

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

Volunteers are a precious resource of DCO's member organizations, and instrumental in making this network strong. Distress Centres Ontario is proud of all the volunteers who serve Ontarians through their member centres. They serve with compassion and dedication, upholding the ideals of the distress line movement, whether listening with empathy or providing leadership within their centres. Again this year, the Selection Committee is delighted to acknowledge the high quality of volunteers who are nominated for the 2013 Spirit of Volunteerism Recognition in memory of Rev. Chad Varah. We are pleased to introduce this year's nominees and recipients.

### Please join us in congratulating this year's Nominees & Recipients

#### **Molly Benoit Leach**

*Distress Centre Peel  
Young Adult Volunteer*

Molly is finishing her Bachelor of Applied Science in Psychology and will be moving into a Masters in Social Work in September 2013. She began volunteering with Distress Centre Peel in 2011 to expand her knowledge of mental health and quickly became a volunteer mentor, a role normally given to senior volunteers with coaching ability. She also helps in training with new volunteers, teaching them how to speak with empathy while talking to callers.

"I have a passion for volunteering because it is such a necessary part of social services. I want to take care of our communities and our people," Molly says.

She loves to help people and offers her empathy and knowledge of youth mental health issues in her volunteer work with the Kid's Help Phone and Associated Youth Services of Peel, an agency that works with children, adolescents, and families involved in the youth justice system and in need of mental health services. Molly is looking forward to summer when she will have the opportunity to volunteer internationally helping to set up day and overnight camps for Romanian orphans.

#### **Sandra Campbell**

*Distress Centres Toronto – North York*

After barely one and a half years, Sandra Campbell has emerged as one of DC Toronto-North Branch's most skilled and conscientious help line volunteers.

Sandra is exceptionally reliable with super human time management skills – during the week she takes 6 am shifts in the phone room, or as a Crisis Link volunteer takes calls from subway platforms to help reduce subway-related suicides. With her warmth, empathy and respect, callers are in great hands when Sandra is on the other end of the line.

She has excelled in volunteer training with a knack for putting nervous trainees at ease, and supports the more experienced volunteers after challenging calls when they just want to debrief. Sandra works a fast-paced full-time job and takes on an equally demanding volunteer position with Victim Services Toronto, which exposes her to traumatic events in others' lives.

Despite this, Sandra never appears burnt out or too stressed to handle her shifts at Distress Centres Toronto. This selfless, cooperative, creative, and enthusiastic volunteer thrives on adrenaline – Sandra has her First Jump Certificate in skydiving and is an Advanced Open Water Certified in scuba diving.

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## **Sam DeKoven | RECIPIENT**

*Telephone Aid Line Kingston (TALK)*

*Young Adult Volunteer*

Sam is a full-time university student majoring in Physics and lists dance, piano, and creative writing as hobbies. Despite his busy student life he has still managed to devote much time to TALK, including over 330 hours on the phone lines. Sam is dedicated to improving the organization and his commitment to making his centre's office and working environment safe and welcoming. This has been recognized by his fellow volunteers, earning him TALK's monthly peer-nominated "Above and Beyond the Call of Duty" award.

Eager to take on extra responsibilities early in his time with TALK, since 2011 Sam has held three different executive positions: Volunteer Liaison, Trainer, and Coordinator. He has trained to provide on-call support to volunteers, launched his own initiatives to improve his organization's policy development, upgraded the training manual, and updated computer code for TALK's internal communication system. Sam has also conducted community workshops for staff at the Kingston branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

"One of the largest benefits of Distress Centres is the spirit of empathy instilled in their volunteers," Sam says, "and this is something that I will carry with me for my entire life."

## **Sarah Dewdney**

*Distress Centres Toronto - Downtown*

Sarah has been with Distress Centres Toronto since 2010, giving her time, expertise, and calming presence to callers and fellow volunteers in the phone room. She was one of the first volunteers asked to partake of additional training to answer Crisis Link calls from TTC subway platforms to reduce subway-related suicides.

She serves as a volunteer mentor during training and helps coordinators impart Distress Centre training information and volunteer skill evaluation. She allows new volunteers to shadow her as she takes calls and helps debrief them after they take their first calls. She shares her experiences with volunteers, making the training material truly come alive. Sarah is considered a "superstar volunteer" by the staff at her agency.

Sarah is also active in the PAIRO (Professional Association of Internes and Residents of Ontario) training, where she takes calls from medical residents or students struggling with the difficulties associated with academic life in a medical program.

