

**Distress** | Centre de  
Centre **détresse**  
OTTAWA & RÉGION



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</u>	1
<u>VISION &amp; MISSION</u>	2
<u>ABOUT US</u>	3
<u>PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE</u>	<b>4</b>
<u>BOARD HIGHLIGHTS</u>	6
<u>TO OUR STAKEHOLDERS</u>	7
<u>Strategic Highlights</u>	7
<u>Operating Highlights</u>	8
<u>Financial Highlights</u>	9
<u>Looking Ahead</u>	9
<u>EQUITY, DIVERSITY &amp; INCLUSIVITY</u>	10
<u>KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS</u>	12
<u>Distress, Crisis &amp; Help Lines</u>	<b>12</b>
<u>Paramedic Services Support Line, <b>Online Crisis Services</b></u>	15
<u>Wellness Check Service</u>	16
<u>Volunteer Responders</u>	17
<u>Financial Summary</u>	18
<u>DISTRESS CENTRE STAFF</u>	19
<u>Thank You to Our Partners</u>	23
<u>Contact Information</u>	24

## *Land Acknowledgement*

Ottawa is built on unceded Algonquin Anishinaabe territory. The peoples of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation have lived on this territory for millennia. Their culture and presence have nurtured and continue to nurture this place. The Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region honours the peoples and the land of the Algonquin Anishinaabe.

*Meegwech*



MONTEBELLO QUÉBEC CANADA  
08 19 2021: Totem of Seven fires  
prophecy is an Anishinaabe  
prophecy that marks phases in the  
life of the people on Turtle Island, a  
Native American name for North  
America.

# Vision

To play a key role in establishing and maintaining a community where individuals in need are supported and empowered to meet **life's** challenges

# Mission

Working within the continuum of mental health services, we contribute to a healthier and safer community by providing support, without judgement, to individuals in need

# Guiding Principles

- ✓ Recognize our outstanding volunteers
- ✓ Protect **client's** confidentiality
- ✓ Ensure access 24 / 7
- ✓ Provide services free-of-charge
- ✓ Be accountable
- ✓ Transparency
- ✓ Diversity

## About Us

Our 200 volunteer Responders are here, day or night, to answer voice, chat and text interactions from those needing help. Some have simple questions; many are in crisis. By answering more than 56,000 interactions a year, we provide an integral and vital service in the community.

## Who counts on us?

People of all ages, races, genders and socio-economic groups call our confidential service. Here, they always find a supportive and caring person.

## Who do we count on?

Our Volunteer Responders and Leaders. Coming from all walks of life, they give not only their time, but themselves. DCOR Responders are trained to listen, talk through concerns or provide community resource information. Responders are supported by a team of dedicated Leaders who step in when a client is in danger, making necessary decisions when intervention is needed, and providing a listening ear to our responders.



## What else do we do?

Our staff provide an outreach service to patients recently discharged from hospital after admission or a visit to Emergency for a mental health issue. They connect with the client to ensure:

- They are functioning well
- They have made necessary connections with both formal community resources and informal support networks
- They have been able to follow their discharge plan

911 operators may transfer patients to the DCOR responders, who provide emotional support and stabilization for patients until the ambulance arrives.

We provide direct Distress Centre lines at various stations for transit system users who are in crisis.

We also offer training to a variety of groups including, colleges & universities, social service agencies, businesses, government departments and police staff on topics as diverse as conflict management, as well as communication skills, stress management, and suicide and crisis intervention.

## Where can you find out more?

[www.dcottawa.on.ca](http://www.dcottawa.on.ca)



## President's Message

As I write this in June, looking back over the 2022-2023 year, I am immensely proud of the work of the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region. We have continued to be an important resource for the communities we serve, answering more than 56,000 calls, providing support, crisis response and suicide prevention. Like many other organizations, we have been making the gradual transition to a world with fewer restrictions, welcoming staff and volunteers back to our office, call centre and training facility while maintaining the capacity for remote response.

It has been a time of change for the organization. After 35 years, Judy Grunwald, our Director of Corporate Services, retired but has continued in an advisory role providing continuity and expertise. We were happy to welcome Russ Gallant as Manager of Operations in January.



Leslie Scott, our Manager of Marketing and Communications, moved on to new opportunities. Kathyryn Leroux joined us at the end of March to take over that role with new energy. With these key roles staffed, we are better positioned to move forward on our Strategic Plan for 2022-2025. A key priority is improving our technology framework and work on this multifaceted initiative is well underway.

