



2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT

**Canada's Pandemic: Through the Eyes of Our
Distress Centre**

Our Vision

The Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region plays a key role in establishing a community where individuals in need are supported and empowered to meet life's challenges.

Our Mission Statement

Working within the continuum of mental health services, the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region contributes to a healthier and safer community by providing suicide prevention, crisis intervention, psychological stabilization, emotional support, information, referral and education services, without judgement, to individuals in need.

Our Guiding Principles

The Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region (DCOR) is committed to:

- Recognizing the outstanding volunteer workforce that delivers the core of its services.
- Protecting the confidentiality of all callers.
- Ensuring access to its services 24 hours per day, 7 days a week.
- Access to its services being free-of-charge for individuals residing in the geographic areas covered by DCOR.
- Evolving its services to meet the changing needs of the community.
- Being accountable to the community it serves and reporting regularly on current needs, gaps in services and emerging trends.
- Transparency, accountability and diversity throughout the organization.
- Leadership and excellence.

President's Message



At the time of writing this message in early June 2021, we have been in some form of lockdown for almost 15 months. As COVID-19 vaccination rates continue to increase, we are all eagerly looking forward to resuming more social activities.

As we move forward to our new post-pandemic reality, many of us will experience the excitement of live gatherings with friends and family, public events, and dinners out. But, for just as many, it will mean facing mental distress, loneliness, a sense of loss, and long repressed frustration and angst. In fact, most of us will, and likely already do, have conflicting emotions which will challenge our mental equilibrium.

It is in this light that the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region's (DCOR) staff have been working over the past year to continue to improve and enhance our services to meet the needs of all our 60,000+ callers.

In May 2020, following a collaborative community effort, Counselling Connect was officially launched. This new service added the ability to refer callers for same-day or next-day bookings of virtual counselling sessions with one of several service providers, if it was determined during a call that an individual could benefit from counselling with a professional. Since the program's inception, Distress Centre Schedulers booked 782 virtual counselling sessions for local clients.

In November 2020, DCOR also publicly launched its Online Crisis Services after several years of careful development. With Chat and Text options, it made it even easier to find support when needed in Ottawa. We were also very pleased to be involved in the new Encompas Mental Health Wellness Program for the Ontario Provincial Police Association and a pilot project to provide crisis services to the Nishnawbe Aski Nation through a Mental Health and Addictions Pandemic Response Program.

As always, we continue to proudly support our fifteen existing crisis and distress lines as well as providing our standard-setting Wellness Check Services for patients who were recently discharged from hospital following an admission or a visit to the Emergency Department for a mental health issue.

On the back-end, our staff have introduced new software to manage the ever evolving needs of providing distance and remote response solutions, upgraded our phone system, and completely re-vamped our website, including making it fully bilingual.


A joint team of Board, staff and volunteers have continued to move forward on our Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity efforts to ensure that, irrespective of ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, religion, age, gender, exceptionalities or sexual orientation, our services reach all individuals and communities in an equitable and inclusive manner. We are currently focused on implementing thorough reviews of our existing policies and practices to ensure that our staff and volunteers operate in a safe environment, free of unintended systemic or hidden barriers.



While we cannot fully anticipate what our post-pandemic 'new normal' will be, at DCOR we expect it will have us continuing to provide services with some volunteers working from home and many returning to the phones in our Call Centre. We expect the euphoria of opening up again will also bring with it the reality of having to deal with items that have been long delayed as we have waited for things to re-start. But whatever it looks like, at DCOR, our amazing volunteers and dedicated staff will continue to be here, for all of us, providing support to any-one who needs it.

Yours in health,

Peter Donnelly
President, Board of Directors
Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region



OTTAWA AND REGION • OTTAWA ET LA RÉGION

Board of Directors March 31, 2021

Peter Donnelly,
President

David de Lunay,
Vice President

Frank Costello,
Treasurer

Shannel Rajan,
Secretary

Directors

Fatemeh Gido

Gordon Hill

Elle C. Labaky

Jaime Morse

César Ndéma-Moussa

Susan Padmos

Nirika Rawari

Dear volunteers and staff,

In early March of last year, when it was announced that some strict measures to combat COVID-19 would be implemented, it didn't even cross our minds that they might eventually include the need to turn the Distress Centre into a virtual operation. Even further from our thoughts was that we would still be here a year later.

We have often said how the volunteers are the lifeblood of the Distress Centre...and the staff our beating heart. Never has this been more in evidence than over the past year with the work everyone has put in to keep our crucial services going.




Our staff have demonstrated not only remarkable creativity in finding and implementing new solutions to allow crisis interactions to be effectively managed remotely, but previously unimagined levels of dedication in the long hours they have all put in to ensure we remain open, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. For this, we owe our amazing staff our gratitude.

For 52 years, as volunteers, we have welcomed into our lives the desire to help our neighbors, friends, colleagues and communities through the Distress Centre phone lines (and now chat and text). This year, we have further opened our homes. Answering interactions, attending training sessions and hosting strategy meetings from our personal safe spaces during pandemic isolation. As a result, the Distress Centre has been able to continue to provide important services to the community when they needed it most during these difficult times.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone that has contributed to keeping DCOR strong this past year.

Yours in mental health,
Your Board of Directors

P.O. Box 3487, Station C, Ottawa, Ontario, K1T 4J6
T: 613.238.1000, F: 613.722.5217, www.dcora.on.ca





About the Distress Centre



We are the people who are here, day or night, 24/7, to answer voice, chat and text interactions from those who are reaching out for help. Clients may have simple questions. Or they may be in crisis. Either way, with 216 volunteer Responders answering over 60,000 interactions a year, we provide an integral, important and vital service in the community.

Who counts on us? At any given time of day or night, people out there require our help. Whether they're depressed, lonely, overwhelmed or so distraught they're contemplating suicide, they will find a supportive and caring person at our end of the line. People of all ages, races, genders and social-economic groups call our confidential service, trusting that we'll always be here. And that's a trust we will simply never betray.

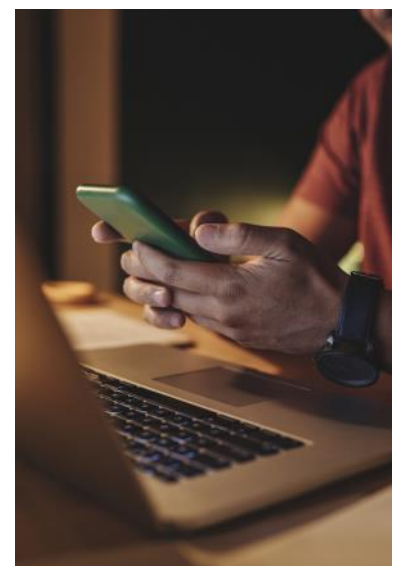
Who do we count on? Our volunteer Responders. We couldn't do what we do without them. Although they come from all walks of life, they do have some things in common - they give not only their time, but themselves. Patient, understanding and giving, Distress Centre Responders are trained to listen, talk through concerns or provide community resource information. In other words, whatever is needed, our Responders are there.

What else do we do? Considered a Leading Practice by the Health Standards Organization, our staff provide a telephone outreach service offered to patients who were recently discharged from hospital following an admission or a visit to the Emergency Department for a mental health issue to (1) ensure they are functioning well, (2) have made necessary connections with both formal community resources and informal support networks and (3) have been able to follow their discharge plan.

Transit users in Ottawa are able to speak with a Distress Centre Responder if they are in crisis or are feeling suicidal while using the transit system. A special button on pay phones located at various transit platforms and stations allows direct access to our Responders.

