

2024



# ANNUAL REPORT

## Gerstein Crisis Centre





# Letter From Our Leadership



Dear Friends,

Gerstein Crisis Centre is thirty-five! We are proud of and committed to the work we do. We have offered leadership within the sector and the community while we continue to center the voices of lived and living experience of mental health in all we do. Over the last few years, we have shared our experience and expertise with communities across the country who are looking at developing community based, non-police crisis teams. The World Health Organization invited us to present as a case study on non-coercive crisis response to a world wide audience. We are grateful for these opportunities to speak about our work and to share our unique community based, trauma informed, equity focused and humanistic approach to mental health crisis.

Gerstein Centre also continues to learn. We know there is more work needed to support mental health in our communities. It is time for more investment in housing and quickly! Access to mental health and substance use supports, income assistance and employment continue to be barriers for the people we serve. We recognize that times are tough, and people are suffering. We see this everyday in our work and are committed to continuing to advocate for system improvements, better services, more equitable access to all health and social supports while at the same time building on our own service delivery.

We have grown again! We have added 42 Crisis Workers to our team and now have 8 mobile crisis teams covering South Central Toronto and South Etobicoke. We have supported thousands of people over the last year and have widened out access points to include our 24-hour crisis line, 988 National Suicide Prevention Line, mobile team access through 211 and diversion from 911, crisis teams located in 3 Downtown Toronto Public Libraries, and 10 new partnerships providing dedicated access to needed health and social supports (see Gerstein by the numbers to see our impact).

Gerstein Centre continues the work we have been doing to create a reflective environment that strengthens our approach to serve community, and to support staff, from an anti-oppression and anti-racism lens. This is work we do together at all levels of the organization and our commitment is to continue to prioritize the inclusion of diverse perspectives, reflect the communities we serve at all levels of the organization and update our commitment statements, policies, hiring practices and communication to help us disrupt racism within our organization and in the communities we serve.

We have an incredible team at Gerstein Centre united by our principles and values. People are at the core of our impact. We want to express our appreciation to our staff, leadership and the board for their passion, commitment, trust, and flexibility through this intense period of growth at our organization. We have also received a great deal of support from our community and partners who have put their trust in us and who have stepped up to support us in our work.

With respect and appreciation,

*Susan Davis + Adam Wheeler*



# 35 Years!



In 1989, Gerstein Crisis Centre, in collaboration with many community partners and people with lived experience developed a model for crisis intervention that listened to the individual in crisis rooted in the belief that individuals have the strength and capacity to be part of resolving their own crisis. To be a place that someone could go in crisis where they could maintain their dignity, respect and autonomy. Gerstein Centre was developed as an alternative to hospital, the first community-based crisis response that was non-medical in nature looking beyond a medical diagnosis, recognizing the unique individual and the many social determinants that impact people's lives.

We are deeply committed to this legacy and the values and principles that have guided Gerstein Centre over the years. Listening to people with lived and living experience of mental health and substance use remains at the core. People continue to struggle to get the support and treatment they need however we also know the incredible resilience and expertise that people have that both contribute to their own well being and to improving our communities, families and workplaces.

Gerstein Crisis Centre has grown and changed over the years and almost always in response to gaps in services and changing needs in our community. We have built on the foundation established 35 years ago and have grown considerably. We have shared our work with many organizations across the province, country and around the world and while we are proud of our model we are committed to continue to listen to and learn from others and strengthen our approaches to serve the community. Collaboration is a big part of our success and we are grateful for the incredible support of our many partners, the communities we serve and our supporters for the trust they put in us.

As always, it is the people who make a difference. We have an incredible team who bring to life the mission, vision and values of Gerstein Centre every day. The compassion, care and generosity they bring to each other and the people we serve is what keeps us strong and allows for the positive impact we make in the community.