## President's Message Cont'd

The core of our organization: our 200 volunteer responders and 15 Leaders give their time and energy to listen, 24 hours a day. We can never thank them enough, and we were happy to bring back our in-person holiday celebration on November 30th and recognized our Leaders' contributions with an in-person barbecue in September.

Five members of our Board left DCOR in 2022. Peter Donnelly completed his term as Past President. Frank Cestnik, Fatymah Dido, Gordon Hill, and Nitika Rewari moved on to other endeavors – we will miss their sage advice. After a rigorous recruitment process, we welcomed Roxanne Anderson, Michelle James, Brian Mangan, Nicole Storms, and Matt Triemstra in June 2022.

Looking ahead, we anticipate some challenges as the funding environment, post-covid, for all nonprofit organizations is changing. We will need to explore new sources of funding to support our plans and services.

As part of that response, we have introduced the CanadaHelps donation system on our website, making it easier to donate and giving us improved capacity to understand our donor community.

All Distress Centres will be impacted by the anticipated implementation of a three-digit number for crisis response in late fall 2023. We are working with the implementation team now to try and determine our place in the new system.

Appreciative callers are a reminder of why managing change and addressing new challenges for the organization are all worthwhile:

“..a caller reached out to tell us that, last night, he called and spoke to a Responder, and she saved his life.... He said she showed she truly cared for him and stayed on the phone till she knew he was okay and saved his life that night....”



Susan Padmos  
President, Board of Directors  
Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region

## Board Highlights

**There's never a shortage of activity taking place at the Board of Directors' level.**

A new 2022-2025 Strategic Plan came to fruition in June 2022, with 3 main strategic goals.

Our Directors were involved in the development of several new policies including a Right to Disconnect Policy, an updated Human Resources Policy for Employees and a revised Agreement.

An initiative to review several Distress Centre policies with an equity, diversity and inclusivity lens was completed with a final report suggesting several improvements.

The Policy Review Working Group reconvened to complete an updated Resource Database, Inclusion Exclusion Policy and a new Nomination of Directors Policy which were adopted by the Board of Directors. Other policies are in the process of being reviewed.

**Working with former Director, Gordon Hill, the Board of Directors initiated the first review of Distress Centre**

## 2022-2023 Board of Directors

**Susan Padmos, President**

**Elie C. Labaky, Vice President**

**Roxanne Anderson, Treasurer**

**Michelle James, Secretary**

**Marija Cemna**

**David de Launay**

**Brian Mangan**

**Juliet McMurren**

**Nicole Storms**

**César Ndéma-Moussa**

**Matthew Triemstra**

**bylaws** to ensure that they are all in compliance with the new Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act. We expect to complete this task over the next fiscal year.

**In February, the Board of Directors held its annual Retreat, welcoming Directors, Staff and special guests to the half-day event. This provided an opportunity to better understand the current challenges faced by the organization and to learn more about important partnerships that DCOR nurtures to provide its services to the population.**



# TO OUR STAKEHOLDERS

## Strategic Highlights

Our strategic planning process started during the summer of 2021 with a goal to develop a roadmap for the organization as we considered our future path.

First Phase was to identify and understand the elements that could have the greatest impact for the Distress Centre, and that would be important when crafting a strategic plan for the agency. The planning committee considered data obtained from various surveys as well as information gathered through internal meetings, and a facilitated planning workshop for the Board of Directors helped identify three main goals for the organization.

- 1) DCOR invests in technological capacity that supports and improves the delivery of innovative services.
- 2) DCOR delivers exceptional service to the diverse communities of Ottawa and region.
- 3) DCOR is a model of excellence in providing a frictionless volunteer experience.

Staff and Directors worked to identify actions that were most important for the development and growth of the Distress Centre over the next three years. With this information, an initial plan was developed and approved by the Board of Directors in June 2022.

Next steps include aligning the 2022-25 strategic plan with resources (staff capacity and dollars) and laying the groundwork for a 2025-2028 plan.

## Operating Highlights

The entire Charity landscape is reporting being impacted by Volunteer and Staff shortages. COVID-19 continued to have an impact on people and the return to work greatly reduced the number of hours that individuals were able to provide as volunteers.

These shortages created numerous challenges, requiring Volunteers and Staff to fill in gaps to maintain 24/7 coverage.

2022-23 saw significant time and effort spent reviewing existing technology and developing a replacement strategy. The goal is to simplify the work of our Volunteers and Leaders, giving them the ability to work both on premise and remotely, and future-proofing our technology and data management systems.

