

# Distress Centre 24/7 Crisis Services SROI Case Study



## Fast Facts

### By the Numbers (2016):

- Distress Centre responded to 113,975 contacts
- 80,786 contacts were responded to in our 24/7 Crisis Program (calls, chats, texts, emails)
- 4408 urgent and emergent contacts were identified (due to risk of suicide, self-harm, domestic violence, homicide or child welfare). 58% of these were de-escalated, with the remainder being linked to appropriate external resources for additional support
- 9.4% of calls were suicide related
- 17% of chats and texts were suicide related
- 63% of callers had an identified mental health concern
- 59% of contacts occurred after 5pm
- 486 volunteers served, providing over 48,653 hours of service

### Contact Details:

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*"Sometimes we save lives, and sometimes we just help someone get through a really bad day."*  
– Jerilyn Dressler, Executive Director, Distress Centre

### Program Background

Distress Centre Calgary (DCC) has provided 24 hour crisis support in Calgary and southern Alberta since 1970. We do this through our 24 hour crisis line, email and daily chat and daily text for our youth. We also have professional counselling for clients with issues that can't be resolved over the phone. For people needing information on community, social, and health services we have 24 hour support on our 211 line. All of our services are free.

Crisis contacts are responded to by volunteers and para-professionals who were trained as volunteers, supported by professional staff. Studies have suggested that volunteers can better relate to the experience of the caller, are more empathetic and respectful, and interact as peers rather than as experts<sup>1</sup>. They are therefore more helpful in crisis situations, particularly when there is a risk of suicide.

Distress Centre does not define crisis. We do not judge. Anyone can contact us day or night if they are concerned about issues like personal abuse/violence, addictions, family, financial concerns, mental health, physical health, relationships, isolation and gender/sexual identity, amongst others. We provide the ONLY 24/7 crisis support in Calgary.

### Theory of Change Summary Statement:

If individuals in crisis are provided with no-cost, 24/7 crisis services, they will have immediate access to support and information, thus preventing crises from escalating.

### User Demographics

While Distress Centre receives crisis contacts from a wide variety of people, the focus of this SROI was on the contacts from individuals accessing Distress Centre's 24-hour crisis services at different levels of crisis. This can include individuals:

- with a wide range of mental health issues
- who are at risk of suicide
- experiencing loneliness/isolation
- at risk of domestic violence
- reaching out on behalf of a child at risk of abuse or neglect

*"For 3 years you helped me. I am a victim of abuse/violence. 40 years in silence. Somehow I found your phone number. I called 266-HELP. Thank you so much for existing. Thanks for all the many nights and days over the three years on the phone. I am safe now."*

– Distress Centre Caller

### User Experience

Value is created by the volunteers' ability to de-escalate crisis situations. During each crisis contact, volunteers establish rapport with each individual; conduct a risk assessment; help the user recognize coping skills; develop new ones, and make an action plan so they can cope in the short-term. Users then gain confidence and feel empowered to take steps to deal with their situation.

In all situations where users are at risk, volunteers receive support from professionals during the call. They help the user develop a safety plan, and they are offered a follow up call within 24 hours if the user wants further support.

<sup>1</sup>Mishara, Brian L. et al, 2016 Comparison of the effects of telephone suicide prevention help by volunteers and professional paid staff : Results from studies in the USA and Quebec, Canada Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior 46(5): 577-587

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When it is determined that a person is at imminent risk of suicide, a Distress Centre volunteer will maintain contact until emergency services and/or police arrive. Maintaining contact is instrumental to increasing the likelihood of saving a person's life.

*"I called. They answered. They listened. Suicide is serious and they took me seriously." – Distress Centre Caller*

## Value Creation

The value created by Distress Centre is linked to volunteer success in assisting people to:

- Develop resiliency by utilizing effective coping strategies.
- Connect to community services that are appropriate to their needs.
- Link to Distress Centre short-term counselling.

An increasing body of research shows evidence that the act of giving and caring for others has significant impact upon the giver. Value is created for Distress Centre volunteers as a result of being an essential part of a service contributing meaningful value to others. Our volunteers also develop organizational, managerial and communication skills that are valued by and transferable to any sector, increasing employability. Our volunteers have identified that community and family members in crisis benefited from their skills outside of Distress Centre.

By individuals contacting the Distress Centre instead of Calgary Police Services or emergency rooms, both departments are free to redirect resources elsewhere which is a considerable financial cost saving to the community.

Value is created by Distress Centre acting as a hub in the social sector; responding to "after hours" calls of partner agencies and those that do not have 24-hour infrastructure.

## Distress Centre's Social Return on Investment (SROI)

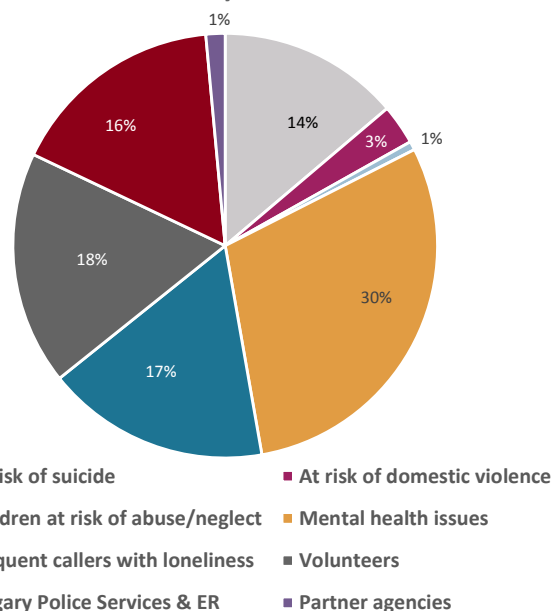
The SROI for Distress Centre's 24/7 Crisis Program reflects the value of ensuring that contacts made by individuals in various degrees of distress are received by highly trained volunteers skilled at empathetic crisis de-escalation.

An SROI seeks to illustrate the value of outcomes

experienced by callers and other stakeholders, in financial terms. As such, the value created was calculated by linking the outcomes experienced by stakeholders to financial proxies that represent the value of change that they (the stakeholders) have experienced.

As illustrated by the 2016 operating year, the social return on investment into Distress Centre's Crisis Program was \$7.42 per \$1 invested.

Value created by stakeholder



## Conclusion

Every dollar invested into Distress Centre creates a minimum of **\$7.42** in value for stakeholders impacted by the work of Distress Centres' 24/7 Crisis Program. This ratio includes the Centre's important role in crisis intervention as well as the value of de-escalating **one crisis** experienced by **one person** at imminent risk of suicide, in addition to the crisis situation of other callers experiencing varying degrees of distress and for various concerns (domestic violence, child abuse, mental health, and loneliness/isolation).

Of note, the Distress Centre intervened in **68** suicides in progress in 2016. The role of the volunteer in maintaining contact with the person at-risk, until the police and/or emergency services arrive, is instrumental in preventing death by suicide, thus avoiding impact upon family members, friends and the community as a whole.