# Voices & People Shaping Our Approach



## DR. REVA GERSTEIN

“ We who consider ourselves as civilized should pause and think for a moment. A great city such as ours is not judged by its beautiful buildings, its clean streets, its subway system or its harbour front. The true measure of a civilization rests upon how it cares for its vulnerable members. ”

In 1989 Dr. Reva Gerstein established Gerstein Crisis Centre. Her advocacy and hard work gave rise to the establishment of community supports and services that sought to better the lives of those affected by mental health issues. We at Gerstein Centre will be forever grateful to Dr. Gerstein for all that she taught us and for instilling the values and vision that we work and live by.

## PAT CAPPONI

“ We, those with lived experience, must challenge the status quo; we must be the change agents, we must dare to speak our truths even when gate-keepers and those who derive their status and employment from our communities deny us our right to speak, to engage, to point out the systemic failures that guarantee their jobs and our continued poverty. ”

Pat Capponi, was a founding member of the Gerstein Crisis Centre. A psychiatric survivor, author, and activist, her experiences navigating the mental health system ignited in her a passion in her to make systemic changes. She had an impactful role in shaping the legacy and the values and principles on which Gerstein Crisis Centre is built



## PAUL QUINN

“ As we look back on the years, we can see many improvements in the lives of psychiatric survivors in Toronto, yet there is still a long way to go. If we listen to the strong voice of the psychiatric survivor community — to those with lived experience — we can make positive changes to the mental health system. ”



Paul Quinn was the first Executive Director of Gerstein Crisis Centre and served in this role from 1989 until 2013. He worked closely with the founding members to establish a non-medical crisis response, rooted in community based, non-coercive approaches that are grounded by the involvement and leadership of people with lived experience.



Gerstein Crisis Centre receives the 2024 Front Line Workers Leadership Award at the Jessica Bell Community Recognition Awards



Gerstein Crisis Centre along with the three other TCCS partners (2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, TAIBU CHC, and CMHA Toronto) are recipients of the 2024 Toronto Community Champion Awards

## 2024 Awards



# Gerstein Crisis Centre: TCCS Expansion

We are excited to announce that as of July 8th, the Toronto Community Crisis Service (TCCS) has officially expanded across the entire city of Toronto! Launched as a pilot in early 2022, TCCS provides a community-based, client-centered, and trauma-informed response to mental health and addiction crises. This expansion means that anyone in need of mental health support can now access this vital service by calling either 211 or 911 and specifically requesting a mental health response. TCCS is available 24/7.

This expansion is part of SafeTO: Toronto's Ten-Year Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, making it a key initiative in improving community safety and access to mental health support across the city.

GCC is proud to be one of the four anchor partners supporting this citywide initiative. As a result of this expansion, GCC is covering South Central Toronto and South Etobicoke. GCC TCCS offers alternative crisis response in Police Divisions 11, 13, 14, 22, 51, 52, 53 and 55.

To support this expanded service, we have hired an additional 29 Crisis Intervention Workers and 8 Access Facilitators, who will assist with the new expanded areas and help ensure that we are providing timely and effective support to individuals in crisis across these parts of the city.



# Collaboration with Toronto Public Library(TPL)

It has been a little over a year since the start of this collaboration between Gerstein Crisis Centre and the Toronto Public Library. This pilot is located at four Toronto Public Library branches, primarily at Toronto Reference Library and Lillian H. Smith, with additional resources and programming available at Sanderson and Fort York. The goal of this pilot is both to provide on-site crisis de-escalation and crisis support, and to create an access point for library users experiencing various vulnerabilities to connect with resources outside of the library setting, including mental health, primary care, housing, and recovery supports. The supports offered through this partnership include on-site crisis support, as well as on-site wellness and recovery groups, including F.R.E.S.H. and W.R.A.P.

## **Crisis Support:**

A team of skilled Gerstein Crisis staff are based in Lillian H. Smith, and Toronto Reference Library, providing low barrier support to library users in crisis. The presence of crisis workers in these public spaces has had a significant and indelible impact on the community and library staff, all of whom report that a vital need is being met by the supports and services provided.

