



Answering the call.

2025/26 Annual Report

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Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region (DCOR) is located on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation.



Crafted by Algonquin Elder Dan Bowers from a fallen 116-year-old tree. Representing peace for all nations.

The peoples of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation have lived on this territory for millennia. Their culture and presence have nurtured and continue to nurture these lands and waters.

We honour the peoples and land of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, and all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, and their valuable past and present contributions to this land.

True reconciliation requires ongoing effort and accountability, and we are committed to fostering a future that honors the dignity, rights, and contributions of all Indigenous peoples.

Executive Director's Message

The first time I walked through the doors of the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region, it was as a volunteer.

Starting in 2021, I got to know many of the staff through our virtual interactions and learned by listening to my fellow volunteers as they showed up for their community again and again. I still recall many of the calls I took and find myself wondering how the people I spoke with are faring today. Four years later, I am prouder than ever to work alongside people who listen deeply, without judgement, at any hour of every day.

I have spent my entire career in public health, working across Canada and beyond, and I see clearly that the mental health needs of our community are both growing and changing. The growth is evident: each year brings more calls and requests for connection than the one before, with this past year being our biggest yet. The continuing growth of Canada's 9-8-8 National Suicide Crisis Helpline, of which DCOR is a proud founding partner, brings even more voices from outside our region into our headsets. Many people contact us when they are in deep crisis and are struggling to find hope and safety. It is hard to know that someone is suffering, and it is our privilege to sit with them in that moment.

Increasingly, though, we answer calls from people who are not yet in crisis but feel themselves moving toward it. They reach out because they are lonely, frightened, or feeling intense emotions they cannot carry alone; because they need resources or referrals and are unsure of where to go; or because a brief conversation with someone who cares helps them to face the day ahead. Some people call us once; some people call us regularly. These calls are not always the conversations that people picture when they think of our impact, but to me, this is as much a part of our mission as the crisis calls. They are a reminder that DCOR does not only respond to mental health emergencies; we also prevent them.

When I told people I was joining DCOR, I could not believe how many people had a story to share with me. Some were donors, some were callers, and some were past responders who could still recall their 'DCOR Volunteer ID' number decades later! What an incredible legacy to be a part of. I am inspired by their commitment to seeing mental health as an essential priority in Ottawa and beyond. This trust makes our work possible. In my new role, it is my responsibility to support those that support others, and I am deeply committed to keeping the engagement and wellbeing of our responders at the forefront of our priorities. I am grateful for the warm and encouraging welcome I have received from volunteers, board members, and colleagues.

As the needs of our community grow and change, so must we as an organization, and I have no doubt that we have the people and passion to make the biggest difference possible. I am tremendously proud to join you and am hopeful for all that we will achieve together.



Jessica Ferne
Executive Director

President's Message

This past year was one of transition and renewal at DCOR. After 25 years of service, Charles Laframboise officially stepped down as Executive Director to enjoy a well-deserved retirement.

During his tenure, Charles was instrumental in shaping DCOR into the trusted community resource we are today. On behalf of the board, I want to thank Charles for his commitment to our community and our team.

Recognizing the importance of choosing our next leader, the Board undertook a rigorous and competitive search process.

The care, consideration, and diligence of the DCOR Executive Director hiring committee was remarkable and ultimately, we were fortunate to identify Jessica Ferne as our new Executive Director.

Jessica brings extensive experience in the non-profit and health sectors. Most fittingly, however, she first came to DCOR as one of our volunteer responders, and she possesses understanding and deep respect for the work our responders do every hour, every day.

I am confident that she will lead DCOR into a new chapter defined by a commitment to excellence, engagement, and impact.

Together with Jessica and the DCOR staff, our focus as a board has been on strengthening our foundations to meet the growing regional demand for our services.

This year, we launched a thorough board recruitment process to strengthen our governance, and also worked with staff to design our first ever volunteer survey.

The results give us insight into how to strengthen wellbeing over the coming year, in keeping with our strategic commitments.

At a national level, we were delighted by January's announcement that renewed funding for the 9-8-8 program for two years. This financial commitment signals that mental health remains a Canada-wide priority, and that the work we do at DCOR is life-saving and essential.

Through all the changes that this year has brought, our service remained constant: whenever someone was in crisis, a compassionate voice was there to answer the call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

I remain, as ever, in awe of the contributions of our responders. This year, our network of 313 staff and volunteers provided nearly 62,000 caring interactions – a record-breaking number.

