

Edmonton Distress Line is in distress

For Tom, life wasn't worth living. Recently divorced, he was using drugs and alcohol to numb the pain. With his affairs in order and the pills lined up beside him, Tom was ready to kill himself. He called The Support Network's Distress Line because he simply wanted someone to talk to during his final moments. A volunteer helped him choose life. Tom's story is just an example of the kinds of calls that come through on the Distress Line. Every day there are people like Tom who feel suicidal, depressed, afraid to leave an abusive spouse or simply overwhelmed. "Every call is different," says Renee Gagnon, volunteer co-ordinator for The Support Network. "It's a new challenge every time you pick up the phone."

Gagnon has answered her share of calls and knows first-hand how rewarding it is to help people. But a shortage of volunteers could result in thousands of calls going unanswered – a startling fact when you consider that 1,500 people call the Distress Line every month. Close to 31 per cent of those calls are suicide-related. The Support Network has been offering this unique service for almost 30 years. The Distress Line was developed to serve those in crisis outside working hours, which is why the line is open 24 hours a day, every day.



Gagnon estimates that The Support Network needs at least 120 to 150 more volunteers to sufficiently cover the lines. To become a volunteer, 64 hours of training must be completed. "The training will teach you how to effectively help people," she says. While a background in psychology, social work or counseling isn't needed, Gagnon notes that volunteers must be over the age of 18 and should be non-judgmental, empathetic and mature. These are qualities that ensure the right people are answering the phones. "There are lots of ways to give back to the community. The amount of time and effort you give as a Distress Line volunteer means that you get so much more back. Knowing you've made a huge difference in a person's life is an amazing feeling," Gagnon says. Upcoming training classes take place from Jan. 13 to Feb. 10. Training classes are also scheduled from May to June 2010. To become a volunteer for the Distress Line, email volunteers@thesupportnetwork.com or call 780-732-6648. If you or someone you know is in crisis, you can call the Distress Line any time at 780-482-HELP (4357). For more information or to suggest a topic, please contact Evelyn Pham, Communications Co-ordinator, at ephram@volunteeredmonton.com, call 780-732-6655 or check out our website at www.volunteeredmonton.com.

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Christmas Office Closure for the Planning and Development Department

The following public offices will be closed December 25, 2009 until January 3, 2010, inclusive and scheduled to reopen January 4, 2010.

- Current Planning
- Planning and Policy
- Community Standards (Bylaw Enforcement)
- Housing

The Animal Services Facility will be closed December 25, 26, 27, 2009, January 1, 2010 and will reopen January 2, 2010.

For emergency and essential services, please call 780-496-3100.

The management and staff of the Planning and Development Department wish you a happy holiday season and look forward to serving you in the new year.

THE CITY OF EDMONTON PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT