



***Distress Centres
of Greater Toronto***

ANNUAL
REPORT

2020

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

REPORT FROM CO-CHAIRS OF THE BOARD

When we reflect on the past year, not much has changed... yet so much has changed. In many ways, what has transpired is extraordinary. In Greater Toronto area, we have continued to be in varying and sometimes confusing degrees of lockdown, we are still experiencing an unacceptable level of new Covid cases, mental distress continues to be a huge societal issue that we see every minute of every day at DCGT and sadly, people are continuing to die from Covid. We do have the miracle of vaccines that are slowly moving us back to a state of "normal", whatever normal means and are very slowly opening up again in Ontario.

And as they say, with the bad can come good. That is so often a difficult statement to believe but hopefully all is not wasted and that THIS TIME we have learned from events as the terrible passing of almost 4,000 nursing home residents and EDI (Equity/Diversity and Inclusion), again through some horrific events, has risen to a level of consciousness where hopefully we will finally begin to truly affect change.

And throughout, our volunteers and staff have stayed disciplined and focused. We have been here to help the many thousands of our citizens that needed support, comforting, listening to and even a simple hello as we all worked through this tragic pandemic.

In 2020, the pandemic also allowed us to demonstrate our organizational agility and resilience. Our dedicated staff and volunteers handled almost 175,000 client interactions across 10 programs through inbound calls, proactive outcalls, texts (in up to 8 different languages), all with needs ranging from elder abuse to immediate crisis support through to ongoing Survivor Support.

We, too, have begun our Equity, Diversity & Inclusion journey with training for all volunteers and staff, and have a plan in place that will allow us to measure our progress. We will provide further details next year on the positive steps and progress we hope to make.

We have many stakeholders at Distress Centres of Greater Toronto, and we want to take a moment to thank you all.

Our 500 plus volunteers have gone above and beyond in smoothly making the transition to a "home based" crisis system while at the same time continuing to interact with those in need with an unmatched level of compassion, care, empathy, warmth and sensitivity.

Our dedicated staff have demonstrated an agility to manage the ever-changing landscape that is Covid and to each of you, we must say THANK YOU for leading all of us with a well thought out and reasoned plan and path forward.

And finally, it's with the warmest appreciation that we acknowledge all our core funders, including United Way of Greater Toronto, City of Toronto and Region of Peel, Ministry of Health and Long- Term Care and to all our donors whose support is so critical to our success.



Jass Aujla



Mark Sklar



Board Co-Chair(s), Distress Centres of Greater Toronto

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is impossible to talk about 2020 without talking about COVID but my comments are largely not about COVID itself. Rather, they are about what it takes to provide essential services to our community, no matter what happens.

In March 2020 we were less than one year into our merger when COVID hit. As you may remember, at the time it seemed as though we were dealing with an emergency that could be measured in weeks or perhaps a few months. There was tremendous uncertainty around what was happening. I remember listening to a presentation by a top infectious disease expert who believed that COVID was no more of an issue than the common seasonal flu.

On Monday March 16th, 2020, we realized that we could no longer deliver our programs without changing things. Volunteers and staff, like people everywhere, understandably started to become nervous about leaving home and our service model was heavily dependent on facility-based work. On that day, our United Way rep, Keisa Campbell at the time, reached out asking how the United Way could help. I didn't know it at that time, but this would be the first of many instances of organizations and people in our community reaching out to offer us support.

What happened next seems so extraordinary now but was so ordinary at the time. All of us: volunteers, staff, board, funders and donors rallied around one cause: to ensure seamless uninterrupted delivery of essential services to the most vulnerable people in our community.

We had no pandemic plan. Day by day we took the action that was necessary to serve the thousands of people who rely on our services. With the support of the United Way and many foundations and individual donors, we equipped over 500 volunteers with remote connections. Alfred Jean-Baptiste of the Toronto Centre for Learning and Development, someone I hadn't even met prior to the pandemic, helped us setup an online training platform. Our staff worked diligently to create and adapt processes to work in this new remote environment. No one complained. They just did.