As we enter what will certainly be our biggest year yet, I am confident that DCOR will continue to bring hope and healing to all those we serve.



Matt Triemstra
President, Board of Directors

About the Distress Centre

Since 1969, the Distress Centre of Ottawa & Region (DCOR) has been a source of connection, hope, and empathy for those experiencing stress, distress, and crisis.

Operating 24 hours a day, every day of the year, DCOR provides accessible, confidential, and non-judgmental support and referrals in both English and French.

Through our phone lines, community partnerships, training, and volunteer-driven programs, we ensure that no one in our community faces their most difficult moments alone.

Our model is built on strong partnerships.

Our flagship distress and crisis line services responded to calls from across the region over the past year, as well as from Nunavut through our support of the Kamatsiaqtut Helpline.

Through our partnership with the 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline, we also provide nationwide crisis support, connecting with callers from coast to coast to coast.

In addition, DCOR offers wellness check services for individuals recently discharged from hospital or after an Emergency Department visit related to mental health concerns, delivered in collaboration with our hospital partners.

DCOR is integrated into community services through our collaborations with the Ottawa Paramedic Service Emergency Support Line, as well as the OC Transpo Transit Crisis Service to provide specialist mental health care and maximize first responder resources.

As part of our commitment to mental wellness, DCOR brings our celebrated community education and training programs to volunteers and the wider community.

External Training

Leveraging our extensive frontline experience, our external trainings are practical, evidence-informed workshops, designed to enhance communication skills, build resilience, and strengthen effective client interactions across diverse professional settings.

Our training is highly interactive and grounded in real-world scenarios, ensuring participants gain relevant, actionable skills that can be confidently applied in their day-to-day roles.

In 2025 we reviewed and revamped our external public training programs in preparation for an expansion of this area in 2026.

We help to build the capacity of other organizations and individuals to listen deeply, de-escalate tense situations effectively, and connect meaningfully with others.

Year at a Glance



44,790
All DCOR lines



9-8-8
15,630
Calls



1,350
Phone check-ins
through our Wellness
Check-in program



17
Community Events

"...very interactive. I did not feel bored at all. Enjoyed the explanation and energy of the trainer"

"...thoroughly enjoyed this session...made me rethink some challenges/scenarios and how to improve"

"Trainer is very knowledgeable and she made the content more interesting with her experience"

On the Lines

Responder development priorities are shaped each year by what we hear on the lines and by the topics responders want to learn about.

This year, partner organizations provided training on medical assistance in dying (MAID), homelessness, and intimate partner violence.

We also expanded our course offerings, strengthened community partnerships, and joined new training lists—building our own knowledge while supporting others.

To improve accessibility and flexibility, we shifted all training to a remote format.

This allowed participation from people unable to travel to DCOR's downtown Ottawa office or those with accessibility needs, broadening the diversity of our team.

We also enhanced support for responders during shifts.

A new supervision model introduced "Listen and Learn" shifts, where experienced responders listen to live calls and offer real-time coaching.

A competency-based rubric and end-of-shift reports now provide consistent, actionable feedback.

In December, DCOR was honoured to host The Honourable Minister Marjorie Michel, Minister of Health and Ms. Nancy Hamzawi, President of the Public Health Agency of Canada, alongside colleagues from CAMH.

The Minister spoke directly with our responders about the importance of mental health supports in the community.

We were grateful for their acknowledgment of DCOR's role as a founding partner of Canada's 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline as well as our status as one of the initiative's top partners by call volume.

On January 16th, DCOR warmly welcomed the announcement of the 9-8-8 Helpline's renewal.

This is a clear signal of confidence in this work and the value of this community-based model of care.



Visit from The Honourable Marjorie Michel, Minister of Health

In the Community

Our work in the community is focused on supporting initiatives that provide for a safer environment for everyone.

External Training

External training remains a key priority for the Centre because caregiving takes many forms, and support often comes from people who may not see themselves as caregivers at all.

Our training helps community members—both those in formal caregiving roles and those who simply want to help—learn how to support individuals experiencing stress, distress, or crisis.

Through sessions on active listening, empathetic assertiveness, safeTALK, and ASIST, we provide practical, evidence based tools that empower anyone to play a meaningful supportive role in their community.

National 9-8-8 Conference

In October 2025, the first national 9-8-8 conference brought together partners from across the country, creating space to connect around shared challenges, emerging opportunities, and ways to continue strengthening this vital service.

Media Partnerships

The Centre has continued its strong relationship with local media who continue to broadcast our message to the community in connection with mental health issues. We are grateful to tremendous support from all our partners.