Key focuses are:

1. Upgrading our server to a cloud-based version
2. Replacing our call centre management software with a new platform
3. Changing our telephone system to an all-in-one web solution

*In 2022-23, DCOR volunteers completed over 50,000 volunteer hours. Changes to Chat & Text services will see that number increase in 2023-24.*

## Financial Highlights

DCOR had another successful year, albeit more modest than the previous two years. The year 2022-2023 saw grants come to an end as the COVID-19 emergency response moved to the recovery stage. Personal and business donations were down over the previous year with people struggling financially during tough economic times. Focus going forward will be on developing sustainable fundraising activities to stabilize funding streams.

DCOR has been providing professional development workshops to other organizations for quite some time. During the past year, our trainers were busy training various groups on active listening, limits and boundaries, stress/distress/crisis, maintaining another source of revenue for our agency. This additional revenue stream will be a focus in the new strategic plan. Even with changes to funding sources, DCOR managed a modest surplus for the year.

***2023 and beyond will require DCOR to secure new streams of sustainable funding.***

### Looking Ahead

DCOR is committed to providing support services, using technology, systems and training that will simplify the work of our Responders, and ensure we continue offering the best quality service possible to those who contact us.

We look forward to working with our Volunteers, our Directors, our Staff and our Partners to move through this next phase of our adventure.

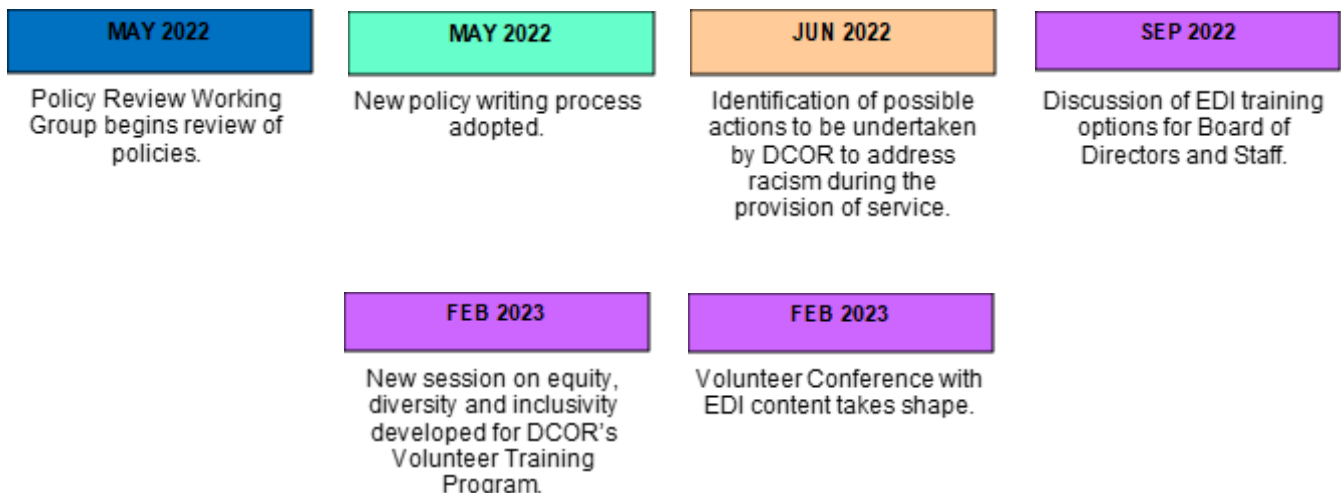
*Charles Laframboise  
Executive Director*

## Continuing the Pursuit of Equity, Diversity & Inclusivity at DCOR

The pursuit of equity, diversity and inclusivity at the Distress Centre continued during the past year.

DCOR's EDI committee struck a Policy Review Working Group to begin the review of DCOR policies with an EDI lens. Working with DiversiPro, thirteen of DCOR's policy documents were reviewed, with recommendations for improvement submitted to the Board of Directors.

During this initial phase, the Board of Directors adopted a new policy writing process. The Policy Review Working Group has now begun the task of addressing the recommended changes for DCOR's policies.