The pandemic has had an impact on the well being of all people but especially those who were already lonely or isolated or who had experienced traumatic loss. The challenge for our volunteers was to provide support in a manner that was initially foreign to most of them and without the direct supports they were used to.

We are a volunteer-driven organization. To all of our volunteers: because of your dedication, your agility, your problem solving and adaptability, lives were saved, and the well-being of thousands of people was made better. Thank you.

We will emerge from the pandemic a stronger organization. We have seized the opportunity to think more critically about who we are and what we do and how we do it. Going forward, volunteers will have more options with respect to how they serve. We will gain a better understanding of who we serve and ensure that all communities have equitable access to our services, This includes expanding our survivor support program to the Region of Peel, an initiative that was generously supported by Tommy and Zina Longo and Family.

A huge thank you to our funders, including the United Way, the Region of Peel, and the City of Toronto and the many foundations and individual donors whose generous and timely support ensured that our services remained available in this most unusual year.

A big thank you to staff whose agility, problem solving, and thoughtfulness were integral to our success.

And thank you to the Board who collectively invested hundreds of hours, often dealing with challenging issues, to help guide us through the pandemic.

And again, thank you to our over 500 volunteers who ensured that over 180,000 helping interactions were possible.

I recently met an individual who asked that we end our meeting together by stating two things that we were grateful for, and I would like to do the same here.

I am grateful for all the people: the staff, volunteers, and Board members who helped create DCGT over the years through Distress Centres Toronto, Spectra Community Services and their predecessors. The foundation they helped set allowed us to respond seamlessly to the greatest public health crisis we have ever seen.

And I am grateful that so many people who can help others, do help others.

I look forward to seeing all of you soon.



Robert Ridge, Executive Director

Robert Ridge

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PROGRAM RESULTS AND SUCCESSES

Over 180,000 helping interactions across all programs.

408 HELPLINE

408 Help answered **61,129** calls in 2020.

- **65%** of callers were provided with emotional support and distress management
- Approximately **20%** of callers were provided with mental health support
- Approximately **30%** of service users reported a decrease in isolation and loneliness
- Approximately **30%** of service users reported reduced emotional intensity

Callers consistently mention through the year that they are grateful for the support that our service provides. They have noted that they find it therapeutic, that our ongoing support has helped them move out of a season of depression, and that speaking with a responder has helped them through low moments in their day to day.

MULTILINGUAL HELPLINES (ENGLISH, PUNJABI, HINDI, URDU, SPANISH, PORTUGUESE, CANTONESE AND MANDARIN)

- Number of calls answered - **24,519**

CALLER ISSUES

- **82%** - Mental Health Issues
Includes: Diagnosed Mental Health, Concern for emotional health and wellbeing, In treatment, Possible Undiagnosed symptoms
- **87%** - Interpersonal issues

CALL OUTCOMES

- **55%** - Decrease in social isolation and loneliness
- **33%** - Increased ability to cope
- **11%** - Immediate crisis diffused
- **2%** - Decrease in harmful intentions

DCGT is the only organization in Canada to have 8 multilingual helplines that directly support our community members in their own language (i.e. without third party translation). Individuals who are going through a difficult time can call the lines and feel comfortable speaking to someone who really understands their struggle. Our English Helpline is available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Our multilingual lines are available in Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Spanish, Portuguese, Cantonese and Mandarin, Monday to Friday 10am to 10pm. These lines provide emotional support for anyone who needs a caring, compassionate, and non-judgmental listening ear. Majority of the callers are dealing with issues of mental health, interpersonal, social isolation, settlement, relocation and cultural issues.

