

February 2012

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Upcoming Events...

ED Exchange:
March 20, 2012 - Whitby
June 20th - London
November 15 -
Oakville/Mississauga/QEW area

**Spirit of Volunteerism
Recognition nomination
deadline:**
Saturday, March 31, 2012

**SOV Selection Panel Review
Date:** April 4, 2012

**DCO Board of Directors
2012/2013 Planning Session:**
May 8, 2012

**DCO AGM & SOV Recognition
Awards Dinner:**
Sunday, October 14, 2012
Niagara Falls, ON

CASP 2012:
October 15 - 17, 2012

Black History Month: Distress Centre Peel's Christianah Olawejaju By Leah Morrigan

To mark the close of Black History month, DCO would like to celebrate the lives and times of our own volunteers and staff of colour, spotlighting their experience and contributions to the distress centre movement.



Christianah Olarewaju, Volunteer Coordinator at Distress Centre Peel, hails from the seventh most populous country in the world, Nigeria, in West Africa.

Nigeria is split almost in half between Christians and Muslims. When she was young, Christianah lived peacefully as a Christian in northern Nigeria, where Islam was the majority, integrating freely with the Muslim children. Suddenly, for reasons at least Christianah was not aware of, people began to use religious beliefs as labels and hostility grew between Christians and Muslims. "Intolerance was everywhere," Christianah says.

This religious rift between Nigerians was difficult and people had to deal with religious prejudice and live with a looming militant Islamist terrorist group. This group, known as "Boko Haram", meaning "education is sin!" began to create problems for Christians as the Nigerian version of Al Qaeda. Christianah says that whether people like it or not, Boko Haram is a force to be reckoned with, and it preys on vulnerable young people.

"It's unfortunate that a few people now use a lot of uneducated young people for their agenda of turning the country into turmoil," Christianah says, "The youth are idle and they get into trouble; no one takes responsibility for them. These are the types that Boko Haram exploits."

Uneducated and idle Nigerians are the vulnerable ones used by the terrorist group, and mental health problems are not usually well-addressed, according to Christianah.

Niagara Falls, ON

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DCO Committee Meetings for the remainder of 2012...

CASP2012 Steering Committee Meetings:

Friday, March 23rd

Friday, April 27th

1-800 Steering Committee Meetings:

Wednesday, March 21st

Wednesday, April 18th

Education Committee Meetings (Thursdays):

April 19

May 17

June 21

July 19

August 23

September 20

October 18

November 15

December 20

Board of Directors Meetings (Tuesdays):

May 8

July 10

September 11

November 13

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"Some people who have mental health issues just roam about - there are so few programs for the magnitude of mental health problems in Nigeria," Christianah says, "These people are homeless. They live on the streets, under the bridge, in the marketplace. They are shunned by society."

Largely, Nigeria's mentally ill are ignored and mental illness is not given the attention it deserves. There are very few government-operated mental health institutions and no private clinics to deal with mental health issues. Some churches, and undoubtedly some mosques, offer nurturing, spiritual care for these people, but they are too large in number to be cared for properly. Christianah says that people still consult with herbalists and witch doctors to cure their "madness".

Christianah immigrated to Canada 15 years ago. When she looked back to reflect on the type of social service available to the mentally ill in Nigeria, she could really appreciate the Canadian health care system and the way Canada treats the mentally ill - with dignity.

"The mentally ill need help and they need empathy," Christianah says, "They have something to contribute to society, and they need to be heard."

Coming from a place where there is virtually no support system for the mentally ill, Christianah was amazed with the Canadian health care system being available to anyone suffering from mental illness, and this had an impact on the direction her life took.

In order to better integrate and give back to Canadian society, Christianah started volunteering and chose to donate her time to Distress Centre Peel. After a year of happy volunteer work, a part time position came up at the centre. Christianah applied for it and got it. When she first took the position of Volunteer Coordinator, there wasn't even a desk for her to sit at. Now, as the full time Coordinator of Volunteers, she's got her own work space and is very pleased with what she does and is happy to work with volunteers and colleagues. "My work is very rewarding," she says.

Christianah works with volunteers of many cultures, including Nigerians and other Africans. Many of the Nigerian volunteers are legal and medical professionals, looking to understand Canadian work and social culture through volunteering. Like her, the Nigerian volunteers are impressed with the empathy shown toward the mentally ill in Canada, which helps them understand the conditions of the mentally ill in Nigeria.

In a new country, these volunteers are eager to be integrated into the Canadian workforce, and through volunteering, develop and improve their communication abilities, their empathy, and their listening skills.

"There is a lot of talking in Nigeria, and for a change we have to be quiet and learn to listen!" Christianah says with a laugh.