## Key Performance Indicators



# KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

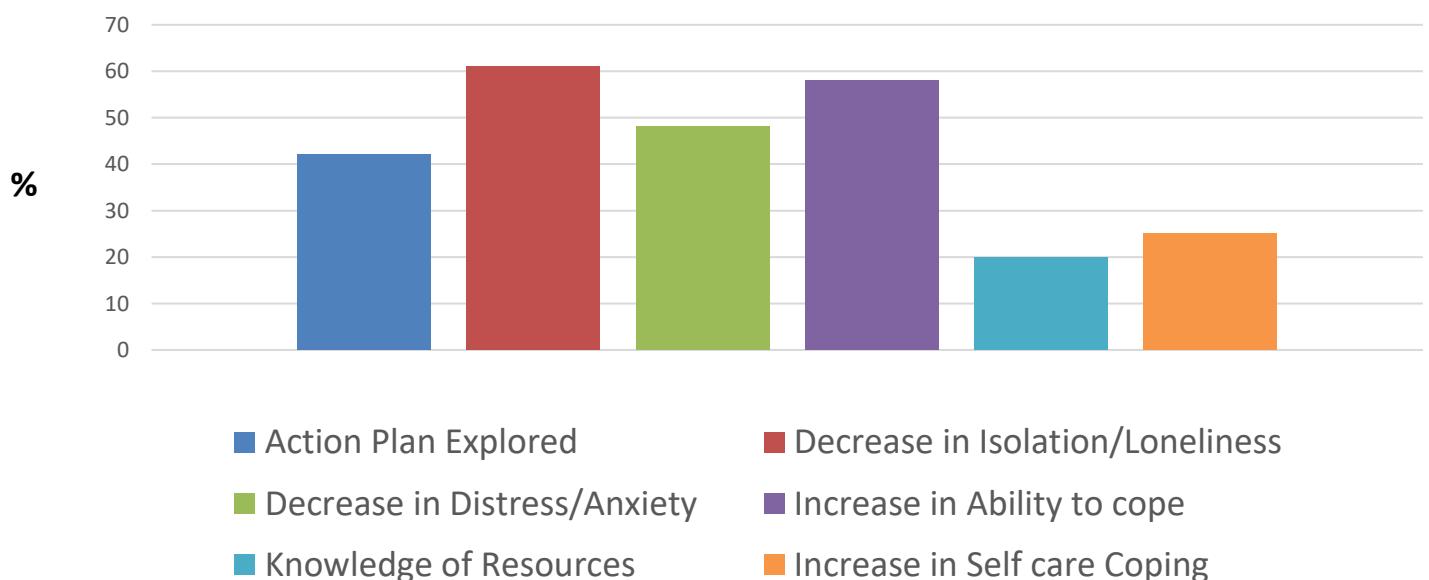
## Distress, Crisis & Help Lines

Over the last 54 years The DCOR has answered nearly 1.5 million calls. We answer distress and crisis calls for the residents of Ottawa, Renfrew County, United Counties of Prescott & Russell, United Counties of Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry & Akwesasne Territory, Counties of Grey and Bruce, West Québec, Northwest Territories, and the Nunavut Territory.