## **F.R.E.S.H. (Finding Recovery through Exercise, Skill & Hope):**

FRESH currently has a presence at Fort York, Sanderson, Lillian H Smith and The Reference Library. The team has a strong working relationship with W.R.A.P, the Gerstein TPL crisis team and the staff at the various branches. Through, FRESH various activities are being offered such as craft tables, movies, history walks, comfort dog visits, music therapy, exercise classes and more. An increase has been noticed in the number of library clients participating in outdoor FRESH activities and FRESH clients participating in library activities. This has lead to the formation of friendships and a sense of community that is stronger and more engaging than ever before.

## **W.R.A.P. (Wellness Recovery Action Plan):**

WRAP is a flexible, self-designed wellness tool that can be used for any life issue. WRAP allows one to consider the meaning of "Recovering Wellness" for oneself. With WRAP, individuals develop their own wellness plan, which serves as a tool for facing life's challenges. Participants can learn more about this by attending eight group sessions. The WRAP program, utilizes a train-the-trainer approach and participants who attend a WRAP group may be eligible to move on to the next level to train as a WRAP facilitator. Through this collaboration, WRAP groups have been offered at all four participating libraries: Fort York, Sanderson, Lillian H Smith and The Reference Library.



# 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline

9-8-8 is a new three-digit national suicide prevention helpline launched on November 30, 2023. 9-8-8 for anyone across Canada who is thinking about suicide, or who is worried about someone they know. Call or text 9-8-8 toll-free, anytime for support in English and French. 9-8-8 responders are here to listen and provide help without judgement. Led and coordinated by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and funded by the Government of Canada, 9-8-8 is made up of a growing network of more than 40 experienced local, provincial and territorial, and national crisis lines across the country.

As a partner in 9-8-8, Gerstein Crisis Centre is part of a network of local, provincial and territorial, and national helplines across Canada who are delivering the service. When someone reaches out to 9-8-8, wherever possible, they will be connected to the responder that is closest to them, based on their area code. There will also be additional trained responders across the country, to provide extra capacity when a local responder is not available. All 9-8-8 responders are trained in suicide prevention and providing trauma-informed and culturally affirming support.

From November 30, 2023, to October, Gerstein Crisis Centre responders handled 4879 voice interactions on the 9-8-8 network. Our crisis workers have successfully worked jointly with callers to create safety plans that reflect the strengths and resources of each caller and provide them with the supports they need to move forward.

In May 2024, veteran Gerstein and 9-8-8 Responders/mentors attended the National Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention conference in Vancouver. They were able to meet other 9-8-8 partners from across the country. In October 2024 Gerstein welcomed representative from the Public Health Agency of Canada and Centre for Addiction and Mental Health to our Charles Street location where they discussed the importance of having an accessible, anonymous three-digit suicide prevention line.

A huge thank you to the staff for their dedication and hard work!



# Anti-Racism: Commitment and Action

Educating ourselves about white privilege, white supremacy, and dismantling systems of oppression requires ongoing reflection, learning, accountability, and action. Gerstein Crisis Centre is committed to working toward achieving racial and social justice by centering and actively listening to Indigenous, Black, racialized, disabled, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ voices and speaking out against racism and all forms of oppressions and structural violence. We invite you to join us in this commitment to demolish systemic racism and move toward justice, equity, healing, and hope. [Click here to view our Anti Racism Statement.](#)

We know this work will be ongoing and continued action is required. Over the last year we have taken the following actions:

- Organization wide training on anti-Black Racism, anti-Indigenous Racism and 2SLGBTQ+ Foundations
- Anti-Black Racism Focus groups and all staff event promoting dialogue, joint learning and action planning
- Anti Racism Action Plan Developed and Communicated
- Strengthened infrastructure to support the Action Plan through the Anti Racism Steering Committee from all levels of the organization and as well establishing an Anti-Racism Committee of the Board
- Updated Anti Racism Policy and Procedures

We are thankful for the expertise and commitment of all members of our teams from Front Line Staff, to Management, Senior Leadership and the Board who are passionate, knowledgeable and committed to decolonizing our work place and communities. Thank you everyone and we look forward to continuing this work together.



