



photo: Oliver Wong

ANNUAL REPORT

2019 / 2020

ABOUT THE CRISIS CENTRE OF BC



photo: Oliver Wong

The Crisis Centre of BC is dedicated to providing help and hope to individuals, organizations, and communities. Spanning the spectrum of crisis support, suicide prevention, and postvention, we engage staff and volunteers in a variety of services and programs that educate, train, and support the strength and capacity of individuals and communities.

We offer:

- Immediate access to barrier-free, non-judgmental, confidential support and follow-up to youth, adults, and seniors through 24/7 phone lines and online services.
- Education and training programs that promote mental wellness and equip schools, organizations and communities to assist people at risk of suicide.

Our programs work to ensure timely access to support, destigmatize suicide and mental health concerns, and increase awareness and skills for mental health. We engage a community of passionate volunteers. We foster and create compassionate, connected, suicide-safer communities.

Special thanks to those individuals who worked on interview and writing the stories captured in this Annual Report: Chelsea Carter, Jeffrey Preiss, and Stacy Ashton.





A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends:

We have made a commitment to respond to individuals in crisis and distress through 24/7 phone lines, chat services, and community-based education and training. We are proud to say that we have delivered.

We have experienced many changes and transitions in our individual lives, in our communities, the not-for-profit sector, and at the Crisis Centre since the start of 2020. In March, the lives of British Columbians along with the majority of Canada and the globe changed. We were asked to "stay home" with self-isolation and quarantine orders put in place to do our part in slowing the spread of COVID-19.

Our annual report focuses on our past fiscal year - April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020 - and is a snapshot of our success in the year leading up to the current health emergency.

One of the activities we started in early 2020 was a visioning process. In February, members of the Crisis Centre staff team, volunteers, and Board met to explore what our services and programs will be in the years ahead. As we move forward through our current fiscal year, this work continues.

And, we continue to do what the Crisis Centre has been called on to do for over 51 years – respond to crisis.

To all our donors and volunteers - thank you for your generosity of money and time. To all the staff - thank you for your commitment. To all those who reach out to use our education and training programming, the phones, or online through our chat services - we are here for you.

Together, we give hope.

Stacy Ashton
Executive Director

Bob Meyer
Board Chair

PHONES MATTER



If you've used a crisis line for support, you are not alone: 505,000 British Columbians have used crisis lines when they were in distress. And if you reached out, chances are you reached out by telephone.

This past year, the Crisis Centre commissioned a survey through Insights West to study crisis service use among British Columbians. The survey found that even in an age of constant texting, British Columbians prefer talking on the phone (49%) instead of texting (19%) or chatting (14%) when they are looking for emotional support.

Although preference for phone-based crisis support increases with age (76% of those over the age of 55 preferred phones vs 58% of 35-54 year olds), 43% of those aged 18-34 still preferred phone.

"We are social animals, and we seek comfort from one another," remarks Stacy Ashton, Executive Director of the Crisis Centre of BC, who was not surprised by these findings. "When people are sad, angry, or afraid, they want to hear the warmth in another person's voice. Our words only communicate 20% of our meaning, so a text is very limited in how much support it can convey. The tone and pacing of our voices hold 80% of our meaning, and that's how our volunteers

and staff on the lines let you know we understand and care about you."

Almost twice as many British Columbians who were aware of a crisis line have thought about using a crisis line (21%) than have actually used one (12%).

"When people are sad, angry, or afraid, they want to hear the warmth in another person's voice."

"If you are thinking about calling a crisis line, please call," says Ashton. "Being alone with painful, intense feelings is hard. It's not a weakness to reach out for help, it's a strength."

These findings were released in time for Crisis Line Awareness Week (March 23 to 27, 2020), which draws attention to the crucial work BC's crisis lines do to support people when they are upset, in emotional pain, or thinking about suicide.



PROGRAMS

DISTRESS SERVICES

photo: Oliver Wong

Our Distress Services program provides support to vulnerable individuals across British Columbia. We offer services through our 24/7 distress phone lines and online chat services between 12pm and 1am.

Services are delivered by highly trained volunteers and paid responders who provide non-judgmental emotional support through risk assessment, collaborative safety planning, and short-term follow-up by phone. We also engage emergency rescue services as needed.

SERVICES INCLUDE

Vancouver Coastal Regional Crisis Line 604-872-3311

- Available to youth, adults, and seniors across Metro Vancouver, 24/7
- Services the communities of Vancouver, Richmond, North Vancouver, West Vancouver, Sea-to-Sky (Squamish, Whistler, Pemberton) and the Sunshine Coast (Gibsons, Roberts Creek, Sechelt, Powell River)

310 Mental Health (604-310-6789) and 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)

Serves British Columbia in collaboration with 14 other crisis centres through the Crisis Lines Association of BC

YouthInBC.com (ages 12-24)

Provides youth, and those concerned about them, an opportunity to chat online, confidentially, with a highly trained crisis responder (12pm - 1am) in BC and the Yukon

CrisisCentreChat.ca (ages 25+)

Provides adults who may not connect with crisis services by phone or in-person to chat online with a highly trained crisis responder (12pm - 1am) in BC and the Yukon

"The last several years have been difficult for me work-wise and I am among the many who could not keep their jobs with COVID, and so this donation isn't much. I hope to be able to give more when my financial situation improves. Thank you for all of the beautiful work that you do and I hope you are keeping safe and doing well."

– Distress Services Caller/Chatter

GETTING STRAIGHT TO THE POINT

You wouldn't expect Jess to become anxious in front of a group of teenagers. When you meet her she's all smiles and has a calm, friendly demeanour. When she first volunteered leading mindfulness workshops with the Crisis Centre, she would feel extremely anxious – as most people do when speaking in front of a group.

Jess found a way to overcome these sensations; she put into practice the very thing she was teaching. She was mindful of her emotions, of the feeling of anxiety that she would feel at first during a workshop, and she learned to sit with these emotions. Instead of allowing these emotions to overcome her she used mindfulness to allow the emotions become a part of her workshop, a part of her own mindfulness practice.

"It can be really intimidating," Jess says about presenting, "but there's something cool about doing something that intimidates you and then receiving all this positive feedback at the end and knowing you've made a connection."

She began volunteering with the Crisis Centre after taking part in a workshop held by the Centre for her employer. Mindfulness had played a big role in her life over the past four years and she strongly identified with the workshop's message. She offered to become a volunteer on the spot.

In addition to being able to increase her own knowledge of mindfulness through

courses provided by the Crisis Centre, Jess was also able to use other lifesaving skills she learned through the safeTalk training.

When a colleague mentioned wanting to die, playing it off as a simple joke, Jess realized she needed to reach out. She had taken safeTalk with the Crisis Centre and was aware that joking about death is a sign of someone potentially in crisis, so she used what she had learned and reached out.

"Have you thought of suicide?"

Straight to the point, no beating around the bush. It was the direct question needed to get her colleague along the road to support. As a mindfulness educator with the Crisis Centre, Jess was aware of the many resources that the Crisis Centre makes available to participants through its workshops and gave these to her friend in need. Jess notes the importance of having these resources so readily available.

"People just don't know where to look and when you're at that point you might not have the energy to look either. The great thing about the Crisis Centre workshops was that it gives you all these resources, and I was able to pass these on to her."

With Jess' support and resources, her colleague was able to be properly diagnosed and begin receiving the mental health support she needed.



PROGRAMS

COMMUNITY LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

We work with individuals across the lifespan to support wellbeing in schools, communities, and organizations. Our programs and services increase awareness about suicide, strengthen intervention skills, facilitate growth and recovery after a suicide experience and provide empowering tools for resiliency.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Practical and innovative programs provide a unique opportunity for youth to learn about mental health and gain practical skills for coping. Delivered by staff and volunteers, our youth programs are a vital component of school district mental health education.

"Much, much more than once, I have wanted to just punch someone in the face because they were being so mean, and/or annoying but I did some mindfulness breathing and other strategies to stop myself before I snapped."