We also provide training, not only for our own volunteers, but for other groups as well, including colleges and universities, social service agencies, businesses, government departments and police staff. Our professional trainers, renowned for their expertise and knowledge, have trained on topics as diverse as conflict management, communication skills, stress management, suicide prevention, crisis intervention and more.

Where can you find out more? Visit www.dcottawa.on.ca



2020-2021 Board of Directors

Peter Donnelly, President

David de Launay, Vice President

Shannel Rajan, Secretary

Frank Cestnik, Treasurer & Chair/Finance Committee

Fatymah Dido

Gordon Hill

Elie C. Labaky

Jaime Morse

César Ndéma-Moussa

Susan Padmos

Nitika Rewari

HIGHLIGHTS!

In addition to keeping informed of any changes related to the pandemic and their impact on the Distress Centre, the Board of Directors spent considerable time on the development of an equity, diversity and inclusivity Vision Statement and Implementation Plan. Given the ongoing uncertainty brought on by the pandemic, Strategic Priorities were also crafted to ensure the well-being of the agency throughout the next fiscal year while providing the proper setting to maintain quality services for all clients during their time of need.

FAREWELL TO COLLEAGUES

The Board of Directors wishes to thank Diane Lepage who was a Director since 2017. Diane served as Board Secretary where she did an outstanding job. She was a thoughtful and active contributor on key areas of discussion at every meeting. This past year, Linda Mouhamou also ended her Board term. As a passionate advocate for equity and diversity, Linda played an integral role in elevating our awareness of EDI and furthering our EDI initiatives.



2020-2021 Distress Centre Staff

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Charles Laframboise, Executive Director

Kyla Clark, Volunteer and Client Support Coordinator

Ivie Edebiri, Wellness Check Coordinator

Jessica Grunwald, Manager of Volunteer Selection & Engagement

Judy Grunwald, Director of Corporate Services

Chantal Ladouceur, Director of Client Support and Educational Services

Leslie Scott, Manager of Media, Marketing and Communications

Robyn Young / Mélanie Guénette, Online & Educational Support Coordinator

DID YOU KNOW?

Together, the Centre's administrative staff of 8 employees bring a total of 90 years of experience in crisis service delivery.

SERVICE SUPPORT WORKERS

Angela Accettura, Nawal Araj, Alexandre Belisle, Marie Josee Chabot, Jade Côté, Angela Falker, Liam Gareau, Mélanie Guénette, Kendra Hawkins, Arcade Kakunze, Devin Lachaine, Chloé Landry, Karine Major, Lydie Masengo, Camille Maynard, Rebecca Nagrodski, Aaron Plowman, Sarah Romeo, Elnaz Saleh, Natalie Triemstra, Casper Watras

ONLINE CRISIS RESPONDERS

Nasri Chamas, Megan Fillier, Heather Fisher, Owen Freiheit, Sarah Grummett, Laurie Laird, Lydie Masengo, Kristina Montone, Faith Mottahedi, Sukanya Mukherjee, Aaron Plowman, Valérie Quinn, Chelsea Vineyard

WELLNESS CHECK SPECIALISTS

Angela Accettura, Marie Josee Chabot, Kendra Hawkins, Lydie Masengo, Rebecca Nagrodski, Aaron Plowman, Elnaz Saleh

SERVICE ASSISTANTS

Sarah Church, Megan Fillier, Kyle Johnson, Stefanie Oppenheimer, Casper Watras

Caring, Dedicated, Empathic

Staff Changes at DCOR



On March 16th, DCOR welcomed Mélanie Guénette as Online and Educational Support Coordinator.

Fluently bilingual, Mélanie completed a bachelor's degree with a Psychology specialization and Management minor from the University of Ottawa. She brings with her seven years of experience with different organizations including the ROTEL Foundation, Acuity Research Group and CHEO's YouthNet where she worked as a Mental Health Planner.

In Mélanie's words: "I have been a part of the Distress Centre as a Crisis Line Responder, Service Support Worker and now as Online and Educational Support Coordinator. I am intrinsically motivated to support our community outside of the organization, and our community inside of the organization. Like many others at the Centre, I have an open door/email/phone policy, so please feel welcome to reach out!"

Should we cross paths, you are likely to (virtually) meet my dog and be met with an open and safe space - whether to discuss items related to the Centre, share educational experiences/goals related to psychology/management, or engage in conversations about interests and adventures.

It is a pleasure and privilege to be joining the team as a Coordinator, and I hope we will cross paths!"

Bienvenue au sein de notre équipe, Mélanie!

Protecting Personal Information at DCOR

Since 2019, DCOR's Privacy Protection Working Group has been working diligently to review the Distress Centre's policies and processes to ensure that our agency remains in compliance with legislation and best practises with regard to the collection, protection, use, retention and destruction of personal information of clients, volunteers, staff and donors.

To accomplish their objectives, the Working Group reviewed legislative framework and guidance from the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario. Other distress centres in Ontario were canvassed to determine best practises (note that we focused on Ontario since the legislation regarding personal information varies from province to province). The Working Group also reviewed existing DCOR policies and website information on privacy/personal information.

Issues that were addressed touched on DCOR as a custodian of health records, implicit vs. express consent to collect personal information, the use of a recorded message to inform clients of personal information gathering, and more.

The Board of Directors is currently reviewing a draft Privacy Statement, Service Terms and Conditions Statement, and Complaints Policy in relation to the collection, protection, use, retention and destruction of personal information. The implementation of new policies and procedures will take place during the 2021-2022 fiscal year.



COVID-19 into Words (as shared by clients during the pandemic)

Overwhelmed

Challenging

Sleepless

Stress

MINDFULNESS

Waiting

Frightened

Frustration

FUTURE

Exhaustion

Cabin Fever

Anxiety

Suffering

PATIENCE

Addictions

Resilience

UNIFYING

Distrust

GRATITUDE

Endless

FINANCES

TOGETHER

Crying

Impact

COPING

MENTAL STATE

Risk

Depression

Struggles

Targeted

Confusion

Homeless

Anger

House Prisoner

Breaking Point

Alone

Triggers

Panic Attacks

Burden

Suicide

FREEDOM

Restrictions

SAFETY

Deteriorating

HOPE

FAMILY

ENCOURAGEMENT

Canada's Pandemic: Through the Eyes of Our Distress Centre

As the number of cases grew daily at the onset of the pandemic, the Distress Centre Responders continued to answer calls for help from the organization's Call Centre which offers a safe and comfortable environment, with plenty of space for physical distancing. However, as the provincial lockdown was fast approaching and anxiety was growing for staff and volunteers, a decision needed to be made - should the Distress Centre continue to operate from within the confines of its Call Centre, given that our services were deemed essential, or should the organization expand its remote response solution to include all staff and volunteer Responders?

An important asset of an organization is having the ability to recognize when change is needed, then to move as quickly as possible to make it happen. This not only applies where finances are concerned but also in times of crisis when reacting quickly could save lives. At the Distress Centre, our ability to adapt to changing needs was evident during past traumatic events such as the North American ice storm of 1998, the Northeast blackout of 2003 and the more recent Dunrobin-Gatineau tornado of 2018. Naturally, our first thought is always to ensure that our services continue to be available 24/7.