**TCCS Staff with Marci Len, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth at a rally for National Day Against Gun Violence on June 7, 2024**

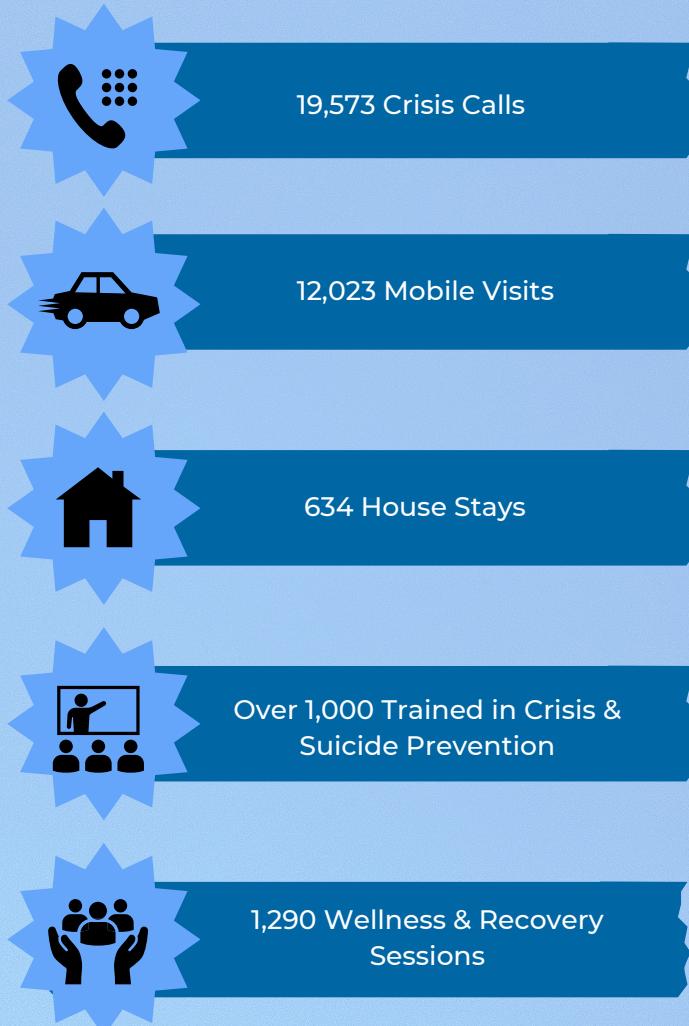


**H2H staff receiving approval from a four legged friend during community outreach**

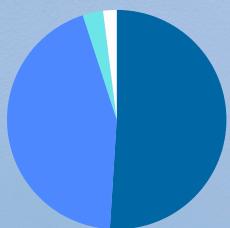
# In Our Community



# Gerstein By Numbers

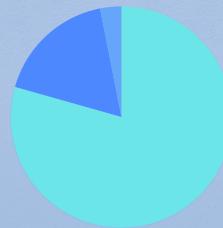


## Revenue



2% Other Income

## Expenses



1% Professional fees, Amortization

# Board of Directors

Adam Wheeler (Chair)

Angela Nyamweya

Desmond Rowley

Frank Gerstein

Indira Stewart

Katie Almond-Hoffman

Lubna Khalid

Lucia Costa

Madeline Timlin

Marina Morrow

Shawnna Hunter

Stephanie Gloyn

Sonali Sagare



# Thank You



Philip Smith Foundation  
Bertrand Gerstein Family Foundation  
Toronto Foundation  
Glenview Presbyterian Church  
Hugh Garner Co-op

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work

