Suicide Prevention Service through the CDLN network is now a reality. Ontario’s distress and crisis centres are looking forward to partnering cooperatively with our colleagues in all Canada’s provinces and territories to provide a nationally available, regionally delivered 24 hour/365 day phone, text and chat service to individuals thinking about suicide.

On behalf of all DCO staff and member organizations, I would like to extend heartfelt appreciation to Karen Letofsky as she completes her service as Chair of the DCO Board. We thank Karen for serving 3 years in this capacity and sharing her insight, dedication and foresight with myself as ED, as well as with the staff and fellow Board members. Karen is held in the highest regard by her peers and colleagues and DCO has been enriched by her leadership. Wisdom and a great sense of humor are a powerful combination!

*Elizabeth Fisk*

Elizabeth Fisk, CAE | Executive Director

Distress and Crisis Ontario continues to provide new and topical information and education to its member organizations and their call, text and chat responders.

### LEARNING FORUMS

The [www.learningforums.ca](http://www.learningforums.ca) website offers Canadian produced videos featuring experts in the field of study as well as additional resources provide on-line, on-demand 24/7 learning on topics of interest.

# of times videos were accessed as learning opportunities

3,729

# of videos in the Learning Forums library

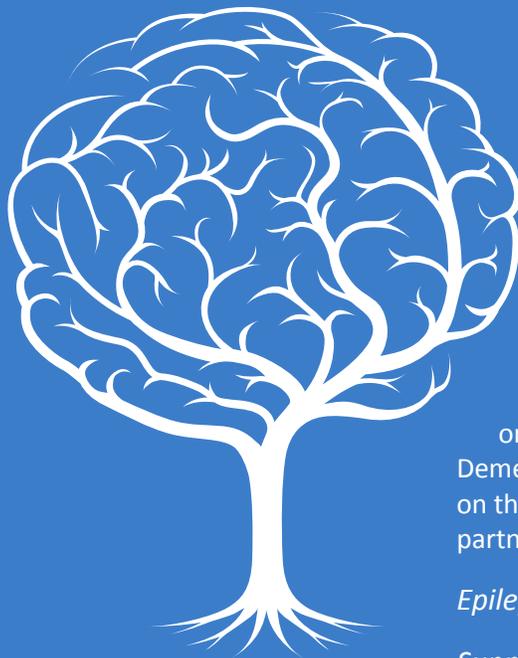
57

# of page views in 2015-16

30,991

# of new learning forums sessions filmed in 2015-16 for future distribution

14



### 5 most viewed Learning Forum sessions:

- 1 Victim Services
- 2 Active Listening – The Power of Empathy
- 3 A Focus on Anxiety
- 4 Youth Bullying
- 5 Human Trafficking

### CERTIFICATE TRAINING COURSE

A four-week course on *Neurological Disorders* was attended by 80+ attendees.

Content experts from six organizations provided sessions on a variety of topics including Epilepsy, Alzheimer’s Disease, Dementia, Cerebral Palsy, Parkinsons, Comorbidity and Impact on the Family. We wish to extend special thanks to the following partners for sharing their experts and very valuable resources.

- Epilepsy Ontario*
- Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre*
- The Alzheimer Society of Ontario*
- Parkinson Society Central & Northern Ontario*
- Neurological Health Charities Canada*
- Ontario Federation of Cerebral Palsy*

## LUNCH AND LEARNS

Upgrading and reinforcing the skills of staff and leadership at our membership organizations is an important offering from DCO. Five interesting Lunch and Learn sessions were provided during the past year and attended by over 65 people.

*Not for Profit Organizations – Addressing Insurance Needs and Concerns*

*Obligations to Volunteers – a Legal Perspective*

*The “How To” of Developing a Seniors TeleCheck Program*

*CRA - Charity Audit Update*

*Service Development and Integrating distress and crisis lines*

## New partners in 2015-16 who helped to strengthen our education and training sessions:

*Durham Mental Health Services*

*The Tema Conter Memorial Trust – Heroes are Human*

*Epilepsy Ontario*

*CMHA - Health Promotions Dept.*

*Whitby Fire & Emergency Services*

*Children’s Aid Society of Peel*

*Individual with Multiple Schlerosis*

*CONNECT Counselling Services*

*Canadian Hearing Society*

*Regional Diversity Roundtable*

*Peel Big Brothers/Big Sisters*

*Canadian National Institute for the Blind*

## CONFERENCES

In September 2015, Distress and Crisis Ontario hosted 60+ registrants over two days in Toronto for Part 3 of the *Making the Pieces Fit – Networking and Conference* series.



Titled *Reaching Out to New Partners, Realizing New Opportunities*, the conference boasted exceptional speakers who enriched the membership’s dialogue, provided them with stimulating ideas and got them thinking about potential opportunities.

*The Suicidal Patient and the Hospital System*  
– Dr Jenn Brasch

*Pragmatics of Bridge Building: Making Connections with Private Practice Practitioners*  
– Heather Fiske

*Patient Discharge Wellness Check Service*  
– Distress Centre Ottawa & Region

*Saving Your Culture after a Workplace Event*  
– Laura Williams



# of e-newsletter articles published in 2015-16

**83**

% of articles on governance issues

**8%**

% of articles related to staff and volunteer management

**8%**

% of articles dealing with suicide prevention

**10%**

% of articles sharing information provided in DCO educational or training forums

**19%**

## Dan's Story

"I'm no good anymore. What's the point? Everyone would be better off without me." These thoughts keep running through Dan's\* head – whether he is drunk or sober. The divorce had taken a toll on 50-year-old Dan. He misses his ex-wife and when he has the kids on the weekend, he feels like a loser, not a role model they can love and respect. His contracting business is suffering as well; Dan worries whether he will be able to keep things going and meet his financial obligations, including child support. One of the guys he works with spoke to him about his drinking – told him to "get his act together." Easier said than done, thinks Dan. Drinking numbs the pain and suicide is looking like a solution.

### *Dan's story takes a turn:*

Dan calls a distress hotline. The responder is a highly-trained and experienced individual, who has been providing support at the distress centre for a number of years. Skilled at empathetic listening, he provides Dan with support and encourages him to talk through his emotional pain. As a result, the responder is able to deescalate an intense situation. Together they discuss all the reasons for Dan to keep living and work on a plan to keep Dan as safe as possible. Dan and the responder start to speak regularly and Dan begins to feel more in touch with who he was, focus on his strengths and find healthy strategies for coping. Dan gets his life back on track.

\* "Dan" is representative of the men who make up 36% of callers to distress and crisis lines in Ontario. Issues with alcohol account for 37% of the addictions cited by callers.

## DCO continues to aggregate the call statistics and related information from its member organizations.

Each year our collection process improves as more organizations adopt the SIOM schema. A detailed SIOM statistical review is published yearly highlighting call issues, concerns, demographics and suicide statistics. Each member organization is also provided with a confidential comparison of their statistics to the aggregate numbers for their review purposes.

# of callers who reported struggling with addiction

**33,009**

# of new immigrants to Canada who called distress lines in Ontario this year

**6,028**

# of callers struggling with the stress of legal troubles

**14,286**

% of callers who cited 'financial concerns' as a contributing factor to their distress