Therefore, with the pandemic situation barreling down on us in March of 2020, the safety of staff and volunteers was paramount if we were to maintain the service needs of our community. Within a span of approximately two weeks, a new service delivery model was implemented for the entire DCOR Team. Our efforts included:

- Research and evaluation of options for phone and computer software programs
- Installation and configuration of Splashtop software on all volunteer and staff home computers
- Twinning of phone system to each individual Responder's cell/home phone when on active duty
- Training of 224 volunteers and staff on new systems and processes (videos were produced, written instructions were prepared)
- Creation of Dropbox folder for new resource documents and activation of videoconferencing account

By March 31st, DCOR had successfully moved its operations to a remote response solution. On this day, all calls were redirected to volunteer Responders who were now working from home. Since then, DCOR staff have been on hand to ensure a smooth transition. At that point in time, staff were required to input each volunteer's number manually into the system at the beginning of each shift and remove their number at the end of the shift. Staff also had to be available to ensure the Splashtop features were working. These new tasks meant that job descriptions were modified to meet these new requirements. There were long days and long weeks as we navigated this new service delivery model. Software changes have now been made to enhance our remote response solution.

Providing a distress/crisis service to clients from various parts of the region, different areas of the province and, in some cases throughout the country, is not a simple task. Moving to a remote response solution is a bit like connecting hundreds of mini satellite sites into one central hub. This new way of doing business has taught us many lessons which have made us stronger as a team but it has taken a toll on many of us. As we move to a new hybrid system once restrictions are lifted and vaccinations are well underway, we do plan to spend some time with our staff and volunteers to celebrate our accomplishments, maybe heal a little, share some stories, laughs and tears, and remember a time when a global pandemic came knocking on our door and we stood guard for people in need.



Canada's Pandemic: A Year in Review

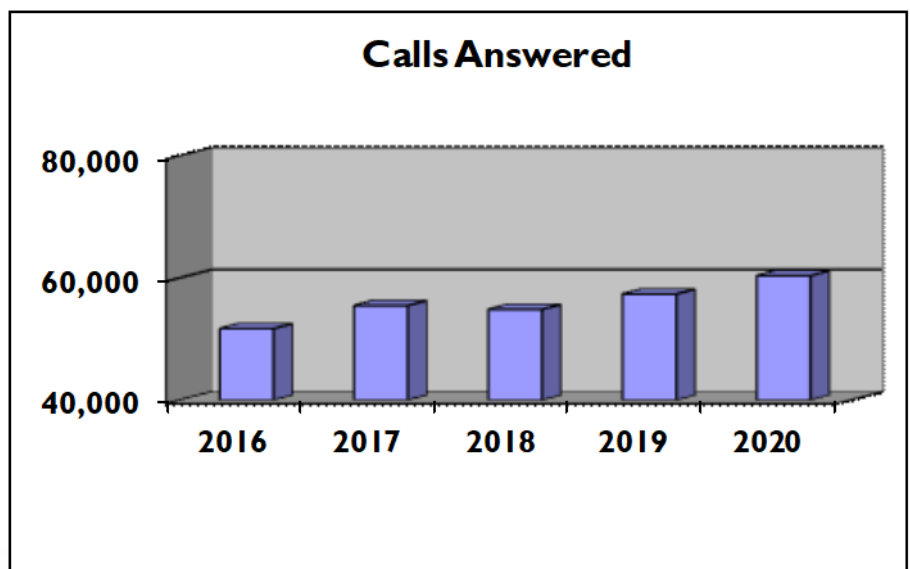


The Ottawa Distress Centre has answered in excess of 1.3 million calls for help in its fifty-two years of service to the community. The Centre provides a variety of community services to the residents of Ottawa, the Renfrew County, the United Counties of Prescott and Russell, the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry and Akwesasne Territory, the Counties of Grey and Bruce, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, West Québec, the Northwest Territories and the Nunavut Territory.

During 2020-2021, the Centre's Responders answered 60,366 calls. Fourteen percent of calls were related to the pandemic. Thirty-six percent of callers were either in distress or in crisis. Twenty-eight percent of people using our services had done so for the first time. More than 53% of callers were women. More than 63% of callers were between the ages of 25 and 54. Nearly 3% percent of callers were Indigenous, Métis or Inuit while more than 8% were from multicultural communities.

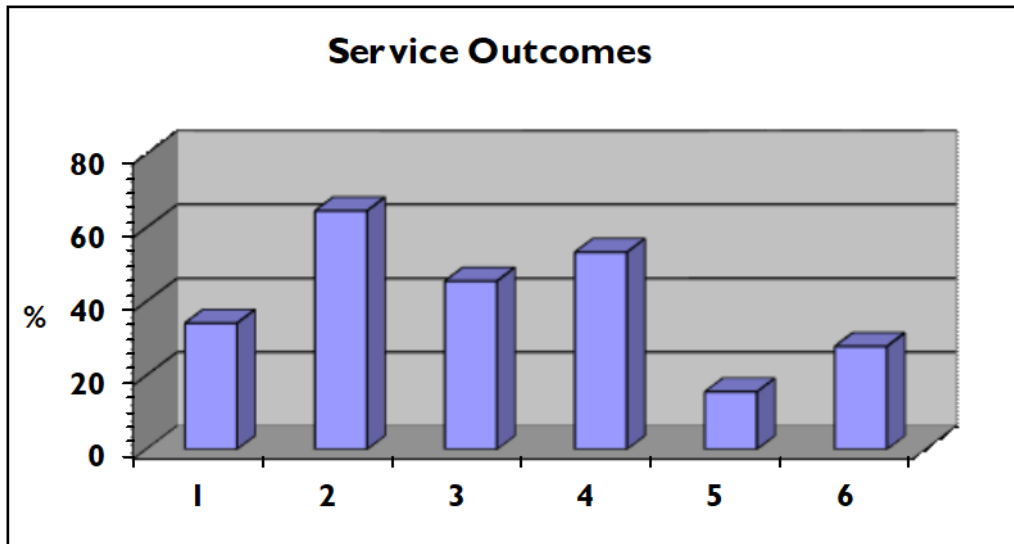
60,366 CALLS FOR HELP

85% of clients who contacted the Distress Centre appreciated the service they received from our Responders.





The Distress Centre consistently offers a high-quality service to its clients through its various distress/crisis lines. During the past fiscal year, 85% of clients told us they appreciated the service they received from our Responders. As shown in the graph below, the Centre has a tremendous impact on the lives of the people it serves.

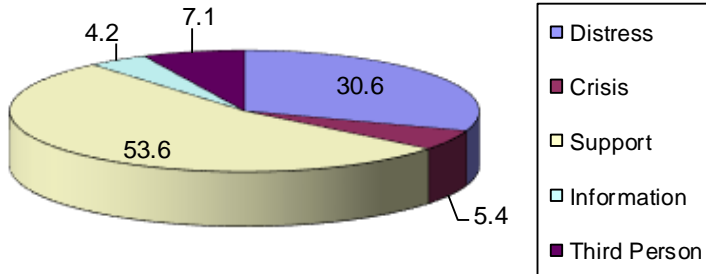


64.6% of clients experienced a decrease in isolation and loneliness following their call to the Distress Centre.

- 1 Action Plan Explored
- 2 Decrease in Isolation and Loneliness
- 3 Decrease in Distress/Anxiety Level
- 4 Increase in Ability to Cope
- 5 Increase in Knowledge of Resources
- 6 Increase in Self Care Coping Strategies



Major Types of Calls



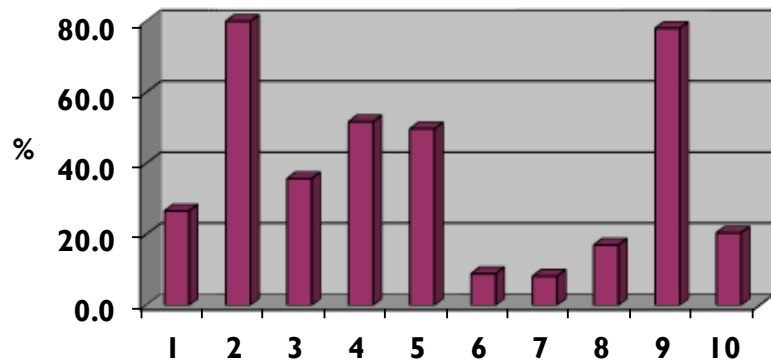
During the past year, **36%** of clients who contacted the Distress Centre were either in distress or in crisis.

Service for All

From April 1 to March 31, services were provided to 4,267 youths between the ages of 16 and 24, as well as 11,321 adults between the ages of 55 and 74.

Nearly 80% of clients who contacted the Distress Centre in the last 12 months were dealing with relationship issues.

Presenting Issues Addressed

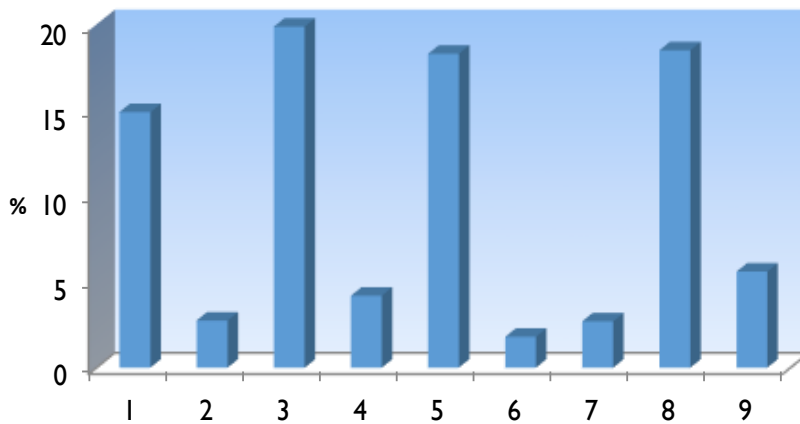


RESIL-
IENCE

- 1 - Suicidality
- 2 - Mental Health Issues
- 3 - Abuse / Violence
- 4 - Isolation / Loneliness
- 5 - Physical Health Issues
- 6 - Housing / Shelter / Food / Clothing
- 7 - Financial
- 8 - Legal
- 9 - Family / Relationships / Spouse / Partner
- 10 - Substance Abuse / Addictions



Diagnostics



- 1 - Anxiety / Panic Disorder / Phobias
- 2 - Eating Disorders
- 3 - Mood Disorder
- 4 - Personality Disorder
- 5 - Schizophrenia / Psychotic Disorder
- 6 - Sexuality
- 7 - Sleep Disorder
- 8 - Substance Addictions
- 9 - Developmental Disability

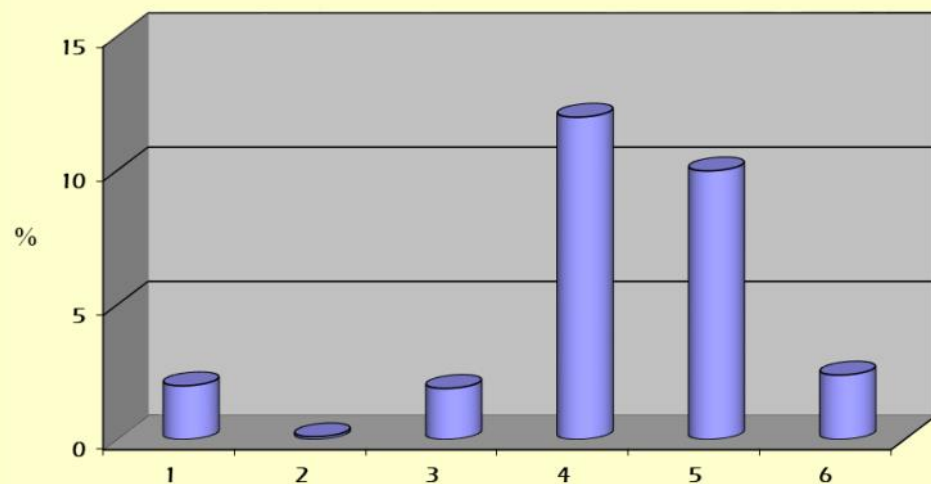
Community Referrals

In the past year, 9,823 referrals to our community partners were provided by our Responders to clients who were in need of additional assistance and support.

Transfers to Crisis Teams

In 2020-2021, our Responders transferred 2,838 clients directly to the appropriate local Mental Health Crisis Team where more help was provided to them.

Suicide Prevention/Intervention



- 1 - Self Abuse / Harm
- 2 - Attempt Commenced
- 3 - Moderate to High Risk
- 4 - Ideation
- 5 - Prior Suicidal Behaviour
- 6 - Survivor of Suicide

Suicide remained an important source of concern during the pandemic. A total of 8,452 calls were answered by our Responders from clients who experienced suicidal thoughts and /or behaviour during this difficult time.

Interactions Concerning COVID-19

During the past year, Distress Centre Responders answered 8,276 calls/chats/texts during which the main topic of discussion was COVID-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the number of daily calls related to COVID-19 ranged from a high of 46% in April 2020 to an average of 10% per day in March 2021. The following data provides a brief overview of characteristics of the clients who contacted the Distress Centre to discuss issues related to COVID-19.

The majority of clients were new to DCOR (35.5%), with 62.4% being female and 8.2% being from multicultural communities. Nearly 7% of clients were unemployed or were receiving social assistance (3.3%) while 4.3% had no income. Forty-five percent were in distress at the time of their communication with DCOR and fifty percent required support from our Responder.

Mental Health

More than 58% of clients reaching out to the Distress Centre were living with heightened stress/anxiety levels since the beginning of the pandemic. Many clients were living with mental health issues such as anxiety/panic disorder and phobias (18%), developmental disabilities (4%), eating disorders (1%) and post traumatic stress disorder (4%). Some clients reported being unable to care for personal needs (2%).

Interpersonal Issues

In 2020-2021, clients concerned with COVID-19 felt lonely and isolated (62%), while others were dealing with family issues (41%) or spouse/partner issues (13%), or general relationships issues (38%).



Abuse and Violence

In the past year, individuals calling the Distress Centre were often dealing with abusive issues including childhood abuse (12%) and emotional abuse (5%). Others were victims of physical assault (6%) or sexual assault (5%).

Outcomes

During their interactions with clients concerned with COVID-19, DCOR Responders worked with clients to explore an action plan (48%). Following a call to DCOR, clients experienced a decrease in their feelings of isolation and loneliness (77%) and a decrease in their level of distress and anxiety (62%). Clients experienced an increase in their ability to cope (61%), an increase in their knowledge of pertinent resources (22%) and an increase in self-care coping strategies (34%).

Reaching Out to Discharged Hospital Patients: Wellness Check Service



The Wellness Check Service is a telephone outreach service offered to patients who were recently discharged from hospital following an admission or a visit to the Emergency Department for a mental health issue to (1) ensure they are functioning well, (2) have made necessary connections with both formal community resources and informal support networks and (3) have been able to follow their discharge plan. It is the only service of its kind in Canada. Considered a Leading Practice by the Health Standards Organization, the Wellness Check Service has been identified by Accreditation Canada as a standard for hospitals to implement.

The service is available in the City of Ottawa, the County of Renfrew, and the United Counties of Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry, for patients from the Cornwall Community Hospital, Hôpital Montfort, the Ottawa Hospital (Civic and General campuses), the Pembroke Regional Hospital and the Queensway Carleton Hospital.

As the Distress Centre moved to its remote response solution, transferring the Wellness Check Service from the office to home was simple since the program was already set up for remote work. At the beginning of the pandemic, as the number of hospital visits and admissions fell significantly, the Wellness Check referrals dropped to less than 200 a month (for April and May 2020). Normally, we would receive over 300 referrals every month. In June, as the situation improved, the numbers were back up to over 300 referrals. Our Wellness Check Specialists were also able to reach more patients for their Wellness Check since so many people were now home. During Wellness Checks, patients discussed the impact of the pandemic on their mental health. Patients also mentioned that their follow up appointments were now offered virtually instead of seeing their doctor/psychiatrist in person. Some patients appreciated being able to work from home and spend time on their own or with their family.

As we know, the stay-at-home order in Ontario has been implemented, extended or cancelled on different occasions depending on our COVID-19 numbers. Whenever a stay-at-home order was put into place, the number of Wellness Check referrals dropped slightly only to return to normal within a few weeks (whether the stay-at-home order was lifted or not).

The Wellness Check Service was highly appreciated during the pandemic. Our hospital partners and their patients appreciated that DCOR could keep this service running during this challenging time.

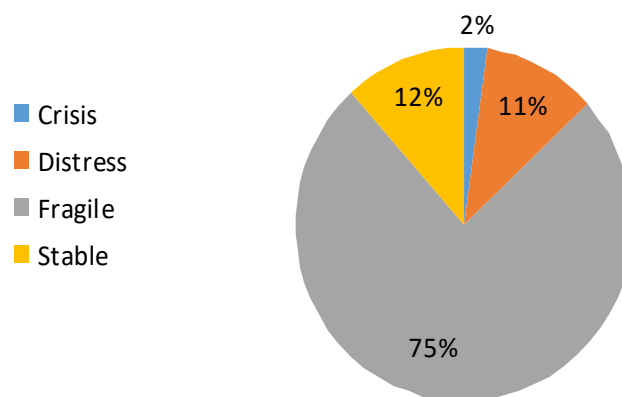




The Wellness Check Service in Numbers

**1,963 PATIENTS CONTACTED
IN THE PAST YEAR FOLLOW-
ING A VISIT TO THE HOSPITAL
FOR A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE**

Present State of Patients



37% of patients explored coping strategies

13% of patients expressed current suicidal ideation

Specialists explored an action plan with 51% of patients

31% of patients were in treatment for a mental health issue

In 46% of patients, there was a perceived improvement in their condition since hospitalization

77% expressed appreciation for their Wellness Check Call

42% of patients had sufficient supports to help them following a Wellness Check call



COVID-19 Response

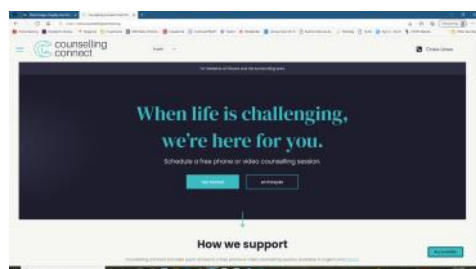
As the pandemic gripped our region, this caring community came together to take hold of the situation and determine a way forward, with special thought given to the most vulnerable and at-risk individuals. Groups of like-minded organizations joined forces to craft a COVID-19 response, to determine how to maintain services when many organizations were closed or working remotely. Thanks to the leadership of the COVID-19 Community Response Table, led by United Way East Ontario, community partners combined their efforts to find creative ways to support their clients living with mental health and addictions issues during a very challenging time. Following are two initiatives funded through the Emergency Community Support Fund (administered by United Way East Ontario) in which the Distress Centre happily participated.

Counselling Connect: Virtual Support Sessions

When the pandemic first hit, many regular mental health and addictions supports within our community were affected as in-person services were either suspended or altered.

In an attempt to provide alternative supports out of concern for their clients, a group from within the mental health and addictions community rallied together to discuss potential solutions. This group, now known as Counselling Connect, chose to focus their attention on modifying walk-in supports to virtual sessions.

DCOR was not initially part of this group. However, when Counselling Connect considered the most effective way to reach the community, they recognized that many people who required additional supports and who may be looking for walk-in services were often times already utilizing the Distress or Crisis Lines. This is how the initial partnership began.



Counselling Connect has come a long way since its inception on May 14th. Initially, this partnership entailed direct transfers to five individual walk-in clinics to book one-on-one sessions in a virtual capacity. Since that time, Counselling Connect has welcomed 15 other organizations, created a client-facing online platform that offers supports across the entire life span. The site also introduces intersectional supports and specialized services for African, Caribbean and Black communities, other racialized communities, and

LGBT2SQ+ communities. Clients are able to self-refer and access the supports in a timely manner.

DCOR now has the ability to schedule our clients for these counselling sessions in live time, through a site called Caredove. How does it work? If a caller is in need of counselling supports and provides their consent, our Responders can provide the information to a DCOR Scheduler who will then work with the caller to determine the most appropriate support for them. This can include counselling, addiction support, family support, specialized support, and system navigation. These supports can be offered in 3 official languages (French, English and Arabic) with the option of many more with the help of a translator. All supports are offered virtually and can be booked for same day or next day sessions.

One-third of all Counselling Connect referrals are currently scheduled by DCOR Schedulers. At this point in time, there are certain supports that can only be accessed through a DCOR referral.

This partnership is extremely helpful for our community. It provides our Responders with an additional level of support (at a time when the majority of our supports are not available) and it provides our callers with viable options, if escalation is required.



COVID-19 Response

Online Crisis Services

During the COVID-19 pandemic, on November 2nd, the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region had the privilege of introducing new Online Crisis Services (Chat and Text options) to the general public. These services allowed us to support members of our community through the means of chats or texts, in addition to voice interactions. Individuals of all ages residing in the Ottawa Region were now able to chat/text with trained Online Crisis Responders. The services are available everyday from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., and can be found on our website: www.dcottawa.on.ca

- For Chat services: Click on the  icon found at the bottom right of our website
- For Text services: Contact 343-306-5550

In light of developing technology, and individual needs evolving accordingly, online services are key to supporting our communities. Data collection and research was conducted over the span of a few years to successfully diversify our services with a new online service. In 2020, the Online Crisis Services were launched to meet the community's ever-changing needs and serve a larger portion of our community. These services allowed our clients to choose to reach out for support in a form other than by phone (i.e., chat, text). This expanded accessibility allowed us to reach community members who may not have felt comfortable speaking on the phone, who may prefer chat/text options, or who may not have been able to reach out to us as easily before (i.e., without TTY relay services).

Being mindful of some consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., more time at home, less privacy within the home), the Distress Centre was able to respond to changing client needs. While some clients are not comfortable using phone services, others may find themselves needing to use chat/text services due to privacy reasons (i.e., inability to call without being heard). Diversifying our services during the pandemic allowed us to reach more community members during a time of need.

The underlying service that the Distress Centre provides is the same regardless of whether it is by voice, chat or text. Despite this, there are some slight differences that exist depending on the type of interaction. While all interactions allow for rapport building, chat/text interactions lack vocal cues (i.e., tone of voice, emotions). The key to a successful online service is for Online Crisis Responders to adjust their approach accordingly. Another difference that we've observed is that clients bring up the reason for reaching out more quickly through chat/text than by phone. This may be due to a decreased need to build rapport with verbal cues. On average, online interactions also tend to be with younger clients, and they last longer than voice interactions.

Total number of chat/text interactions since the start of the program: 922

Age		Gender		Client Status		Content	
0-17	4.8%	Women	55.3%	New	66.9%	Support	55.2%
18-34	64.5%	Men	23.4%	Occasional	19.4%	Distress	30.4%
35-54	27.4%	Other	0.9%	Repeat	12.1%	Crisis	5.9%
55+	1.4%	Unknown	19.4%			Third Party	9.7%
Unknown	0.8%					Other	7.5%



Building Capacity in Our Community

The Distress Centre is in the business of helping people, whether it be by helping clients through their challenges or by sharing its expertise, knowledge and human resources with other local agencies and collectives to help build capacity within our community. By doing so, we hope to contribute to the well-being of the citizens we serve in as many ways as possible. Here are a few examples of how we contributed over the past year.

The Distress Centre tracks changes in the community and maintains regular contact with local service providers to ensure that our database of information is accurate and up-to-date at all times. Thus, our Responders are able to refer clients to agencies and organizations that can best meet their immediate needs. Maintaining and nurturing such relationships and partnerships throughout our serving region is an important aspect of what we do.

As part of its commitment to develop and enhance services for people living with serious mental illness, the Centre is an active participant in the Champlain District Mental Health Crisis Service Management Committee as well as the Champlain District Mental Health and Addictions Services and its Counselling Connect Coordination Committee.

Along with the Canadian Mental Health Association (Ottawa Branch), the Distress Centre is a long-standing member of Suicide Prevention Ottawa (an amalgamation of the Community Suicide Prevention Network and the Ottawa Suicide Prevention Coalition), the National Capital Group of ASIST Trainers and the Post Suicide Support Team.

The Distress Centre's trainers also offer customized training packages on topics such as suicide intervention, stress management, active listening skills and more to the public, local agencies, businesses and government departments. During the past year, these professional development courses were offered virtually. Dalton Associates, the Conseil Scolaire Catholique Providence (Windsor, ON), the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, the Psychiatric Survivors of Ottawa, The Royal and Regional Coordinated Access were amongst the organizations to take advantage of our specialized education.

As in past years, the Distress Centre continues to act as a complementary or after-hours service for many social agencies, community groups, churches, hospitals and mental health practitioners throughout the City of Ottawa.

Finally, the Distress Centre is an active member and contributor of Distress and Crisis Ontario and the Canadian Distress Line Network, two networking organizations that support and help build and sustain the capacity of its member agencies. Our Executive Director, Charles Laframboise, is also a founding member and active Director of Crisis Services Canada, the national organization offering the Canada Suicide Prevention Service.

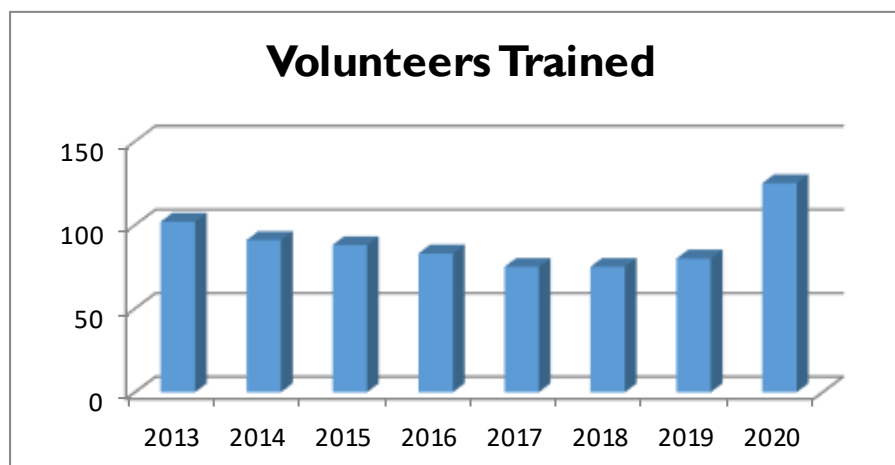


Volunteers: Friends and Neighbours Helping Those in Need During the Pandemic

The pandemic caused many unknowns, especially during the early months, but one thing that began to stand out from the onset was the need for mental health services. Many people in our communities were struggling with anxiety, fears, sudden job losses, worries of the unknown and a loss of social connections. Navigating through these unprecedented times came easier for some than for others. From the pandemic emerged a great number of people who wanted to be on the front lines, assisting and supporting those who needed that extra lift to get through their day. Helping with ways to cope in times of heightened stress and providing a listening ear was something the Distress Centre was well equipped to do. In fact, it's what we've been doing for over 50 years.

The Distress Centre received a tremendous response from individuals wanting to offer their time to support those in need, not only from our current volunteer base, but also from past volunteers expressing a desire to return to the front lines. Most noteworthy was an outpouring of interest from new individuals wanting to rise up to the challenge. Our increased presence in the media was seen by many who had not previously heard of the Distress Centre. Teachers, nurses, bus drivers – all hoping to be part of the team. We were also quite fortunate to be one of the few organizations still training and accepting new applicants into our program. The level of interest for volunteering was so significant that we set a new record for the number of applications received in one year - 476 people applied to become a volunteer Responder at the Distress Centre during the pandemic, representing an 82 % increase over the previous year!

In the beginning of the pandemic, a common theme emerged from new and experienced volunteers alike. There was this overarching desire to help the community in any way possible, perhaps due to a sense of urgency or a newfound inner strength. In new applications, 47% of individuals mentioned the word "Covid-19" in their submission. Some mentioned how this pandemic created such a difficult time, but the majority of volunteers simply mentioned that "COVID-19" was the reason that they wished to volunteer. As time went on, and months turned into a year, the pandemic took on an even greater toll. It became clear that the mental health of children and adults in our communities had been greatly affected. Perhaps, now more than ever, the need for services like ours will continue to increase. If so, this will require maintaining a thriving volunteer corps ready and able to help 24/7, and their mental health will be of utmost importance. After all, volunteers are at the heart of what we do and we are so proud to be able to count on such generous individuals.



Preparing Responders for Duty: Transitioning to a Virtual Training Environment

What a year it has been - 2020 was a time like no other. Although this was a year of challenges, it was also a year of change.

From global pandemics, social movements and even killer bees - the Distress Centre was able to remain open and operational at a time when many others were unable to.

How did we make this happen? Teamwork! With support from staff, Leaders and volunteers, we moved our services completely remote. But while we were responding to calls for help, DCOR also had to focus on recruiting and training new volunteers to ensure that our numbers remained at a level that would ensure the continuation of our 24/7 services.

For our Volunteer Training Program, this meant moving our in-class teachings to a virtual learning experience. We were fortunate that our training was already in a PowerPoint format which allowed us to maintain our training material intact. We did however have to move quickly to find a viable online platform that would meet our needs. We wanted to ensure that we could provide a training experience that was as close as possible to what we were previously offering.

Zoom Meetings Pro luckily had all the features we required. We did have to get creative to ensure that we could balance risk and safety. We adapted our training sessions to support more break-out spaces, check points and even one-on-one components. We introduced a Mentor program and partnership in an attempt to provide the same level of support at home as we had previously seen in DCOR's Call Centre.



Although it was a steep learning curve for everyone, we're very proud of the fact that we have now been training virtually for over a year. Our Responders are still as skilled, caring and compassionate as ever.

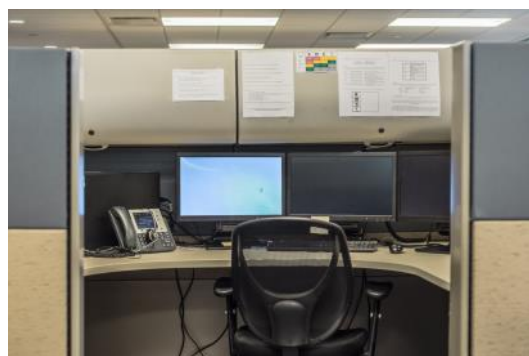
The pandemic may have pushed us out of our comfort zone and, truthfully, forced us to try a remote training response, but there may be a place for remote training in the future.

There may also be opportunities to support remote communities with virtual training, to recruit and retain virtually and even to provide an alternative for someone who is unable to travel to the Centre for the training program.

We are taught in training that it is important to acknowledge challenges. It's OK to say "Wow, that sounds really hard" and it was, but we are also taught that, at times, the most challenging moments can bring with them some very valuable lessons and exciting changes. This pandemic forced us to try something new. It forced us into this new virtual world that brought with it a lot of opportunities which could expand our reach, support, accessibility and involvements with a multitude of communities.

Testimony from a Distress Centre Responder and Volunteer Mentor Applicant

My reasons for wanting to become a part of the Mentorship Program with the Distress Centre are rooted in my volunteer experience this past year. When I signed on to be a Crisis Line Responder, I did so, like so many of the other members of my cohort, because of COVID. Because of the fear of what this pandemic would do to our communities, our loved ones, our friends - the kind of harm it threatened to our individual and collective well-being. And while a sizeable number of calls did (and do) concern the pandemic, without question the experience of working on the lines has just extended so much further beyond that subject matter. It has opened my eyes to facets of the human experience I would have never been privy to otherwise. It's changed how I view my interactions with everyone around me - how I understand and negotiate human vulnerability. But also, and I think more importantly, how I recognize human resiliency. It's taught me how abundant that resiliency is. How absolutely tenacious and inextinguishable. And so, while I joined the DC out of a kind of apprehension, my time working for the service has actually been one of incredible hope. And it stands, as I've told countless people, as one of the greatest privileges not only of this past year, but of my life to date. There is truly a power and a dignity to being granted the time and space to sit with a stranger in their moment of pain that you just cannot understand until you have done it. Of seeing how transformative and important this resource is for callers. And I wish more people would try it. We would all live in a better, more compassionate and less judgmental world.



I am incredibly interested in becoming a Mentor to help further this work by familiarizing new Responders to the ins and outs of serving on the lines. I know how much I benefited from the tutelage and mentorship of staff and senior volunteers during those early days of training and working from home, how much hearing their insights helped bring me on board to the Centre's mandate and purpose. It was a big reason I fought through those early nerves, why I became so invested so soon, and why I've remained invested this long. Now, more than a year into my time as a volunteer, I feel ready to guide others similarly. Based on my past experience working in student advocacy and education, I believe I have the skills to do so. And would be honoured to if afforded the opportunity."





Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity at DCOR

During the past year, our efforts to implement a strategy on Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI)¹ at DCOR focused on the creation of an expanded EDI Committee which moved towards better representation of the community we serve. Land acknowledgement statements are now included in DCOR meetings. Elder Annie Smith St-Georges attended EDI Committee and Board of Directors sessions. She shared her experience on Distress Centre work and her own work. She also provided guidance on Indigenous Peoples' perspective on mental health. Elder Annie also introduced the consensus based decision-making approach which has now been adopted by DCOR. Equipped with a new Terms of Reference, the committee is now moving forward with the review of DCOR's EDI Implementation Plan.

SEP 2018

DCOR assumes service for the Northwest Territories Help Line to support their residents, including the Indigenous and Inuit communities.

NOV 2018

The Board of Directors approves a Diversity and Inclusiveness Policy following a comprehensive review.

MAR 2019

DCOR's Chocolate Affair Gala includes a land acknowledgement statement for the first time.

MAY 2019

The Board of Directors identifies Diversity as a new strategic priority.

SEP 2019

A sociodemographic profile of DCOR's volunteers is derived from DCOR's Volunteer Survey.

OCT 2019

Staff & Directors complete an Intercultural Development Assessment and Training exercise.

FEB 2020

An equal opportunity statement is added to DCOR's Volunteer recruitment documents.

MAY 2020

DCOR's newly formed EDI Committee conducts a readiness assessment and visioning exercise.

JUN 2020

Inaugural EDI Committee meeting results identify we are ready (a "Good Fit") to engage; a statement for Black Lives Matter is released.

JUL 2020

The EDI Committee reviews four possible visions & selects one; an EDI lens review of the Board recruitment process begins, along with targeted community outreach.

AUG 2020

The Board of Directors approves the recommended EDI vision; DCOR takes part in supporting the Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities.

SEP 2020

EDI evolution, Volunteer sociodemographics and an acknowledgement of systemic racism is published in the Annual Report; the website is translated to French.

OCT 2020

The EDI vision, definitions and strategic plan will be presented internally and to stakeholders for feedback.

NOV 2020

The Board of Directors adopts a new Police Record Check Policy; expanded EDI Committee is struck.

JAN 2021

The Board of Directors welcomes Elder Annie Smith St-Georges to its meeting.

FEB 2021

EDI Committee Terms of Reference drafted to help guide future EDI Committee activities.

¹ **Equity** (not equality): the removal of barriers to address imbalances among different groups of people. **Diversity**: the representation of racialized and marginalized individuals. **Inclusivity**: ensuring different identities are valued, leveraged and welcomed within a given setting to give everyone a sense of belonging.

Data Management at DCOR

Volunteer Satisfaction Report
February 2020



In September 2019, the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region surveyed its volunteers to better understand their satisfaction levels, thoughts, and feelings. The need to develop a process through which the Distress Centre could gather information regularly from its volunteers was deemed an important aspect of our planning efforts.

Following the review of the Final Report, our Board of Directors discussed options to gather information, data and feedback on a consistent basis from our volunteer corps to guide the agency's future plans and directions. Our organization will now conduct a Responder Survey annually to gather demographic information from all Responders (volunteers and staff) to gain a better understanding of who they are. The data gathered through the survey will also help DCOR in the recruitment and training of our Responders. Over time, this annual survey

will allow us to describe characteristics of our Responders.

In addition to an annual Responder Survey, the Distress Centre will conduct a Volunteer Satisfaction Survey (such as the one completed in 2019) every three years, as part of its strategic planning process. This survey will help us gather information on different determinants of satisfaction (organizational culture, volunteer selection process, volunteer leaders, staff, shift scheduling, impact as a volunteer, volunteer interaction, volunteer training). The survey and its analysis will also help DCOR gain insight into four key research questions:

1. Are there barriers decreasing satisfaction and retention?
2. Are there factors increasing satisfaction and retention?
3. How is satisfaction affecting various groups from a diversity and inclusion lens?
4. What recommendations can be drawn from these results?

DCOR is now working with uOttawa's Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services on the design and implementation of DCOR's next Responder survey, as well as the design and implementation of the Volunteer Satisfaction Survey to be implemented in the spring of 2022.

Here are some of the actions undertaken by DCOR during the past year as a result of feedback obtained from volunteers through the 2019 survey:

- 1) Annual Reports are now available to the general public via the Distress Centre website. Reports for the last five years will be maintained on the website. The 2020-2021 Annual Report will be added to the list following the Annual General Meeting.
- 2) Staff are currently working on bringing back Exit Surveys for volunteers and Leaders. Previous versions are being reviewed and modified to include current content.
- 3) A section of the Distress Centre's Volunteer Newsletter will provide updates on actions emanating from the Volunteer Survey, as needed. A "Suggestion Box" will also be made available in the Call Centre (upon return) to encourage volunteers to share their suggestions for improvements at the Distress Centre.