Sarah's compassion is not limited only to those who may be

oppressed, or marginalized, but is extended to all living beings – she is a compassionate vegan and volunteers with Toronto Vegetarian Association's Food Festival.

## **Gary French**

*Distress Centre Durham*

Since he began volunteering at DC Durham in 2004, Gary has donated over 1,489 hours of his time. His empathetic helpline work extends to Distress Centre's Prideline Durham program, ensuring that the especially vulnerable and isolated LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning) people in the community have a non-judgmental and safe place to turn to when in crisis.

Gary participates in the Group Leader program, encouraging other volunteers to complete their monthly shift commitment, and organizing social events with his team of volunteers helping them feel more connected. Gary's enthusiasm for volunteering has extended to his centre's Basic Training sessions and mentoring new volunteers through their first shifts.

Through the many hours he has donated to training and mentoring other volunteers, Gary has assisted in reaching out to more and more callers each year. From his work with fundraising events, training, and taking calls on the Pride and help lines, Gary is a stellar example of a dedicated and empathetic volunteer.

## **Evangelia Kirou**

*Distress Centre Windsor-Essex*

Evangelia, or Evie, started with DC Windsor-Essex in 2012 and amazed her trainers with her natural ability and quickly learned the empathetic skills required for distress line work. She completed her required number of phone room hours for the first year of volunteering in just eight months! Evie acts as a true mentor, sharing her experiences and guidance with new volunteers coming into the phone rooms.

She strives to support each caller with genuine empathy, compassion, and understanding. Evie has a positive disposition and a reflective way of tackling all areas of life. She supports the Distress Centre by undertaking extra tasks, whether it is in the office or at fundraising events, and by helping to promote DC Windsor-Essex within the community. Within a year she became a trainer and continues to give more of her time.

When she isn't researching skin cancer at her day job or taking calls on the distress lines, Evangelia is a volunteer dance instructor for youth in her community.

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## **Patty Lo**

### *Distress Centre Peel*

Patty started learning about mental illness in 2003 when a close friend was hospitalized for depression. When she found out about the Distress Centre in her region, she decided that through the agency she could help people like her friend, and started volunteering with DC Peel in 2004.

Since the beginning, Patty has demonstrated a great responsibility to people in need of support. She has donated over 1,500 hours to the phone lines, offering her compassion to callers, and reliably taking the Tuesday morning shift, where repeat callers dial in to take in her loving, caring voice.

She is a member of the Peel Association for Handicapped Adults (PAHA), and volunteers her time and craft-making skills to help people with disabilities. Patty also helps in senior's homes, making tea for residents of the Wesburn Manor in south Etobicoke, and organizing fund-raising bingo events at Sheldon Villa.

## **Dustin MacDonald**

### *Distress Centre Durham*

#### *Young Adult Volunteer*

Since Dustin began volunteering with Distress Centre Durham in 2011, he has already clocked over 599 volunteer hours. Beginning as a placement student, Dustin stayed on to become one of the most dedicated and hardworking volunteers at DC Durham. He participated in Durham's Strategic Planning Day, got involved in the Group Leader program, and sets a wonderful and motivating example as a shift mentor to his peers.

Dustin's commitment to mentoring new helpline volunteers, leadership, and his help with fundraising events has exceeded the expectations of Durham's staff. He consistently connects with and motivates volunteers to give their time and energy.

Not only does Dustin easily build rapport with new callers and help them in their time of distress, he meets the needs of Distress Centre's regular callers, making them feel they are a part of a large support network. While taking emergency intervention calls, Dustin is calm and can find immediate support for callers, making them feel safe and listened to.

## **Brian McDonald | RECIPIENT**

### *Distress Centres Toronto – Scarborough*

From his years of volunteer coaching kid's sports, Brian learned that there are often insufficient human resources available relative to the needs of the community. Five years ago, he

began donating his time and experience as a former law enforcement officer and current life coach to the Distress Centres' phone lines. Callers going through difficult times are in good hands when they speak to Brian.

After only a year, he was asked to become a trainer and has mentored many with professionalism and expertise. Brian promotes teamwork among all the volunteers, encouraging everyone to work together to the same end – caring about people and wanting to make a difference.

Brian has an incredible ability to function under challenging and stressful situations. In the summer of 2011 he was chosen to be part of the Crisis Link intervention, responding to suicide calls from TTC subway platforms, and answering the partner line with Toronto Emergency Medical Services, supporting callers with suicidal ideations until the ambulance arrives. In the fall of 2011 he brought his skills and experience to the Survivor Support Program helping others get through insurmountable losses. Brian values this community service and is proud to be a part of it.

