

## Rotary Grant Gave New Life to Distress Centre Calgary

It's 1999 and Calgary's only 24 hour crisis centre was housed in a decrepit building designated for demolition. There was no transit access or elevator for the staff, volunteers and clients. Located in a very unsafe area of the city, evenings were especially dangerous when staff, volunteers and clients would be arriving and leaving the agency. Drug deals, fighting and prostitution occurred in our parking lot on a daily basis. Heating and cooling systems were old and ineffective and our space could only accommodate 6 booths in our call centre. Today thanks to the support of Rotary we have 26 stations that house our crisis and ConnecTeen volunteers, and our contact centre and 211 staff. We also have appropriate office and meeting space to accommodate our 8 professional counsellors, 45 full-time staff, practicum students and volunteer training.

Distress Centre was operating on an annual budget of just over \$600,000 – all of that for operations. When the building was sold to Impark Distress Centre had only a few months to find a new space. Staff approached their Board and major funders - The City of Calgary, United Way and AADAC – to ask for more funding and for ideas on a new location. No additional funds were available.

Distress Centre heard about a major grant from the Rotary Club of Downtown Calgary. They applied, made a presentation, and were successful in receiving \$110K because the Rotary saw a need in the community and they recognized that Distress Centre could support that need. The grant allowed us to leverage that support, engage new donors and partners, (The Community Facility enhancement Program (CFEP), the Nickle Foundation, an anonymous donor, and the Community Lottery Board) and raise a total of \$340,000. The grant allowed Distress Centre to move into their present location. Renovations were required to provide space for a fully functioning call centre (phone room), offices for staff and private counselling, board room, kitchen, storage, reception, waiting room and meeting room. The new location improved accessibility and safety for our clients, volunteers and staff, as well as providing a warm and welcoming environment for everyone. Computer software was also developed to improve access to resources, collect data and obtain information, ensuring a standard of excellence in the delivery of our services. A level of excellence we still aspire to today.

In 1999 our crisis volunteers responded to 38,700 calls. Today our 250 highly trained volunteers respond to over 100,000 calls, chats, emails and texts 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We are the second largest crisis centre in Canada behind Toronto. We have an annual operating budget of \$4.1 million. We have been providing Calgary and southern Alberta 24 hour crisis support for 45 years. We are experts in crisis intervention and partner with other social agencies in Calgary to ensure that Calgary's most vulnerable have a place to turn to for support.

Whether it is a tragedy like the Brentwood killings, a disaster like the 2013 flood, an isolated senior who needs someone to talk to, a student feeling anxious about exams, or a veteran suffering from PTSD, our 250 highly trained volunteers are here to support them through their personal crisis. Distress Centre endeavors to respond to every call, text, chat and email so that everyone is heard. 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Everyone is heard.