Community Events

The Centre had a busy year participating in events and carrying our message to the community at large. Supported by our volunteers we were able to participate in over 17 community events and fundraisers including:

- Ottawa Black Mental Health Week conference
- Canderel's Mental Health Day
- The Capital Pride Parade
- WOW (Working On Wellness) Festival
- Project Management Institute's Ottawa Valley Outaouais Chapter Annual Conference
- International Overdose Awareness Day
- Ottawa Cold Plunge New Year's Day Celebration
- Algonquin College Harm Reduction Fair
- Tamarack Ottawa Race Weekend

Volunteer-Powered

This year, DCOR launched a revamped volunteer survey. Designed together with volunteers and the board, this survey provided useful insight on volunteer motivations, as well as suggestions for how DCOR can better support our volunteers.

Future surveys will dive more deeply into key issues to ensure that volunteers feel engaged and supported throughout their tenure with DCOR.

78%

of respondents volunteered to give back to the community

66%

of respondents volunteered to fulfill school or accreditation requirements or support continued learning



Ottawa Police Chief, Eric Stubs, speaking at our Volunteer Holiday Event

Many volunteers continue with us beyond their initial commitment. When asked why, here's what they said:

"I want to continue to support the community. DCOR also gives me the opportunity to stay grounded, feel for the plight of others and keep an open mind"

"I feel like the service gets more valuable each year and I like contributing to the community effectively"

"Simply because I love it!"

Call for Volunteers

If you're looking for a volunteer opportunity where you can make a real, immediate difference — join the Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region. You'll be that reassuring voice, helping people find comfort and hope. Comprehensive training is provided, so you'll feel ready and supported every step of the way.

Impact Stories

There is no question that the Centre makes a meaningful difference in people's lives.

Through direct testimonials, the City of Ottawa's annual survey, and the impact statements gathered by our new Mental Health Public Activation unit, *Can We Talk?*, we receive ongoing affirmation of the value and impact of our work.

"...I manage PTSD while working and trying to maintain a normal life. I do have a therapist however I can't call her at 3AM.....They really help, in just calming down from anxiety attacks."

"This program gives me support that helps me support myself and my family. I am so thankful for the difference that it makes in my life to be able to talk to someone when I am in need"

"The responder helped me tremendously and I owe her my life in that moment I was not okay but she made me feel heard and wanted."

"The Distress Centre of Ottawa has been a lifeline for me. I have struggled with depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. The people who work on the Distress Centre phone line have helped me get through some tough times. I am very grateful for the service."

"The people that I speak to are always extremely understanding and supportive. They are great listeners and they always help me to feel better and more confident in the various situations."

"I called today in distress. I spoke with a woman who was so kind, compassionate and attentive...I felt so much more stable afterwards..."



Good Governance and Operations

DCOR's volunteer board of directors play an essential role ensuring good governance, and we are fortunate to have many long-serving supporters in these roles.

This year marked the conclusion of impressive 6-year tenures for Elie Labaky and César Ndéma-Moussa. Their expertise and dedication have strengthened our organization in lasting ways, and we are grateful for their service.

With a total of three potential vacancies on the Board, DCOR launched an extensive recruitment process this year to ensure we bring new, strong perspectives and expertise into the fold.

At the organizational level, DCOR experienced a transition in leadership. Led by our board hiring committee, together with the support of Keynote Search, an Ottawa-based executive search firm, DCOR undertook a competitive process to recruit a new Executive Director.

Jessica Ferne stepped into the position in November 2025, with a supportive transition period by outgoing Executive Director Charles Laframboise.

On the operations side, DCOR invested in strengthening our foundations by engaging expertise in financial and human resources processes.

We also upgraded our scheduling software and enhanced our cybersecurity practices through the implementation of mandatory multi-factor authentication.

We look forward to seeing the results of these investments in the coming year.



Looking Forward

As community demand for our services continues to grow, DCOR aims to grow as well.

The investments we made this year in governance, operations, service delivery, and community engagement have laid a strong foundation on which we can build.

Central to this is investing in the wellbeing of the people who make it all happen. Our responders give considerable time and energy, and the emotional toll of this work is one we take seriously.

As an increasing number of our volunteers prefer remote work to in-centre opportunities, we are adapting how we engage and support them, and we are drawing on the insights from this year's survey to prioritize what matters most to them: flexibility, strong support systems, and up-to-date technology.

Guided by our strategic plan, which extends through 2027, we will strengthen and stabilize each of these areas to ensure that those who care for our community feel cared for in return.

