



**Mission:** To be an association that is the recognized leader in promotion, collaboration, and building capacity within organizations that provide distress and crisis response.

**Vision:** To foster an environment of collaboration and networking while providing universal access to support for individuals in distress and crisis.

## Distress and Crisis Ontario

### Student Placement Reflections

**D. C.** – Renison – Jan to Apr 2023

My placement with Distress and Crisis Ontario shaped what I do today. During my time there, I wrote articles on topics like loneliness and caregiver burnout, and worked on a range of projects that allowed me to turn mental health research into clear, accessible materials. I developed a webinar that allowed me to build on my experience as a sexual violence support line volunteer and translate it into a structured learning opportunity for others. Along the way, I built confidence and a love for knowledge translation, public speaking, and so much more.

The DCO team was incredibly supportive and invested in my learning experience. I wasn't sure what to expect going into the placement, but it ended up being the first step toward discovering my passion for mental health education, an area that continues to guide my work. I'm now a SafeTALK (suicide alertness training) facilitator and am pursuing a career in psychotherapy.

I truly appreciate the freedom, trust, and guidance I was given throughout the placement. This experience unexpectedly shaped my future direction, and I'm so grateful for it.

**M. M.** – Renison – Jan to Apr 2024

As a former student intern at Distress and Crisis Ontario, I am happy to say that my opportunity as a placement student was a helpful introduction into the mental health and social work sector. I was given the opportunity to do research regarding challenges among various social demographics, while learning how to compile data into accessible resources for vulnerable populations. This gave me the opportunity to grow and learn how to communicate with other mental health agencies within the region furthering community relationships and awareness. As well, the DCO offers opportunities for self-expression through written blog posts and podcasts. This is a great way to build confidence in yourself and your knowledge, by giving you the opportunity to put yourself out there about topics you are passionate about. Overall, my experience at Distress and Crisis Ontario was a great introduction into skills that I have taken into my other student placements, and now my social work career.

**M. B.** – University of Waterloo, through Renison – Jan to Apr 2025

My name is Madeline Bauzon, I learned about Distress and Crisis Ontario (DCO) and their student volunteer placement/internship through one of my professors, Dr. Jim Perretta, at the University of Waterloo. In my final year and semester of studies before graduating, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do regarding my future, but I knew I wanted to continue working in the mental health field, particularly in areas related to relationships and psychology.

\* ACCOUNTABILITY \* COLLABORATION \* EMPOWERMENT \* INCLUSION \* INTEGRITY \* LEADERSHIP \*

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Even though these are broad topics, I wanted a learning experience that felt authentic and aligned with my values of advocacy and empowering others. Having a structured placement that challenged me while giving me creative space and chance to apply what I had learned in school and from past experiences to a real-world setting allowed me to gain new knowledge and build upon my existing skills.

Overall, I had a great experience during my placement. Compared to previous work and volunteer experiences, DCO allowed me to understand what it's like to work remotely. I was able to manage my time effectively and choose when to complete volunteer work since the hours were flexible (a valuable benefit as a full-time student, working part-time, alongside this volunteering opportunity).

Another important aspect of the experience for me was the people and the positive environment. Caitlin, my supervisor, was very kind and understanding in her approach, which made it easy to work in a safe and comfortable (virtual) environment that encouraged growth and curiosity. Throughout this placement, I learned many things that go beyond the visible aspects of organizational work, including the essential behind-the-scenes efforts that keep an organization like DCO running. Understanding how my work could make an impact, even indirectly, was very meaningful to me. Everyone I interacted with in the organization was supportive, open-minded, and consistently encouraged me to seek new challenges, ask questions, and set my own goals to maximize my learning experience. I appreciated this greatly, as it eventually led to me joining the team as their social media content creator and continuing to work with this fantastic group!

Some of the personal reflective work I completed during my placement included reflecting on my own mental health and self-care practices and recognizing what I need when my wellbeing feels threatened. Through this placement, I learned that self-care looks different for everyone, and the ways people express their needs can vary greatly from person to person. For instance, while listening to podcasts or reading blog posts and articles published by DCO, I realized how unique we are as individuals and why it's so important to grow, experience, and explore our personal needs and wants.

During my placement, I participated in virtual meetings, email communication with coworkers, brainstorming sessions, and content creation. I worked on creating, drafting, and publishing a resource list about sexual assault and sexual violence prevention, collecting information for regions across Ontario, including post-secondary institutions. Also, I wrote a blog post about navigating relationship changes in post-secondary life and why social circles are important for overall wellbeing.

**P. G. – Humber College – Jan to Apr 2025**

Hello, my name is Prabhvir Gill. I began my placement with DCO in 2024 as part of my post-secondary program requirements. From the moment I first reached out, I received a prompt response with onboarding steps and an introductory Zoom meeting, which immediately made me feel welcomed. From day one, I was given the flexibility to shape my placement experience, whether through conducting research or pursuing more creative projects, such as developing podcasts. Throughout my time with DCO, I had weekly check-ins with [DCO staff] to review my progress and plan next steps. Whenever I needed extra time or guidance on a task, I was met with consistent support. I also had monthly meetings

with Neta, the Executive Director, who generously shared her knowledge and provided invaluable guidance. Starting something new can be challenging, but the support and encouragement I received at DCO made my placement enjoyable and worry-free.

**R. R. – Sheridan College – May to Aug 2025**

During my internship with Distress and Crisis Ontario (DCO), I have gained invaluable experience that has deepened both my professional and personal growth. Working within a non-profit provincial organization dedicated to mental health and crisis support has allowed me to develop a greater understanding of the complexities of mental health advocacy, community engagement, and the importance of accessible crisis services.

I have engaged in deep self-reflection on my identity, experiences, and biases, particularly in how they influence my approach to project work, team collaboration, and community-focused practices. Working on sensitive topics, such as the opioid crisis, overdose prevention, and brain injury awareness, challenged me to ensure that all content I created was trauma-informed, inclusive, and compassionate.

Becoming more conscious of the importance of language—choosing words that reduce stigma and empower communities rather than perpetuate harmful narratives. Through this process, I developed a deeper understanding of the power dynamics between non-profit organizations, frontline responders, and vulnerable populations. Learning how essential it is to center the voices of those directly impacted by mental health and crisis-related challenges by deepening my knowledge on trauma-informed practice, while creating educational and advocacy content that reflects their and my own lived experiences respectfully and accurately.

What stood out most was the supportive and collaborative environment—mentors at DCO not only guided me through challenging situations but also encouraged reflection, growth, and self-care. This placement gave me practical tools I know I will carry into my future career, and it offered a meaningful chance to make a difference in the lives of others.

For any student considering a field placement with DCO, I would highly recommend it. It's an opportunity to gain real-world experience in crisis work, develop your professional voice, and be part of an organization that truly values compassion, learning, and community care.