– Youth Participant in Mindfulness for Youth Program, Gilmore Community School, Burnaby

"As a Peer Support Team for firefighters we had been taught suicide intervention in other courses. However, team members expressed feeling ill equipped to address conversations around suicide. ASIST gave us tools and training providing us a framework to not only ask the right questions, but to know what to listen for in order to support people to find safety today. Our team members who attended all agreed they felt far more confident and equipped to talk to others about suicide. I highly recommend ASIST to all Fire Service Peer Support teams. I wouldn't want my team members to address a suicidal firefighter without it."

– Captain Scott Young, Peer/CISM Team Coordinator, Coquitlam Fire/Rescue

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

Evidence-based and empowering, our education programs form a critical component of organizations' professional development. In building suicide-safer communities, we engage school staff, health care practitioners, mental health professionals, police, emergency services staff, youth workers, older adult care providers, and community members who want to make a difference.

Our programs recognize the importance of self-awareness and self-care and provide skills and strategies that foster resilience and help prevent stress, burnout, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue.

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS



11,914 youth reached through workshops and resource fairs, destigmatizing mental health and supporting wellness



505 adults trained in 2-day ASIST workshops to respond effectively to suicide



97 adults trained in safeTALK Training for Trainers, bringing safeTALK workshops to organizations and communities across North America



501 youth learned life skills with our mindfulness program



41,770 individuals provided with the support they needed when they needed it through distress services



1,811 youth reached out for support through our YouthInBC.com online service



115 volunteers trained in the Distress Services program



1,907 adults trained to support emotional well-being and respond to distress and suicide



300+ organizations participated in training, including BC Emergency Health Services, Coquitlam Fire and Rescue, BC Centre for Disease Control, Delta Police Victim Services, Burnaby School District, and City of Vancouver 311

CALL AND CHAT DEMOGRAPHICS

18%

age 0-24

32%

age 25-39

40%

age 40-64

9%

age 65+

42%

female
(excluding unknown)

28%

first-time
users

17%

indicated
disability
(excluding unknown)

17%

from Vancouver
(of known locations)

FINDING A NEW PASSION WITH THE CRISIS CENTRE

Anne-Marie's life was turned upside down when she suffered her third knee injury. She had been on the path to a life as a professional athlete in either soccer or field hockey. Sport was everything she had built her identity around. When she lost her ability to compete and be active, Anne-Marie felt as though she had lost herself. She began to spiral into depression and was eventually diagnosed with severe depression.

Mental health disorders ran in Anne-Marie's family and her family pushed her to reach out to get help. She thought sharing her feelings with a stranger seemed stupid; after all if she couldn't share things with her closest friends how could a stranger help? But with nothing left to lose, she reluctantly reached out and, despite what she had expected, she saw results.

"Even just the act of reaching out helped," she says, "I could see that despite one door closing for me, others were opening."

Anne-Marie began to see a life after sport, to find herself again and discover new passions. After seeing how valuable the help of "strangers" could be, Anne-Marie decided to volunteer with the Crisis Centre. She wanted to promote the values of self-care and the importance of building the connections that make it possible to reach out: To share the tools that helped her overcome her own depression.

Anne-Marie began giving self-care workshops at high schools as a youth educator for the Crisis Centre. The workshops facilitated the discovery of a new passion while enabling her to continue on her own path of self-care.

As Anne-Marie was teaching adolescents about self-care, they told her how they "felt inspired" by her story. Through her work with the Crisis Centre Anne-Marie discovered her desire to work in counseling, and was shocked to learn how much she enjoyed working with adolescents.

"Volunteering with the Crisis Centre was like dipping my foot in the water," she says. "Facilitating is extremely fulfilling work; it just felt good and it is the reason I've decided to pursue counseling."

Anne-Marie is now studying at UBC to become a Registered Clinical Counselor while continuing to volunteer with the Centre. Let the Crisis Centre help open a door for you! Volunteer now and you may discover a brand new passion.

"Even just the act of reaching out helped, I could see that despite one door closing for me, others were opening."

VOLUNTEER POWERED

Greater Vancouver has a rich and diverse community of committed and talented individuals who are passionate about helping others.

