

TIME FOR A PAUSE;



ORGANIZATION UPDATE

Our 2026 Annual Plan builds on the priorities established in previous years, with a continued focus on four core areas:

- Expanding inbound crisis line capacity to better meet growing demand and serve more individuals in need;
- Strengthening partnerships with marginalized and equity-denied communities to ensure our programs are accessible and responsive to all;
- Diversifying our funding base to support long-term sustainability and growth;
- Enhancing volunteer engagement to ensure the DCGT volunteer experience is meaningful and rewarding.

In addition, we have introduced a new priority for 2026: revitalizing and expanding our Survivor Support Program to better meet the needs of those we serve.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS UPDATE



We are pleased to announce the appointment of **Sarah McGuire** as Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors.

Sarah joined the Board in November 2024 and currently serves on the Finance Committee.

She is Managing Director and Assistant Vice President, Global Fixed Income Data Delivery and Integration at Toronto Dominion Securities.

In addition to her professional experience, Sarah has demonstrated a strong commitment to community service, having led volunteer initiatives with organizations such as the Big Sister Program, Meals on Wheels, and Ronald McDonald House's Home for Dinner program.

FOUNDATION HIGHLIGHT

We are grateful for the continued support of the **Bickle-Wilder Foundation** and the **Shelagh Evelyn Higgins Fund**, whose generosity helps strengthen DCGT's work in our community.

The **Bickle-Wilder Foundation** supports organizations that help individuals and communities thrive through improved well-being and opportunity. Their commitment to strengthening community services aligns closely with DCGT's mission to provide compassionate crisis support and suicide prevention services across the GTA.

We are also thankful for support from the **Shelagh Evelyn Higgins Fund**, which specifically supports our Walk and the important work of our Survivor Support Program (SSP). These programs help raise awareness around suicide, support individuals and families navigating traumatic loss, and foster connection and healing within our community.

We are deeply appreciative of both foundations for investing in mental health support and helping ensure that no one in our community faces crisis or loss alone.

BLUE BIRD CIRCLE

We invite you to join the **Blue Bird Circle**, a community of monthly donors supporting the work of the DCGT. Your ongoing gift helps ensure our 24/7 crisis line, outbound call program, and Suicide Support Program remain available to people who need connection, compassion, and hope. With the collective support of the Blue Bird Circle, we can ensure that no one has to face emotional distress alone. If you are already a BBC member, we thank you!

[Learn More About our Blue Bird Circle](#)



2026 WALK FOR SUICIDE AWARENESS



Our signature event returns in 2026 with a new name: the **Walk for Suicide Awareness**, reflecting our ongoing work to raise awareness about suicide and reduce stigma. The Walk also highlights the impact of our Survivor Support Program (SSP), which supports individuals and families affected by suicide and traumatic loss — hope and healing, one step at a time.

We are currently **seeking event sponsors**. If you or someone you know may be interested, please contact our Resource Development Officer, Amira Al-Harazi Patwa: aalharazi@dcogt.com.

Registration for the Walk opens early May.

DCGT RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Something New Is Taking Shape at DCGT

Volunteers are at the heart of everything we do at the Distress Centres of Greater Toronto. Every conversation, every moment of listening, and every act of care strengthens the wellbeing of our community — often in ways that are quiet, unseen, and deeply meaningful.

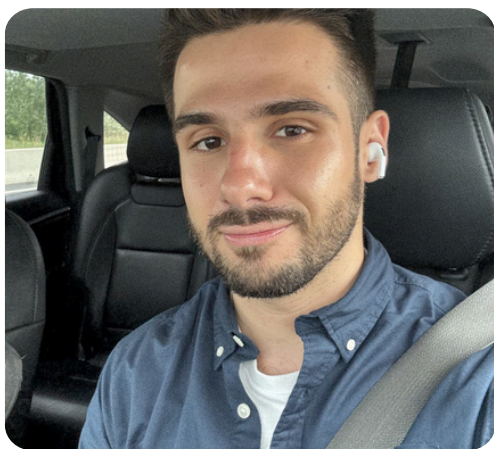
Over the past several months, DCGT has been working on a new way to recognize and celebrate volunteer contributions across our programs. It's an initiative rooted in appreciation, belonging, and pride — one that reflects the dedication and commitment our volunteers bring to this work every day.

This upcoming initiative is designed to acknowledge meaningful milestones, foster connection within the DCGT volunteer community, and create a shared sense of identity across our diverse programs. It's not about grand gestures or flashy rewards, but about thoughtfully recognizing the effort, care, and courage of our volunteers in a little more visible way — both within DCGT and beyond.

Thank you, as always, for the many ways you show up for one another and for the community we serve.

More to come!

STAFF CHANGE UPDATE



"I've been with DCGT since March 2023. I began as a volunteer responder and have since supported as a 988 Voice responder and a mentor for new responders. I joined the full-time team in May 2024.

My current role focuses on designing and coordinating an onboarding experience that is supportive, clear, and emotionally safe for new responders as they begin the deeply challenging and rewarding work of supporting DCGT's service users.

Much of my role involves creating standardized content, processes, and workflows for volunteer mentors to use as they guide new responders. I also recruit and train veteran volunteers to join the mentor team, and I work to streamline high-level processes across DCGT to ensure that the volunteer experience is as seamless and supportive as possible.

This spring, I'm working on creating a set of training materials, including video content, for incoming responders. These will serve as easy-to-access resources that responders and mentors can refer back to as often as needed, especially for more complex workflows.