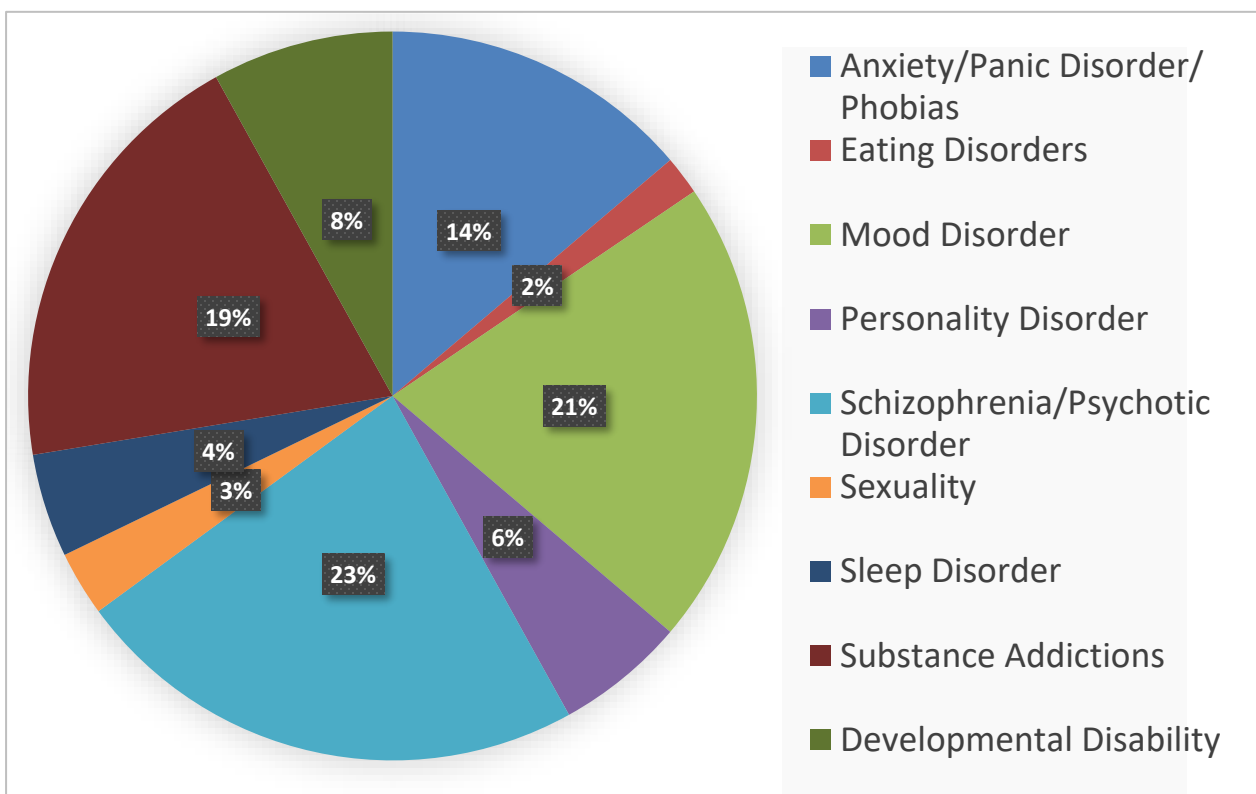
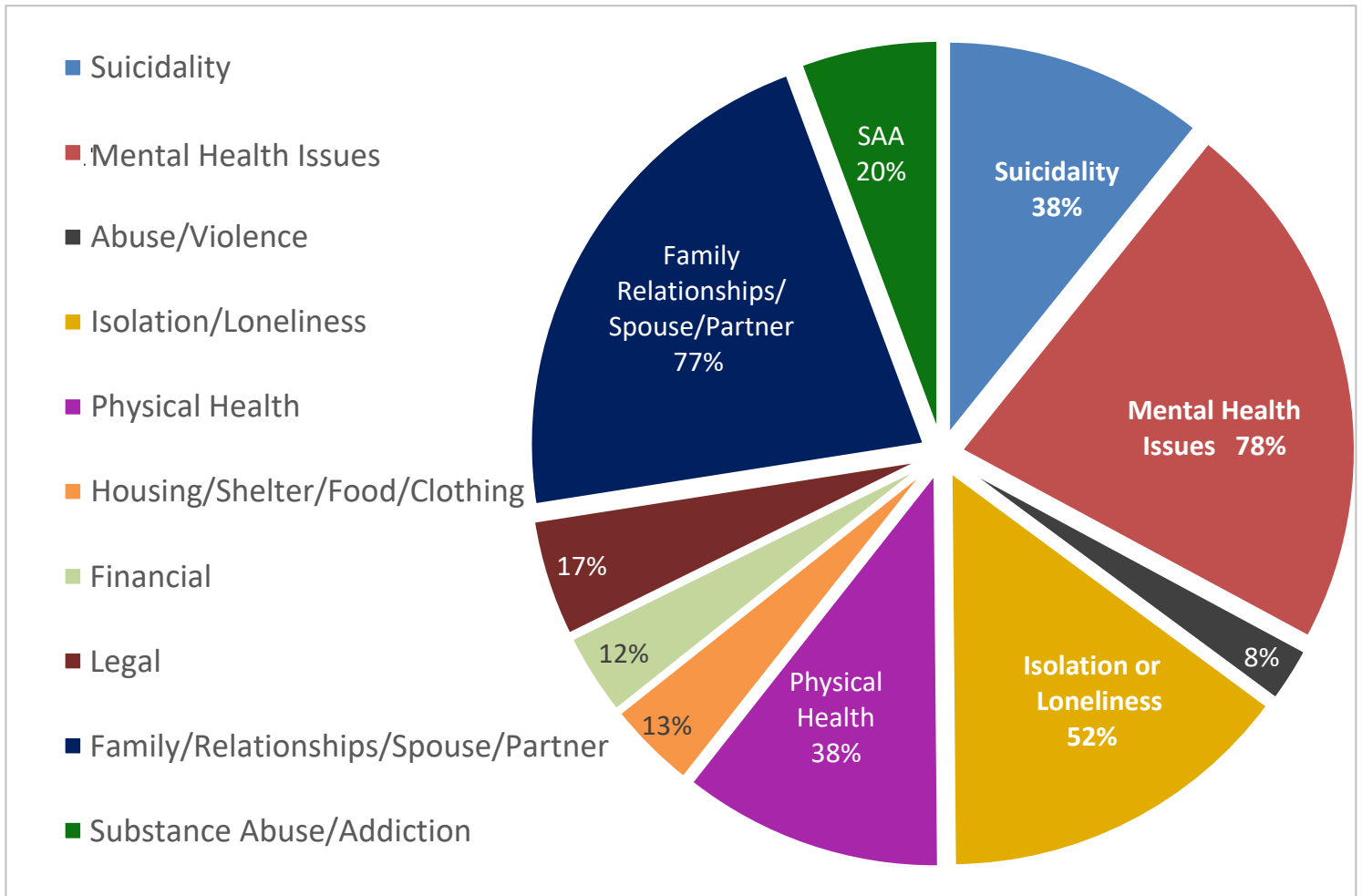
### Here is 2023-2024 by the numbers:

- 56,394 calls answered
- 53% of callers were in distress or crisis
- 35% were first-time callers
- 52% were women
- Over 67% were aged 25 to 64
- 4% percent of callers identified as Indigenous, Métis or Inuit
- 6% identified as being from multicultural communities.
- Almost 91% of clients told us they appreciated the service they received

## Callers Report on a Variety of Outcomes



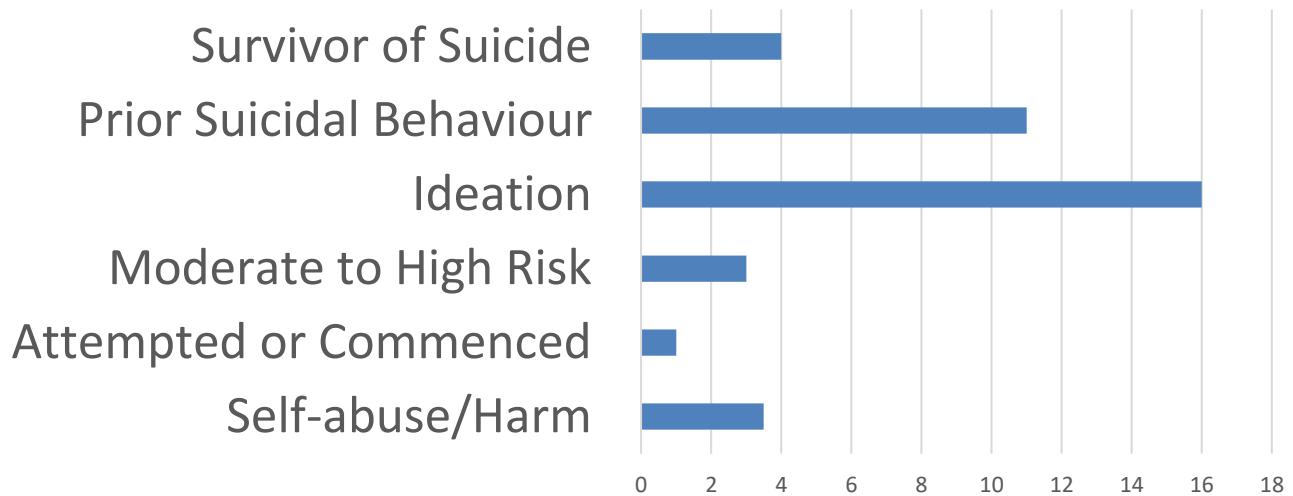
# Presenting Issues Addressed



**In the past year, we provided 10,777 referrals to our community partners**

## Suicide Intervention

In 2022-2023, we experienced a 10.7% increase in calls, over the previous year, from clients experiencing suicidal thoughts and/or behaviour.



In 2022-2023, our Responders transferred 3,257 clients directly to the appropriate local Mental Health Crisis Team where more help was provided to them.

## COUNSELLING CONNECT

In 2022-23, DCOR Responders referred 656 individuals for Counselling Connect sessions.

This service provides quick access to a free phone or video counselling session for everyone, in English, French, and other languages. There is no waiting list and individuals choose from available appointments with more than a hundred counsellors of diverse backgrounds.

## **EMERGENCY SUPPORT LINE FOR OTTAWA PARAMEDIC SERVICE**

In the past year, Distress Centre Responders supported 314 patients who were waiting for the Paramedics to arrive on scene due to a mental health issue. This bilingual service allows 911 Communications Officers to transfer patients experiencing mental health issues to Distress Centre Responders to provide emotional support and stabilization for patients while they wait for Paramedics to arrive. Callers may be exhibiting suicidal behaviour, have serious mental illness, or are dealing with psychotic episodes. The service is approved and supported by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Emergency Health Services Branch.

In 2022-2023, our Responders supported 314 patients transferred from 911 while they waited for Paramedics. In many cases, our Responders were able to stabilize the patient, resulting in the cancellation of the ambulance dispatch.

## **ONLINE CRISIS SERVICES (CHAT & TEXT)**

Since its inception in November 2020, DCOR has responded to 4,887 people requesting assistance via chat and text. These services allow us to support members of our community through the means of chats or texts, in addition to voice interactions. The services are available every day from 4:00 to 10:00 p.m.