**32%**

# of callers who were struggling with issues around their sexual orientation

**1,928**

% of callers who identified themselves as victims of childhood abuse

Top 2 concerns of callers to distress and crisis lines

1. Interpersonal Relationships

**29%**

**5.4%**

2. Mental Health

**40%**

% of callers with prior suicidal behaviour

**39%**

Calls answered continue to increase

2012 **240,000**  
 2013 **263,500**  
 2014 **282,800**  
 2015 **302,700**

% of callers with a diagnosed mental illness

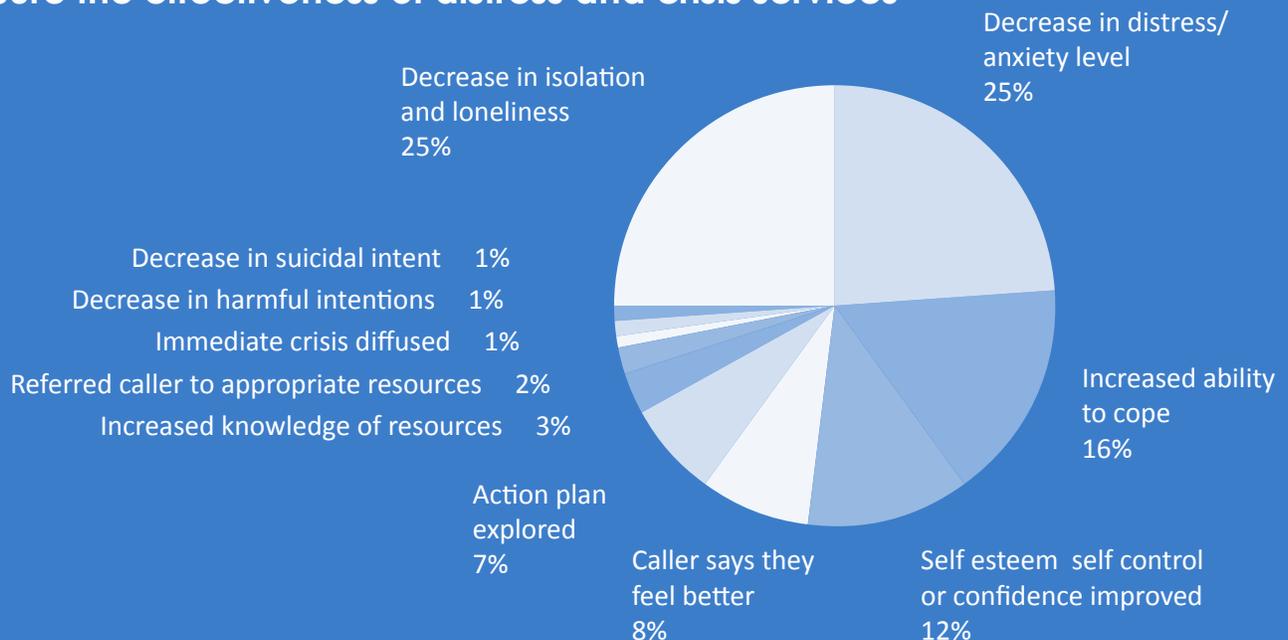
**28%**

% of callers who are in treatment for a mental health issue

**26%**



**Positive outcomes are important and form the backbone of how we measure the effectiveness of distress and crisis services**





## The ONTX project is completing its first year of pilot service in June 2016.

By texting the short-code 741741 or visiting the websites of the partner agencies (Distress Centre Durham, Distress Centres Toronto, Spectra Helpline or Torchlight and DCO), visitors are connected to a highly trained responder from 2 pm to 2 am no matter where in Ontario they are located.

Many firsts were recognized by the service collaborative partners, including the collection of quantifiable and visitor reported impacts, charting of distress levels on a 5-point scale, adoption of an evidence-based DCIB risk assessment tool and standardized follow-up procedures. Visitors at an increased risk of suicide can request follow-up and will be contacted within 72 hours after their chat or text. This evidence-based practice significantly reduces the risk of future suicide attempts.