I consider it to be truly a privilege to be a part of this team! Supporting volunteers as they discover their own abilities and grow into confident responders and mentors is an honour, a privilege, and a joy. I look forward to supporting DCGT's incredible volunteers as they continue to shape our services and strengthen the network of care we provide!"

ANTHONY

**VOLUNTEER MENTOR
PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

MEET OUR STAFF

How long have you been with DCGT and what does your role entail?

"I started at DCGT as a volunteer in June 2022 before moving into my current role in December 2022. My role includes providing on-call support on the lines, leading trainings, conducting evaluations, and contributing to sections of this newsletter that you're currently reading."

What are you most looking forward to this spring season?

"I am looking forward to some warmer, sunnier weather this spring, and getting out for long walks. My birthday is this season as well, so I am excited for those celebrations and upcoming travel plans!"

What tips would you give to newer or aspiring responders?

"It takes patience and practice to gain comfortability and confidence as a crisis responder. Please never hesitate to reach out for support, questions, or debriefing. Also, make sure to prioritize self-care and set boundaries to prevent burnout."

What do you enjoy most about your job at DCGT?

"I most enjoy building connections with service users, volunteers, and colleagues. DCGT is a really supportive environment and I love helping our dedicated volunteers in developing their skills. It also feels very rewarding to offer essential mental health/crisis services to vulnerable populations."



OLIVIA

**DISTRESS LINE SUPPORT
COORDINATOR**



DIANDRA

**DISTRESS LINE VOLUNTEER
COORDINATOR**

How long have you been with DCGT and what does your role entail?

"I started as a volunteer at DCGT back in 2021, and now I'm a DVC on the English Inbound line. My role is all about supporting our wonderful volunteers."

What do you enjoy most about your job at DCGT?

"My favourite part of my job is definitely connecting with my volunteers. I also get to work with such an amazing, supportive team, and our mission really keeps me motivated."

What tips would you give to newer or aspiring responders?

"It's so easy to get caught up in the models, techniques, and wanting to respond "perfectly." Those skills are important, and they really do help guide your conversations. But at the end of the day, what our service users need most is someone who's present, listening, and empathetic. So, bring the training with you but also bring yourself. That balance is what truly makes a difference."

What are your go-to self-care strategies?

"I really rely on my support system, sometimes you just need to talk things through or vent after a tough shift. And when I want to unwind, you'll usually find me watching a good sitcom or reading a book."

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



JULIA

**SPANISH & PORTUGUESE
HELPLINE RESPONDER**

How long have you been with DCGT and what does your role entail?

"I have been volunteering with DCGT for 1 year. On the language lines, we respond to inbound calls but mostly do outbound calls. We check in on how people are doing, do safety checks, and oftentimes give reminders for medications"

What do you enjoy most about volunteering at DCGT?

"One of the things I enjoy most about volunteering at DCGT is staying connected with the service users. I often get to chat with the same people during my shifts, which is very sweet as we can catch up on how things are going since our last call. I also love the community at DCGT. All of the volunteers and coordinators are always very supportive and I've received amazing advice that I'm able to use both during my shifts and in my everyday life."

What is the best piece of advice you've received?

"I've always been someone that keeps very busy and looking for new things to get involved in. I really enjoy living this way, but there have been moments where I've felt overwhelmed by all that I had taken on. My Dad once told me: "When there's a lot on your plate, don't stack things in a tower, arrange them in a line". Essentially, when tasks stack up, they can become like an impossible tower you're unable to climb. By lining them out one by one, it can feel a lot easier to get a sense of control and make it all feel a bit more manageable."

What is a hobby or skill you have outside of volunteering?

"I love doing my nails! I've been doing nail art since I was 8 years old and it's a hobby that I adore to this day. I can spend 10 hours on a very detailed design and it feels like 10 hours of Zen for me."

SELF-CARE

SHANIQUE

STUDENT, ENGLISH INBOUND PROGRAM

Lately, I've been learning how to slow down. Since my days are usually fast-paced, when I get home, I prefer my space to be quiet and simple.

Most nights, especially after a long day, I like to make myself a cup of tea (usually a smooth chai) and light a scented candle. I love how my apartment instantly feels like a cozy, safe space, creating an environment where I can settle in with my thoughts about the day.

Sometimes, I use this time to journal, allowing myself to check in with how I'm feeling, and to make notes of something I've noticed or felt grateful for, or to reflect on a thought that's been sitting quietly in the back of my mind. I find there's a lot of peace in these slower moments, taking some time away from screens, noise, and the rush to do something.



VOLUNTEER EVENTS



Our winter hike was a wonderful opportunity to connect with our volunteers in a meaningful and relaxed way—sharing laughter, stories, and a strong sense of community as we walked along the Woodbine boardwalk and beach.

The crisp winter air and scenic views created the perfect backdrop for conversation, reflection, and simply enjoying each other's company outside of our usual spaces.

Spending time together in nature was also a great way to support both our mental and physical well-being. **It offered a chance to slow down, recharge, and step away from day-to-day responsibilities, while strengthening the connections that make our community so special.**

After our walk, we extended our time together by gathering at the Boardwalk Café, where we warmed up with hot drinks and continued our conversations in a cozy setting. It was a lovely way to end the afternoon, feeling refreshed, connected, and grateful.

Overall, it was a meaningful experience that reminded us of the importance of community, care, and taking time for ourselves and each other.

We're so grateful to everyone who joined us and helped make the day so memorable.



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