## 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. The program endeavours to:

- Ensure they are functioning well.
- Have made necessary connections with both formal community resources and informal support networks.
- Have been able to follow their discharge plan.

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 but is currently the only service of its kind in Canada.

**In 2022-2023, 1,829 patients were contacted;**  
19% of patients expressed current suicidal ideation; we explored action plans with 51% of patients; 74% expressed appreciation for their Wellness Check Call.



## 4,000<sup>th</sup> Responder Trained by Distress Centre!

We were so pleased to be celebrating the training of our 4,000<sup>th</sup> volunteer Responder during the June/July Volunteer Training Class.

Becoming a Distress Centre Responder is no easy feat. Potential volunteers are screened for their suitability and, if accepted, complete 63 hours of training. The training includes instruction in active listening skills, using techniques such as reflection and clarification, as well as suicide intervention using the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training model.

Responders help callers work through their concerns and use their skills to empower callers to handle their own situations. They also provide clients with information on a variety of community resources. In times of crisis, Responders can always count on Crisis Intervention Team Leaders to provide guidance and support, and to debrief following a difficult interaction.

Experienced volunteers who wish to become Leaders receive an additional training to prepare them to deal with the most challenging situations and make crucial decisions when emergency services need to be contacted.



Do you know  
someone  
who would  
like to  
volunteer?

## Financial Summary for the Year Ended March 31, 2023

Revenue		Expenses	
Mental Health Crisis Lines	628,194	Salaries, Benefits, Prof Development	1,197,341
Distress/Help Lines	334,810	Admin, Prof Fees, Dues/Memberships	28,159
COVID-19 Response	179,537	Volunteer Recruitment	68,628
Emergency Line for Paramedic Service	25,250	Technology, Telephony	103,778
Ottawa Transit Crisis Service	79,152	Insurance	10,890
Wellness Check Service	135,954	Rent	114,216
Individual and Corporate Donations	70,966	Volunteer Program	46,981
Professional Development Training	28,940	Fundraising	371
Fundraising Events	39,331	Consulting, EDI and HR	14,217
Interest Income	12,923		
Special Grant	16,921		
Bingo	48,339		
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>1,600,317</b>	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>1,584,581</b>
		Excess Revenue Prior to Amortization	15,736
		Amortization	-14,923
		Excess Revenue Over Expenses	813

*Audited Financial Statements  
are available upon written  
request*

## Funding Focus

Identifying new funding streams will be critical to the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region as we struggle with aging technical infrastructure, telecommunications evolution, and a shift to hybrid delivery of services.

Competition for funding in the not-for-profit landscape is crowded. Many organizations have sophisticated, well-resourced development departments. DCOR will need to use efficient methods of targeting to reach responsive audiences.

A targeting Marketing and Fundraising Plan is in development for implementation in the third quarter of this fiscal year. This plan will leverage DCOR's reputation in the community and long held partnerships.

## Judy Grunwald ... in Retirement Mode

On September 24th, Judy celebrated 35 years of service to the Distress Centre. On that day in 1987, Judy started her journey as a paid employee of our organization.

Judy has been involved in various aspects of operations and finances since then. There were new telephone systems, one new database, new crisis services, new offices, all while achieving surpluses for the last 22 years at least, even through tough economic times.

Judy was then overseeing all Distress Centre finances and operations. She developed the annual budget, managed our finances, oversaw the computer and telephone infrastructure. She completed funding applications and program reports for our funders. She even replenished the kitchen stock. Her knowledge and her experience shone through every day that she worked for the Centre.



In February of this year, Judy took her first step towards retirement, or at least semi-retirement. Judy left her position as Director of Corporate Services and moved into a new contractual role with the Distress Centre, that of Financial Advisor.

Judy has had a long and successful career. We wish her a restful retirement, particularly on those days when she's not working on Distress Centre files, of course.

Thank you, for doing everything you did for us over the years!

Enjoy your retirement, Judy!

## Russ Gallant Manager of Operations

I was born and raised on Prince Edward Island, and at 18, I joined the Canadian Armed Forces. I served 20 years as a Finance/Admin Clerk, at various CF Bases across Canada.

I retired from the military in the early 2000s and moved to New Brunswick, to be the Senior Maintenance Manager at Hopewell Rocks Provincial Park. I thoroughly enjoyed the amazing scenic vistas this park provided.....no idyllic screensavers were ever required!

In 2011, I moved to Ottawa, and started a new role at The Good Companions Seniors' Centre, as their Director of Operations. Overseeing many of their departments, I gained a new appreciation for the passion that goes into creating spaces and programs where older adults can feel safe, welcome, and supported.

