

Caledon/Dufferin Victim Services provide support towards recovery for victims of crime

By Rob Paul

Victims of crime, abuse, and tragedy may feel alone and they have nowhere to turn for support as they deal with differing circumstances. That's what makes organizations like Caledon/Dufferin Victim Services (CDVS) so important.

CDVS is there for those who encounter crisis and need a shoulder to lean on as they work towards recovery. Built on the values of compassion, integrity, confidentiality, respect, accountability, and responsiveness, it has been a key cog in the area for over 30 years.

In 2020-21, CDVS had a clear impact in the community by assisting 30 victims of human trafficking, 399 victims of domestic violence, and 1,165 new victims of crime and tragedy with 60 crisis volunteer responders providing 30,000 hours of service.

The need for the programs and services CDVS offers victims was clear in Caledon after a handful of major incidents in the area.

"The agency began offering service in Caledon in 1990 in response to the high number of serious motor vehicle collisions and fatalities that plagued and continue to plague the area," said Dorthy Davis, CDVS Executive Director. "Serious accidents like the Mother's Day crash in 1993 have had ripple effects through our community and have highlighted the need for community members to lend a hand to victims and survivors in need."

What CDVS does is provide free support to those in need whenever they need it for whatever circumstances they're dealing with as victims.

"Caledon/Dufferin Victim Services is a not for profit, charitable organization serving the Town of Caledon and the County of Dufferin," said Davis. "Our agency offers free, one-to-one, confidential assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to support individuals affected by crime and tragic circumstances. We know the needs of each person who experiences crime, tragedy and disaster are different. The goal of the service is to lessen the impact of crime and tragedy, increase victim's safety, provide victims with information, facilitate connections to community resources and assist emergency service providers in meeting victim's emotional and practical needs."

Services CDVS provides victims are specific to each individual's situation and it's up to the victim to have final say on what they think best suits their recovery before a comprehensive plan is then put together by staff for the victim.

"CDVS is a Victim Crisis Assistance Ontario program (VCAO) that offers 24/7 in person or telephone support and crisis intervention to individuals affected by crime and tragic circumstances," said Davis. "The agency provides a menu of services and which services an individual receives will depend on their individual needs, respecting their right to make their own decisions. The Victim Quick Response Program + (VQRP) provides limited financial assistance to eligible victims and their families in the aftermath of a violent crime. CDVS administers funds available through the Ministry of the Attorney General and all clients must be assessed on an individual basis to determine eligibility."

"Our staff is highly trained in comprehensive safety planning which is available to all victims of crime," said Pina Marino, Program Manager. "Victim services staff can help an individual determine which options best enhance their safety and security. A safety plan is an active process of personalized suggestions, plans and responses created to help reduce the risk of harm. Although a safety plan cannot guarantee safety, it is an effective tool designed to positively impact the individual's safety. CDVS services are client-centered and service providers respect the right of every individual to make their own decisions. Our staff will take the time to assess a client's immediate needs or concerns and help develop strategies to address those most important to them."

Victims of any crime can struggle to get back on their feet and that's why CDVS is there to help regardless of situation and will work

to ensure the best services for each individual is there for them.

"No one should have to go through a crisis alone," said Marino. "Whether the individual is the victim, a friend, a family member or even a witness, we are here to help. Whether a client requires safety, financial assistance, counselling, or even longer-term support we help to connect them with the programs and services that match their needs. By providing support information and referrals we can lessen the impact of crime and help individuals navigate the sometimes confusing social services, medical, justice and government systems."

"As well, it allows police to attend to other crises, knowing that the victim's immediate needs are being met," Davis said. "Victim Services also benefits the community by providing awareness of victimization issues and by mobilizing crime prevention efforts in their area."

The pandemic has forced CDVS to adjust, but it hasn't stopped the organization from serving those who need it by implementing virtual services and increased protocols to keep everyone involved safe.

"Caledon/Dufferin Victim Services has successfully run and modified the programs and services to meet the changing needs of victims and their families in Caledon and Dufferin for over 30 years," said Davis. "Despite the pandemic, no interruption of services occurred, and outreach was made to 100 per cent of referred clients. Service modifications, to conduct more of the client interactions by phone or virtually rather than in person, have been implemented where necessary due to COVID public health guidelines and at the request of service providers and/or clients for safety."

With the pandemic ongoing, CDVS has seen a trend of increased need for their services with COVID-19 leading to more issues on a variety of levels as a result.

"At the onset of the global pandemic, victims of interpersonal violence were experiencing difficulty reaching out to community services as demonstrated by lower call volumes," Davis said. "However, as the pandemic continued, calls for service increased and CDVS connected more closely with community partners who may have limited their programs to ensure seamless access to services for clients. All staff and many of the crisis responders have reported an increase in the complexity of cases especially since the start of the global pandemic. Lock down measures have forced some people to be locked in at home with family members who are abusive. The pandemic has changed the way that we grieve and those who have lost loved ones either to COVID or for other reasons have not been able to process and express their grief."

"The lack of rituals and limits on the types of religious and funeral services during the pandemic has erased the coming together of friends and relatives who would otherwise have supported each other," said Marino. "Social isolation has caused people to become more vulnerable; easily victimized by the myriad of frauds and scams that have popped up in the past 18 months. Hard working parents fortunate enough to transition to work from home were now juggling work, childcare, online education and stress levels greatly increased. And finally, job insecurity and financial issues caused many people to lose their homes and possessions. These are some of the pandemic related types of calls we responded to."

Though COVID-19 restrictions have loosened, and the Province is working towards opening up, CDVS plans to continue with remote services to ensure all victims are comfortable.

"We will continue to provide virtual client support where warranted and virtual training

opportunities for crisis responders," said Davis. "Our community partner meetings have gone virtual, and we are certain that many will continue that way."

As for future programs and initiatives, CDVS is constantly evaluating what is working best and what else needs to be offered to ensure the best service to those in need.

“Besides the programs we are mandated to carry out by our funders, CDVS is always examining new trends in crime and victimization and designing programs that address any gaps in service,” said Davis.

For those who need to reach out to CDVS either for themselves or someone they know that is in need, there are multiple ways of connecting.

“Individuals can call us any time of day or night?24 hours a day, 365 days a year,” said Marino. “Our 24-hour crisis line is 905-951-3838, our website is www.cdvs.ca and they can go to the Need Help Page for more information. You can also find us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.”