By reaching out to our volunteers for their input, we include them in our efforts to build a better Distress Centre, for them and our community. We thank all volunteers who continuously share their thoughts with us!

Fundraising During COVID-19: A Different Approach

To say that this was an “interesting” time for the Distress Centre would be the biggest understatement of the year. While it was full of significant changes for everyone, we have adapted well but our approach to fundraising was modified dramatically.

At the beginning of the pandemic, like everyone else around us, we weren’t sure just how long this “disruption” would last. When it became apparent that this global event wasn’t going away after a few months of lockdown, and with an increase in calls for help, we realized that our planned fundraisers were most likely not going to happen. With much regret, our signature event (the Chocolate Affair Gala) was postponed until November 2021 (it has now been postponed to November 12, 2022). There were many discussions about the impact our cancelled events would have on our financial health – but everyone agreed that DCOR needed to do something to support the increasing demand for our services.

For starters, we ventured into a GoFundMe fundraising campaign. While the administration of this event had its challenges, the response from the public (and actors Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively!) was overwhelming. Within a few weeks, we had raised over \$14,000 for our services. It was clear that people wanted to support the Distress Centre through online donations, which is what we focused on moving forward to replace our cancelled events.

Throughout the year, we were reminded over and over again just how appreciative people were of our services during these dark times, highlighting how vital DCOR services are during tragic events. With social media messages, donations continued to roll in from \$5 to \$3000, not only from Ottawa but from other parts of the country as well. Different groups also joined our fundraising efforts, organizing various online and community events, birthday and anniversary celebrations, even “global” virtual gatherings, all to raise funds for the Distress Centre. Fundraising during a pandemic isn’t the easiest task, but recognizing how generous people are, DCOR seized the opportunity and made it work.

As we navigate through the remainder of this pandemic, it’s difficult to tell when we’ll be able to return to full capacity events. This will be dependent on case sizes and the vaccine rollout, along with the re-opening of the province. We continue to assess the situation and move events as needed. We also continue to encourage the community to host their own fundraising events virtually to raise funds for our services. We are also working on our own virtual events while we wait for 2022 to come along, hoping that it will be the year when we get back to normalcy.



Community Events Benefit the Distress Centre

Mindful Ink 3.0



Free World Tattoo partnered once again with the Distress Centre to host another edition of “**Mindful Ink 3.0**” which took place February 22-23 at the Free World Tattoo shop. Scheduled appointments for the initial event sold out in a few hours.

However, given the impact of the pandemic, Free World Tattoo accepted appointments until the month of November to raise additional funds for DCOR. During the event, participants could choose from a list of pre-designed tattoos displaying positive mental health connotations and pay \$100 to have it tattooed on their person (Free World Tattoo donated a portion of the proceeds to DCOR). There was also a raffle draw to win one of two \$500 gift certificates for Free World Tattoo.

Mindful Ink 3.0 raised a total of \$12,000 for the Distress Centre. We’re very thankful to Free World Tattoo and their devoted artists for their commitment and support of the Distress Centre.

Silver Linings Session

On May 2nd, Shawn Tavenier hosted The Silver Lining Sessions, a new Ottawa Livestream music show. Every week since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, Shawn and his colleagues produced two hours of online music and fun with the aim of bringing some entertainment, positivity and a sense of normalcy to people at home.

This group of talented local individuals decided to host a monthly fundraising show featuring submissions from artists from all over the city and beyond. On May 2nd, they organized 22 amazing musicians and they raised funds through the Canada Helps portal for the Distress Centre.

The online musical event raised \$2,485 for our agency. Here’s a tip of the hat to Shawn and his team for thinking of the Distress Centre during these difficult times.



Double the Love

The Adult Fun Superstore dedicated their fundraising efforts during the month of June towards the Distress Centre with their “Double the Love” campaign. Donations made by customers were matched by AFS, up to \$1000. This event raised a total of \$2,269 for DCOR. We thank the owners of AFS for their community involvement and generosity during this pandemic!

Yoga at the Farm



Third Line Health and Fitness held a charity “Yoga at the Farm” event on July 12th with the Distress Centre as their chosen charity.

Third Line Health and Fitness asked for a \$25 donation as the “entry fee”. A total of \$225 was raised for the Distress Centre. Many thanks to everyone at Third Line Health and Fitness for thinking of DCOR!

Ottawa Hospital Psychiatrists

During the summer months, a group of psychiatrists from The Ottawa Hospital came together to raise funds for the Distress Centre. Of particular interest to our donors was the Centre’s Wellness Check Service which offers outreach calls to patients who were recently discharged from hospital following an admission or a visit to the Emergency Department for a mental health issue. This creative initiative raised \$7,500 for the Distress Centre. Many thanks to all psychiatrists at The Ottawa Hospital for their generous contribution!



Forkgiveness Burger



NoForksGiven hosted a fundraiser for the Distress Centre with their “Forkgiveness Burger”. In partnership with local celebrity John Mielke, a specialty burger was created. With every purchase of the burger during the month of October, 25% was donated to the Distress Centre. NoForksGiven raised a total of \$934 for our organization. We’re very grateful to John Mielke and the folks at NoForksGiven for undertaking this “one-of-a-kind” fundraiser for us. Thank You!

Bingoland Gaming Centre



The pandemic was not very kind to bingo halls and gaming centres since they were required to close down early on. This was particularly difficult for the Bingoland Gaming Centre as it was entering significant renovations in their building and undergoing major changes to the gaming industry

as it will move to an electronic format in the near future. Despite these numerous challenges, the Distress Centre was the recipient of \$13,015 which will help cover costs related to DCOR’s volunteer support program.

TH
AN
K YOU!



2020-2021 Summarized Financial Statements

Financial summary for the year ended March 31, 2021

Revenue

Mental Health Crisis Lines	\$807,184
Distress/Help Lines	297,508
COVID-19 Response	189,294
Emergency Support Line for Paramedic Service	25,000
Ottawa Transit Crisis Service	79,152
Wellness Check Service	134,642
Individual and Corporate Donations	103,905
Professional Development Training	11,750
Fundraising Events	79,147
Interest Income	8,660
Special Grant	4,990
Bingo	<u>13,015</u>
	<u>1,754,247</u>

Expenses

Salaries, Benefits and Professional Development	\$1,195,641
Administration, Audit and Professional Fees, Dues and Memberships and One-Time Expenses	37,579
Volunteer Recruitment	125,606
Technology, Telephony	128,248
Insurance	10,467
Rent	107,698
Volunteer Program	24,989
Fundraising	-
Mental Health Crisis Lines	<u>-</u>
	<u>1,630,228</u>

Excess of revenue over expenses prior to amortization **\$124,019**

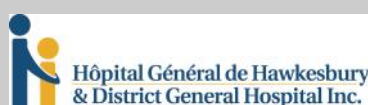
Amortization (19,971)

Excess of revenue over expenses for the year **\$104,048**

(audited financial statements are available upon written request)

Thank You for Your Support!

The Board of Directors wishes to thank all our funding partners that have supported us throughout the year. Your contribution is greatly appreciated. We look forward to working with you in the future.





**DISTRESS CENTRE de
CENTRE DÉTRESSE**

OTTAWA AND REGION • OTTAWA ET LA RÉGION

P.O. Box 3457, Station C
Ottawa, Ontario
K1Y 4J6

Phone: 613-238-1089
Fax: 613-722-5217
E-mail: office@dcottawa.on.ca
Web: www.dcottawa.on.ca