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Black History Month: Peel Volunteer, Garvin Moses

By Leah Morrigan

Garvin Moses saw life from both sides of the table when he grew up. He lived in a multicultural environment in Mississauga and did not hang with the popular crowd during high school. He explains that instead, he felt more on the fringe of the outcast group.

Things changed when he got to the University of Windsor and found himself in a much broader social circle due to his involvement in track and field.



Garvin studied Criminology in university and took great interest in the sociological aspects of the field. Since he started volunteering at the Distress Centre Peel two years ago, his post-secondary studies have given him an interesting glimpse into people.

Despite having a degree in Criminology, Garvin is a programs coordinator at rehabilitation facility called NRIO. They specialize with individuals who have acquired brain injuries, providing a broad spectrum of rehab: physiotherapy, psychotherapy, pathology, and occupational therapy. He manages the Mississauga residential program for clients with limited mobility and at times, people dealing with significant cognitive and physical impairment. The rehab facility takes an individualized approach at assisting their clients achieve their highest level of independence.

His day job helps him with volunteer work in that his organization promotes full advocacy, encouraging clients to speak for themselves and be independent, to come to their own conclusions and solutions to their problems on their own - this has more value to the patients, and undoubtedly to the distress line callers that Garvin speaks to.

He sometimes works with people without a visual disability and is trained to pick up on subtle cues like thought processes and communication. So too, Garvin, like any other telephone volunteer, has to rely on what he hears, paying close attention to tone, which usually tells more of the truth than the words do.

Garvin's volunteer work on the phone lines helps him at his job in the rehab facility: "Improving my communication and active listening skills really helps me when I'm interacting with individuals who have cognitive deficits."

Training at the distress centre has helped him become more aware of

the power of words and the power of human interaction. "There is a point in life when things are bad and we like to share with other people. A simple conversation with some one is much more powerful than we realize and we can take interactions with people for granted.

"It makes me recognize that when people reach out to me, I should make a greater effort to be there for them," Garvin says.

He likes to use his personality in his work and sometimes thinks of himself as a charismatic person, and he values a sense of humour. Garvin says that putting a spin on a terrible situation and making a caller laugh is important because not only is it a release, it lightens the call a little, and it helps to build trust between himself and the caller.

From his sociological studies and his work at the Distress Centre, Garvin says, "We know that people who don't have a good personal support system often have poor coping mechanisms. Understanding people this way helps us anticipate a caller's needs.

"We're trained to ask callers if they have anyone to talk to who they trust. If a caller doesn't have a support system, trust is to be built between the distress centre and the client, so they know they are being cared for, then they are passed onto professional groups."

Sometimes it is more appropriate to refer callers to cultural groups instead of mental health or social service professionals. With a Jamaican background, Garvin says that depending on the circumstances, he might put distressed or lonely Jamaicans through to cultural groups (i.e. Churches or community centres) where people will be able to relate to them better being of similar race and cultural understanding.

Garvin finds that people with a similar cultural background will understand where the client's fears and anxieties originate from, and this can put clients more at ease. He feels good that there is a cultural reference book in the phone room at Peel so he can make appropriate referrals to people of all different cultures because he knows that this will make callers more comfortable and hopefully put them on the road to self-sufficiency and contentment.

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ED Exchange (aka "ED Support Group")

ED Exchange
a.k.a. 'ED Support Group'
and Tour of Distress Centre Durham

Last year, the ED Exchange was developed as an ED support group, offering Executive Directors an opportunity meet informally and talk about what is happening in their centres, share ideas, offer support, and generally chat with their fellow EDs.

An invitation was sent to all member centre EDs to join in the next ED

Exchange scheduled for Tuesday, March 20th at Kelsey's Restaurant in Whitby at 6:00pm. As an added bonus, Victoria Kehoe and her staff at the Durham Distress Centre have kindly opened their doors for the ED Exchange to tour their facility.

Mark your calendar for the next ED Exchange - Wednesday, June 20th in London.

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Distress and Crisis Line Conference



A full day conference is being held in conjunction with the CASP2012

Conference in Niagara Falls in October. The Distress and Crisis Line Conference will be held at the Sheraton-on-the-Falls in Niagara Falls on Sunday, October 14th. An exciting keynote speaker will start the day, followed by morning and afternoon workshops.

The committee is working hard to put together a wonderful program. If you have any suggestions for workshop topics we'd love to hear from you. Send your suggestions to info@dcontario.org.

DCO will also be holding their Annual General Meeting late that afternoon and all are welcome to attend. Following the AGM we will be recognizing our Spirit of Volunteerism nominees and recipients with a reception and dinner. Tickets for the dinner will be available and advertised closer to the event.

If anyone wants to take advantage of the location and come early, there will be accommodation available at the hotel at a very good rate. Stay tuned ... details will follow.

Pencil us in on your calendar and don't miss this great conference being held opposite one of Canada's majestic wonders, Niagara Falls!

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