Closer to home, I am married to my wonderful wife, Annie. I have a beautiful little golden-doodle named Izzie and have two fantastic (adult!) kids and two perfect granddaughters.



If you're not sure where to find me, I'm probably off singing and playing my guitar, telling "dad jokes", or watching my Maple Leafs!

I'm looking forward to getting to know the wonderful volunteers that make the Distress Centre so critical to our community; to finding new technology that can help us work smarter; and to supporting our team to continue to grow that much stronger.



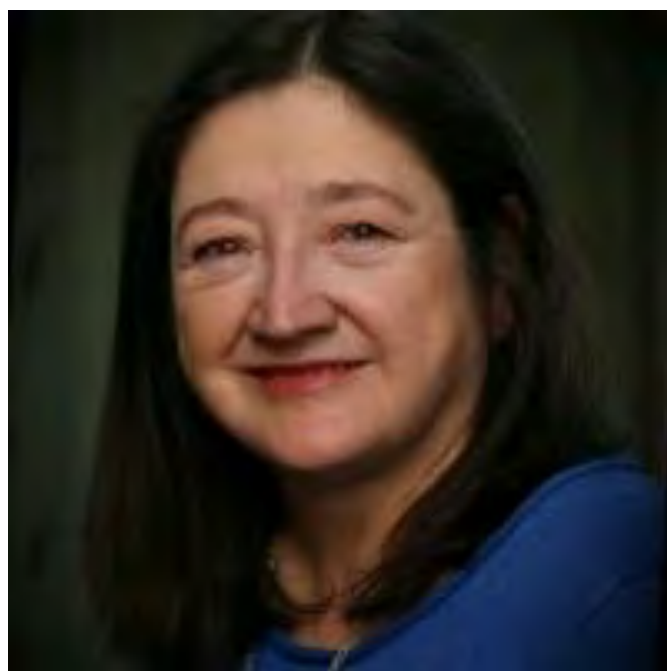
## Kathyrn Leroux Manager of Marketing & Communications

I have called Ottawa my home for most of my life. One of the things I most appreciate about living here is the great access to Big-city services all in a place with a Small-town feel.

My background has been mostly in marketing, communications, and business development. Most recently, I acted as The Executive Director of Business Development for Algonquin College where I had previously sat on their Board of Governors for 6 years.

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of working closely with many local Not-for-profit organizations primarily in a volunteer capacity. I'm thrilled to now be a full-time member of the team here at DCOR. There are so many exciting developments in the community services world, and I look forward to helping the Centre through this next chapter.

In my own time I like to travel and I read as much as I can. I also consider



myself to be a pretty good cook, and my husband Richard and I have a pretty good Chef/Sous-chef relationship (although sometimes I let him wear the big hat)!

My happy place is Vancouver Island where we join family every summer for 2 weeks of some of the most glorious scenery in the world.

If you'd ever like to talk about how we can support the DCOR through marketing, communications or fundraising, give me a call!



# 2022-2023 Distress Centre Staff

## ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

### **Charles Laframboise**

Executive Director

### **Ivie Edebiri**

Wellness Check Coordinator

### **Russ Gallant**

Manager of Operations

### **Jessica Grunwald**

Manager of Volunteer  
Selection & Engagement

### **Chantal Ladouceur**

Director of Client Support  
and Educational Services

### **Kathryn Leroux**

Manager of Marketing and  
Communications

### **Alyssa MacDougall**

Online & Educational  
Support Coordinator

### **Emma Worrell**

Volunteer and Client Support  
Coordinator

## SERVICE SUPPORT WORKERS

Angela Accettura, Daphne

Bailliu-Chaloux, Marie Josee

Chabot, Liam Gareau, Sarah

Gostlin, Mélanie Guénette,

Chloé Landry, Chloe Maignan,

Rebecca Nagrodski, Tessa

Natale, Lisa Roach, Robyn

Young

## SERVICE ASSISTANTS

Connor Davidson-Whelan,

Megan Fillier, Kendra Hawkins,

Rena Hector, Will Jackson-

Monroe, Lydie Masengo,

Kristina Montone, Valerie Quinn,

Jessica Wheeler, Kiera Young

## ONLINE CRISIS RESPONDERS

Megan Fillier, Owen Freiheit,

Lydie Masengo, Kristina

Montone, Valerie Quinn

## WELLNESS CHECK SPECIALISTS

Angela Accettura, Marie Josee

Chabot, Kendra Hawkins, Lydie

Masengo, Rebecca Nagrodski

# THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



# How To Reach us

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