## **Nicola Pizzirusso | RECIPIENT**

### *Distress Centres Toronto - Downtown*

Nicola believes her own personal challenges give her insight to better empathize with the difficulties distress callers experience. The single mother of two leads by example and wants her little girls to grow up considering others who live outside of their own experiences.

Nicola began volunteering in 2010 and quickly became comfortable with the various types of calls that come through. She often takes the early morning shift and takes suicide calls from Toronto subway platforms as a member of the Crisis Link team. She is involved with the Survivor Support Program and has trained to take calls from Toronto Emergency Medical Services.

Nicola is also a mentor and trainer who empowers volunteers to get comfortable with their own style and rhythm of lending support. She possesses a natural calming presence and a sense of openness that allows others to feel safe and comfortable about opening up and sharing difficult moments with her.

Outside of DC Toronto, Nicola supports the parents of sick children through the Ronald McDonald House, raises money and awareness for blood cancer research, and travelled to Ecuador with a grassroots organization that gave her the opportunity to participate in programs supporting the most impoverished and marginalized children in the country.

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## **Celine Poon**

### *Distress Centre Oakville*

Since 2010, Celine has been comforting and supporting local callers, diffusing challenging situations, providing excellent crisis prevention, and helping people regain emotional equilibrium. Her friendliness, warmth, and genuine empathy come through even with the most challenging of calls. Her centre receives positive feedback from callers because of Celine's ability to create a safe environment where callers can speak freely and be supported to "think out loud" about their situation and come-up with some possible solutions.

Celine is Distress Centre Oakville's cherished cheerleader and a terrific ambassador for the Oakville centre, spreading the word about community support systems and doing her own fundraising, including asking family and friends to donate in lieu of birthday gifts. Celine and her husband have donated computer software to the Oakville office, and Celine is always an active participant in her centre's social events.

Celine is extremely organized and reliable, and generously signs up for the harder-to-fill shifts, such as Christmas Day. She ensures new volunteers are comfortable while taking their first calls and provides support and assistance as needed, something much appreciated by the volunteers.

"It's all about helping someone in need because we all need help sometime," she says.

## **Jenna Rines | RECIPIENT**

### *Telephone Aid Line Kingston (TALK)*

#### *Young Adult Volunteer*

Jenna began with TALK in October 2010 and has since volunteered 185 hours on the phones. Her warm-hearted and caring attitude allow her to affirm the feelings and concerns callers: she gives them her undivided attention and support in their feelings and challenges.

In the community, Jenna's passion, leadership, and hard work have allowed her to expand TALK's networking and interactions with related organizations. Dedicating an impressive amount of time to planning and implementing all the duties of the community relations executive, Jenna has worked tirelessly

to expand the TALK network. She been involved in initiating and maintaining contact with organizations throughout Kingston, including major mental health organizations like Frontenac Community Mental Health and the Kingston branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA).

For the Kingston branch of the CMHA, Jenna helped set up active listening and distress response workshops for clients and volunteers at Yonge House, a centre for young male offenders, giving them tools to resolve conflicts and support others in a productive and non-judgemental way.

She began her volunteer work in 2008 with the Crohn's and Colitis Committee at Queen's, where she acted as a community member and then the Marketing Director.

This year, Jenna will graduate from Queen's University with an undergraduate honours degree in Psychology.

## **Adele Rogano - RECIPIENT**

### *Distress Centre Niagara*

#### *Young Adult Volunteer*

Though she's been with Distress Centre Niagara for just over a year, Brock University student and future teacher, Adele Rogano has impressed the entire distress centre staff, volunteer peers, and many distress line callers with her excellent communication skills, caring, and sensitivity. She's a role model to not only her peers and callers, but also to the staff at DCN.

Adele's wonderful voice empathy quickly puts callers at ease. She has a natural ability to connect and build rapport quickly while addressing the needs and safety concerns of her callers. With her interest in education, Adele naturally gravitates to youth in her community, and acts as a professional DC Niagara representative for suicide and mental health awareness presentations to high school students. Knowing that suicide can be a tough topic to discuss, Adele created a safe yet fun interactive game to play with the students.

With all of this going on, Adele still finds the time to help out with her centre's Annual Suicide Awareness Walk, social events, and baking for her fellow volunteers. She is a great reminder of what hard work, dedication and compassion can really do in a community.