

Serving Diverse Callers (language and culture)

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The Telecare Distress Center in Brampton (a suburb of Toronto, Canada) serves a very diverse population, in every cultural and social sense of the word "diverse".

Telecare Distress Center expanded its English Crisis lines to include Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Spanish and Portuguese languages and anticipates launching Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, French and Polish crisis lines soon. The center also offers crisis intervention and emotional first-aid support to the Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender (LGBT) community, and reaches out to people with disabilities.

There are many challenges to offering crisis line services to a very diverse population. Initial screening of the volunteers, routing of calls, staffing of special service desks, and training of diverse volunteers and staff in a culturally sensitive manner all need to be addressed on an on-going basis.

The major benefit of this focused multi-lingual crisis lines program is that it addresses the emerging needs of the population in the region where many people are immigrants from other countries. Currently, Telecare Distress Centre's multi-lingual crisis lines serve as a lifeline for many people in the community who are not able to access community resources and support due to language barriers.

These programs though a great help to the community add an additional expense to the organization. A variety of funding sources, such as Ontario Trillium Foundation, United Way of Peel and Region of Peel have supported these initiatives.

Questions and suggestions will be solicited from the audience, along with anecdotes of relevant experiences in other centers. Attendees will take away an appreciation of the benefits and challenges of serving a diverse population, and will be better able to assess the desirability of introducing similar services in their own environment.