These lines serve as a model for other organizations because our services allow for an open dialogue about depression, anxiety, and crisis and suicide ideation. Our trained staff and volunteers provide support and commend callers on having the courage to call and talk about difficult issues. Volunteers speak to the callers about the importance of mental health well-being and promotion of speaking openly about mental health issues as well as cultural and systemic barriers. These issues affect everyone, everywhere. Statistics show how many people are impacted by mental health and these statistics are not limited to one specific culture or race.

ELDER ABUSE:

DCGT Elder Abuse Support Program provides direct, phone-based support to seniors or loved ones of seniors who have been exploited, abused, and/or are experiencing challenges and struggles associated with abuse, neglect, and aging. We work in partnership with Family Services of Peel (FSP) to build community capacity through education, advocacy and linkages.

We took **81** calls on the Elder Abuse line in 2020. Of these calls:

- **36%** of calls resulted in referrals to FSP
- **80%** of callers reported an increased knowledge of the Elder Abuse Program at both DCGT Peel and FSP as well as other appropriate support resources in the community
- **62%** of callers reported decreases in distress, anxiety, isolation, and loneliness
- **40%** of calls explored action planning with service users

PARTNERSHIP LINES (CRISIS LINK, PARO, EMS)

Crisis Link is a unique poster/payphone program available on every TTC subway platform. It is a partnership between TTC, Bell, and DCGT. It is designed to encourage anyone contemplating suicide to use the payphone and reach out to speak to a DCGT responder for support, risk assessment, and possible intervention. If intervention is required, DCGT works with the TCC to react appropriately to limit risk and provide support to each individual in need.

In partnership with DCGT, **PARO (Professional Association of Residents of Ontario)** is a 24/7 Ontario phone-based Helpline available to medical residents, their partners and family members, as well as medical students to provide immediate assistance in emergency or urgent matters, or to provide emotional support.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

DCGT partners with Toronto's Emergency Medical Services to provide a dedicated warm transfer line for callers to EMS who are experiencing suicidal ideation. At-risk individuals who have already provided their contact information and are awaiting EMS are connected with volunteers at DCGT for crisis support until EMS arrives on scene. This frees up EMS dispatchers to continue to respond to other emergencies, while at the same time providing emotional support to distressed individuals.

1231 incoming calls to priority lines in 2020 (Crisis Link, EMS, PARO)

- **368** service users reported improved moods, reduced emotional intensity, or decrease in distress/crisis

CANADA SUICIDE PREVENTION SERVICE (CSPS) VOICE AND TEXT

DCGT partners with Crisis Services Canada to provide important and life-saving support which are accessible via phone or SMS (text).

CSC is a national network of existing distress, crisis, and suicide prevention line services. These programs are committed to supporting any person living in Canada who is affected by suicide. DCGT is one of 8 partner sites supporting the Canada Suicide Prevention Service (CSPS). Services can be accessed via 24/7 phone line or via text from 4pm-midnight daily.

In 2020, DCGT responded to **19,578** CSPS Interactions (**10,088** Text Interactions, and **9,490** Voice Interactions).

- **46%** service users reported an increased ability to cope
- **184** emergency interventions were made
- **255** suicide plans were safely disabled

TELECHECK

TeleCheck for Seniors program provides ongoing support for isolated seniors. These regular calls provide safety check-ins, medication reminders, and emotional support. This program aims to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, provides positive coping skills, offers referrals to community services and keeps people safe.

- **433** active clients
- **38724** calls
- **9278** volunteer hours

"You do a grand job there, and that's why I always say thank you, because I appreciate the attention and time you take when you call me, especially during this time. Thank you for calling".

"Your calls pick me up, it is like medicine to me. I live alone I have a lot of time alone; I want to thank you for great conversations"

"It is so nice to hear your voice and I have been expecting these calls. I appreciate your time and patience with me. I know time passes and does not wait for anybody, and your calls make a difference to my life. I appreciate your calls and they mean a lot to me."

TOUCHING BASE

Touching Base program provides ongoing transitional support for people in the community identified with a mental health issue. The regular calls that provide safety check-ins, medication reminders, and emotional support provide consistency and connection to the community.

- **256** Active clients
- **17377** Calls
- **5815.5** volunteer hours

CALLER REASSURANCE PROGRAM

CRP program provides ongoing support for isolated seniors. These regular calls provide safety check-ins, medication reminders, and emotional support. This program aims to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, provides positive coping skills, offers referrals to community services and keeps people safe.

- **66** Active clients
- **5749** calls
- **1270** hours

SURVIVOR SUPPORT PROGRAM:

Our professionally developed traumatic loss support program is a safe space in which survivors of suicide loss can identify/explore/clarify their thoughts as well as feelings and begin to navigate the aftermath of suicide loss with peer-to-peer support. Highly trained grief facilitators (many of which are survivors of suicide loss or homicide loss themselves) and our professional staff have come together to create a safe, caring and non-judgmental environment that empowers program participants with pathways forward.

Survivors attending 1:1 sessions: **215**

Survivors attending group sessions: **101**

Homicide survivors attending the program: **30**

1:1 support sessions delivered (each volunteer delivered session, intake = a session, interim support with contact = a session): **1770**

Group sessions delivered (each volunteer delivered session): **113**

Volunteer activity (hours): **4425**

Participant satisfaction (satisfied or very satisfied): **100%**

Participant recommend program to others: **100%**

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION:

All of the program staff are involved in the delivery of this program, which includes volunteer/community fairs, workshop presentations, networking and consultation. Staff continue to be active in United Way's Speaker's Bureau, including participation in the high-value donor events.

Last year, there were invited presentations with a continuing shift, to consultation requests. These included case consultation, protocol/policy review, program development, volunteer management and participation on advisory panels. We work particularly closely with Toronto Public Health and the TTC in this area.

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THANK YOU TO OUR 2020 DONORS!

\$250,000+

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Region of Peel

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SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR DEDICATED MONTHLY DONORS

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Distress Centres of Greater Toronto



Statement of Operations

For the year ended December 31, 2020

	2020	2019 (8 months)
Revenues		
United Way Greater Toronto	\$ 643,087	\$ 378,451
Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care	334,141	209,535
Donations - individuals	314,257	116,177
Foundations and corporations	264,975	170,380
Region of Peel	159,915	77,382
TTC Crisis Link	124,230	79,130
City of Toronto	123,875	77,977
Crisis Services Canada	102,320	48,813
Government of Canada (note 11)	99,910	52,548
The Professional Association of Residents of Ontario (PARO)	63,345	40,697
Fundraising events (note 8)	36,526	88,747
Emergency Medical Services	28,245	18,240
Miscellaneous income	25,853	-
CAMH priority health line services	16,043	10,257
Amortization of deferred capital contributions (note 6)	8,828	6,876
Investment income	4,205	1,601
	2,349,755	1,376,811
Expenses		
Salaries and benefits	1,598,165	850,122
Telephone	193,445	94,646
Building occupancy	136,883	114,718
Repairs and maintenance	65,577	15,532
Volunteer resources	61,528	14,085
Office supplies	58,843	16,655
Accounting and audit	45,012	38,770
Insurance	16,370	24,095
Fundraising events (note 8)	14,603	22,606
Amortization	12,968	18,673
General and administrative	12,795	72,861
Legal	6,655	16,997
Advertising and promotion	3,261	1,948
Travel	1,146	1,631
Bank charges and interest	295	3,019
Program expenses	-	9,028
Volunteer recruitment and training	-	2,410
	2,227,546	1,317,796
Excess of revenue over expenses	\$ 122,209	\$ 59,015

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements.

If you would like more information, our fully Audited Financial Statement is available on our website www.dcoft.com



MISSION:

We foster hope and resilience one connection at a time.

VISION:

To ensure that every individual in need receives life-sustaining emotional support.

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