The Crisis Centre trains and supports these regular yet extraordinary individuals who share their skills as volunteers in administration, on the phone lines and in chat rooms, in classroom and community events, and in training rooms at the Centre.

photo: Oliver Wong



Number of hours contributed by our Volunteers in 2019/2020:

- Distress Services 24,901
- Community Learning & Engagement 2,354
- Administration/Office 392
- Development & Communications 373

THANK

YOU!

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Vancouver Coastal Health

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The Crisis Centre makes every effort to ensure the donor listing is as accurate as possible. If you identify a mistake, please call 604-872-1811. We have excluded donors who have asked not to be identified.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF SUICIDE PREVENTION

A slow smile spreads across Rob's face as he recollects his past two years volunteering with the Crisis Centre. He is glad to be a part of such a community and able to give back – even though what prompted him to join the Crisis Centre was not a happy situation: someone within his circle had attempted suicide.

Two years ago, after seeing someone close to him struggle with suicide, Rob found himself online searching for organizations that had a focus on mental health to volunteer with.

"It was hard to find an organization that was a good fit for me, until I found the Crisis Centre. I wanted to be able to educate others, as well as myself, and lower the stigma surrounding mental health."

Through his own experience, Rob found a large barrier to getting help was the stigma surrounding mental health, which stopped people from opening up to one another. That is why he chose to begin working as a youth educator and safeTalk trainer with the Crisis Centre.

"safeTalk is all about starting conversations and about breaking down the stigma around suicide and mental health."

The work is so rewarding, he says, because he is able to see how much people take away from the workshops. And even if he doesn't get to directly see the benefits, he enjoys the thought that he has cast the first stone in a ripple effect.

"safeTalk is all about starting conversations and about breaking down the stigma around suicide and mental health. If one person takes that away and is able to start an open conversation with someone else, and so on, I find comfort in believing there is a ripple effect."

By enabling people to communicate with each other, and more importantly to feel safe about opening up, we can help save lives. Humans are naturally social, and developing communities is how we have evolved to help one another stay safe through years of evolution. By becoming part of the Crisis Centre community Rob says it is much easier to have those sometimes tough conversations, the kind that can save a friend.

"I find just by telling people I work with the Crisis Centre can open the door for dialogue."

If you would like to become a part of our community while giving back to yours, contact us to volunteer!

LEADERSHIP



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Dan Cox – Director

Morgan Gough – Vice-President

Brandon Ma – Treasurer

Alexis Martis – Director

Bob Meyer – President

Jude Platzer – Director

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Staff Leadership Team

Stacy Ashton, MA – *Executive Director*

Lu Ripley, MA – *Director, Community Learning & Engagement*

Liz Robbins, MS, RCC – *Director, Distress Services, Crisis Response & Operations (On Leave)*

Josh Cytrynbaum, *Director, Distress Services, Crisis Response & Operations (Acting)*

Akhila Blaise, MA – *Director, Distress Services, Training & Quality Assurance*

Jeffrey Preiss, MATS, MA – *Manager, Development & Communications*

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Audited financial statements are made available at the Crisis Centre of BC's annual general meeting and upon request.

If you or someone you know is struggling and needs someone to talk to, we are here for you:

- Vancouver Coastal Regional Distress Line: 604-872-3311
- Anywhere in BC 1-800-SUICIDE: 1-800-784-2433
- Mental Health Support Line: 310-6789
- Sunshine Coast/Sea to Sky: 1-866-661-3311
- Online Chat Service for Youth: www.YouthInBC.com (Noon to 1am)
- Online Chat Service for Adults: www.CrisisCentreChat.ca (Noon to 1am)

Because it's Thanksgiving, I was thinking about what I'm thankful for: I'm really grateful for all your help.

The last several years have been difficult for me work-wise and I am among the many who could not keep their jobs with COVID, and I still wanted to give a donation. Thank you for all of the beautiful work that you do, and I hope you are keeping safe and doing well.

Merry Christmas to everyone at the Centre. Thanks for helping me stay safe and get through the holidays.

Thank you for saving my life.



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