We will also prioritize deepening our community partnerships and continue to champion mental health across our region, carrying the voices and needs of our callers to decision-makers whose support shapes what is possible.

There are many ways to be a part of the work ahead: whether joining us as a volunteer, supporting as a donor, or bringing DCOR into your workplace or community for training.

We have the people, the partners, and the drive to make a meaningful difference in the wellbeing of our community, and we look forward to achieving great things in the year ahead with you.



Together with our Partners

Thank you to the individuals and organizations who make our work possible.

Proud partner in



Board of Directors

The Distress Centre is grateful to its 2025–2026 Board of Directors, whose leadership, expertise, and dedication help guide and govern the organization in support of our mission.

President

Matt Triemstra
Vice-President Government Relations, Restaurants Canada

Vice President

Nicole Storms
Human Resources Professional, CHRP

Treasurer

Roxanne Anderson
FCPA, CA, ICD.D

Secretary

Matthew Chan
Counsel, Department of Justice Canada

Directors

Catherine Bennett
Retired Public Sector Executive

Elie Labaky
Lawyer, Provincial Private Practice

Brian Mangan
Academic Chair, Algonquin College

Daniele Medlej
Senior Consultant, Navigator Ltd.

César Ndéma-Moussa
Eastern Ontario's Director of Equity, Diversity & Inclusivity in Child Welfare

Jaye Poirier
National Labour Relations Manager, Canada Post

Our Team

Our work is made possible by the hard work of our staff who work tirelessly to ensure that the line is always open. Thank you to the incredible team that worked with us this past year:

Abdullah Khakwani	Lisa Roach
Afia Asante	Lydie Masengo
Aileen Mo	Madeline Hiltz
Alex Davis	Maja Elek
Alexandra Milman	Marie-Josée Chabot
Allison Ewacha	Marissa Hamlin
Angela Accettura	Marko Popovic
Angela Eevli	Matt Johnston
Brent Lamborn	Mihai Sarbu
Charles Laframboise	Mouheb Karoui
Chloe Landry	Muniza Khakwani
Chloe Maignan	Natalie Triemstra
Daphne Balliu-Chaloux	Nawal Araji
Eveline Gorodezky	Nika Khossravi
Fariba Sharmin	Nora Bellahnid
Felicia Edomwande	Ravina Thineshkumar
Ikraam Said	Ray Hu
Jonathan Gatogato	Reem Karam
Katelyn Burelle	Regan Barager
Kiera Young	Robyn Young
Kristina Montone	Sarah Gostlin
Laura Vandenberghe	Seva Dhanoa
Leonardo Recalde	Sumaiya Mir
Lisa Paul	Tracey Pope
	Tulsi Barot

Executive Director

Jessica Ferne

Director Client Support & Educational Services

Chantal Fleury

Director of Finance & Operations

Russ Gallant

Manager Marketing & Communications

Kathryn Leroux

Manager Volunteer Selection & Engagement

Jessica Grunwald

9-8-8 Service Manager

Maryanne Monroy

Responder Onboarding Coordinator

Zhenya Hakobyan

Social Media & Marketing Coordinator

Xarlasht Khan

Volunteer & Client Support Coordinator

Vidisha Singh

Wellness Check Coordinator

Ivie Edebiri

9-8-8 Services Coordinator

Kailey Witham

Quality Assurance Specialists

Connor Davidson-Whelan

Quinn Lin

Financial Statements

Summarized Financial Statements for the year ended March 31, 2026.

Revenue		Expenses	
Mental Health Lines	427,804	Salary, Benefits, and Training	1,873,675
Distress/Help Lines	248,757	Audit and Professional Fees	57,263
9-8-8 National Service	1,341,523	Media, Vol. Recruitment	174,463
Paramedic Support Line	26,000	Comms & Technology	160,025
Ottawa Transit Crisis Response	81,980	Insurance	29,761
Wellness Check Service	138,025	Rent	118,610
Donations	50,127	Volunteer Program	40,905
Prof. Develop, Training	5,350	Administrative	25,551
Fundraising Events	33,222	Other Expenses	7,750
Interest Income	28,144	Professional Development	6,977
Capital Contributions	0	Amortization	5,041
Bingo	89,241	Dues and Memberships	1,243
Special Grant	31,898		
Total Revenue	2,502,071	Total Expenses	2,501,264
		Excess of revenues over expenditures before extraordinary item	807
		Extraordinary Item	47,128
		Total Excess Revenue	47,935