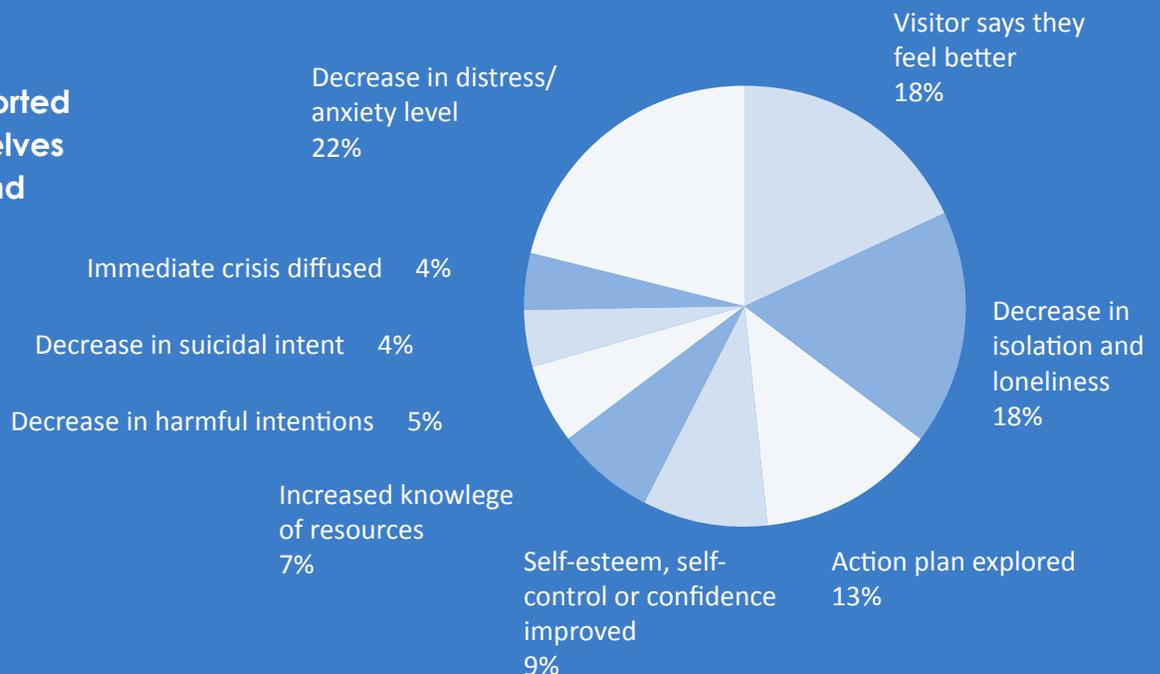


**The number of chats and texts answered by ONTX responders has increased steadily even though a formal promotional campaign has not been initiated**

**Outcomes are quantifiable and reported by the visitors themselves with the use of pre and post chat surveys**

**# of live-saving interventions since launch**

**20**



# of Chats and Texts

6,237

# of ONTX specially trained responders

150

# of hours of support

3,945

# of minutes average text length

44

# of minutes of support

236,700

# of minutes average chat length

# of issues discussed per visitor session

2.2

32



## Janet's Story

Janet\* is home from hospital -- again. She wonders how long it will last. She struggles with bipolar disorder. Sometimes medication helps but more often, it doesn't make her feel like herself. And now that Sam, her partner for the last few years, has finally had enough of the highs and lows of her mania and moved out, there is no one in her life to protect her from herself. The last suicide attempt, and there have been several over the past decade, was particularly bad. She was in hospital for weeks and now she is on a long waiting list for an outpatient therapy program. Janet has limited access to psychiatric care, just an hour once-a-month with a psychiatrist. Her own family doctor just doesn't seem to have the time to listen or the training to address her issues.

### *Janet finds a life line:*

It's not everyday but several times a week Janet calls or sends a text message to a distress centre. She frequently speaks or texts with Susan, a highly-trained and experienced responder, who has gotten to know her and has been able to help her cope. Skilled at empathetic listening, Susan provides Janet with support and encourages her to talk things through. As a result, Janet's hospital admissions have been reduced. "I really appreciate Susan's help," says Janet, "I couldn't manage on a daily basis without the support I get from the distress centre. Without them I'm sure I would be back in hospital or perhaps worse. Now, life is looking more manageable."

\* Women make up 63% of individuals who reach out to distress and crisis lines in Ontario. "Janet" is representative of the 40% of callers who have a diagnosed mental illness and cite various mental health concerns.

## Nationally available, regionally delivered

The National Suicide Prevention Service (NSPS) is designed to integrate existing distress, crisis and suicide prevention line services (currently operating independently across the country) into a coordinated national-wide response providing 24/7 service, accessible anywhere in Canada. Through telephone, chat and text suicide-prevention support services the NSPS will help decrease the number of people who attempt suicide, and die or are bereaved by suicide in Canada.

State-of-the-art telephone and contact centre technology will be used to create an infrastructure and platform that will link the technology of existing service providers across the country within a unified managed (hosted) NSPS solution and be seamless and accessible by every person within Canada.

The organizational and operating philosophy of the National Suicide Prevention Service (NSPS) is to build on a foundation of existing community resources and providing a 'tent' for like-minded organizations to work cooperatively to fill the gaps in accessible and timely suicide prevention resources for vulnerable populations and in underserved area of Canada.

DCO, in collaboration with other provincial colleagues, played a significant role in moving the project along from the concept stage to a funded program. DCO was the lead agency on a submission to the Public Health Agency of Canada for \$2 million funding over 5 years. It is anticipated that the project will be 'soft launched' in November 2016 in 4 or 5 locations in Canada.

### Here's a snapshot of activities over the past year:

#### PHAC Grant

Preparation of grant application - Nov 2015-Feb 2016  
Notification of funding approval - Feb 12, 2016  
Signed contract notification - Mar 7, 2016  
Initial funding received by lead agency - April 13, 2016

#### Infrastructure Configuration and Vendor Selection

Engagement of a Technology consultant - April 2015  
Needs analysis for an integrated national service - May 2015-June 2015  
Development and publication of an RFP - June 2015  
Review of submissions and identification of mandatory requirement gaps - August 2015-April 2016  
Identification of preferred vendor for technology infrastructure - April 2016

#### Partnership Development

Development of Business Plan and identification of partnership opportunities - June 2015- Nov 2015  
Presentation of possible partnership opportunities - Dec 2015 - Jan 2016  
Discussions and review of partnership offers - Jan 2016-April 2016  
Selection of Media partner - May 2016

#### Best Practice, Service Standards and Policy Development

Compilation of existing practices - Aug 2015 - Nov 2015  
Compilation of existing policies - Aug 2015 - Nov 2015  
Initial meetings of Committee - Oct 2015  
Document consolidation - Feb 2016

# 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Spirit of Volunteerism Recognition

DCO is proud of all the volunteers who are so dedicated to our member organizations. Every year, through the Spirit of Volunteerism Recognition, we acknowledge those exemplary volunteers who have donated their time and talents to supporting their organizations and their communities. On September 27th, 2015 we welcomed 60+ guests to the Holiday Inn Yorkdale to help us celebrate and recognize the nominees and recipients.

## 2015 Recipients

**Esmie Hurst**, Distress Centres Toronto - Central  
**Carol Jarvi**, Spectra Helpline  
**Roy Purgavie**, Distress Centre Oakville  
**Amy Vandewouw**, Telephone Aid Line Kingston (TALK)

*Recipients and nominees honoured at a reception at the Holiday Inn Yorkdale.*



## program and service recognition la reconnaissance de programmes et services



*Members of the Torchlight CONNECT team receiving the PSR Award at a reception at the Holiday Inn Yorkdale.*

DCO celebrates the many significant and varied programs and services that its membership offers their communities. They are an integral part of psycho-social safety net which keeps individuals at risk or in distress out of harm's way. In 2015 the DCO Board of Directors began a process of recognition which highlights the achievement of our member organizations and recognizes their programs and services.

The inaugural Program and Service Recognition Award was presented to Torchlight for their CONNECT Program.

The CONNECT call-out service was established in 2012 out of the desire of regular callers to the distress lines who felt stuck and challenged in moving forward and in creating positive opportunities in their lives. Congratulations to all who work with the Torchlight CONNECT program!

**Funding Sources 2015-16**

Ministry of Health and Long Term Care	\$217,200
Ontario Trillium Foundation	103,342
Deferred Revenue - OTF and CPMHF	84,313
Membership fees	11,375
Donations	624
	<b>\$416,854</b>

**Program and Funding Allocations 2015-16**

Association programs	\$65,345
ONTX Online & Text Services	103,342
Education programs	62,022
SIOM	13,925
Program development	15,115
Communications/recognition	28,261
Admin support and infrastructure	40,097
Staff development	3,813
	<b>\$331,920</b>

DCO's income and revenue totaled \$332,541 for fiscal 2015-16.

Copies of the audited financial statements are available upon request from the DCO offices.

The financial records of the association are audited by BDO Canada LLP Chartered Accountants, Guelph, Ontario.

We appreciate the generous financial support of our long-term funder:

We appreciate the generous grant for our Ontario Online and Text Crisis Service:

We also wish to thank the individuals who provide support to our programs via [CanadaHelps.org](http://CanadaHelps.org) on our website.



**DCO Board of Directors 2015-16**

- Karen Letofsky (Chair)
- Victoria Kehoe (Past Chair)
- John Jones (Vice Chair)
- Colleen Gallagher (Secretary/Treasurer)
- Alison Caird
- Linda Gerger

**DCO Staff**

- Executive Director  
Elizabeth Fisk
- Administrative & Program Facilitator  
Jackie Grigsby
- Learning & Development Coordinator  
Laura Donatelli
- ONTX Online & Text Crisis Services, Facilitator  
Dustin MacDonald
- SIOM Coordinator  
Melissa Bosman

**Member Agencies** (March 31, 2016)

- Telecare Cambridge Distress Centre
- Beendigen Inc.— Talk 4 Healing
- Chimo Helpline, New Brunswick Distress Centre Durham
- Telephone Aid Line Kingston (TALK)
- Developmental Services of Leeds and Grenville
- London & District Distress Centre
- Distress Centre Niagara
- Distress Centre North Halton
- Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Helpline
- Distress Centre Oakville
- Distress Centre Ottawa & Region
- Spectra Helpline
- Torchlight
- Tel-Aide Outaouais
- Distress Centres Toronto
- Distress Centre Waterloo Region
- Distress Centre Windsor-Essex

Contact information for member centres can be found on our website at [dcontario.org](http://dcontario.org)

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