



Jerilyn and many of her colleagues know what adversity feels like first-hand—and that's what keeps them working to help others.

Putting empathy to work

Jerilyn never intended to be a social worker. As a psychology undergraduate student looking to build practical skills, she started volunteering at Distress Centre Calgary, a United Way–supported agency, nearly two decades ago. The experience changed the direction of her life.

An opportunity to volunteer for the agency's 24-hour crisis telephone line, which helps people experiencing any level of distress, inspired Jerilyn to pursue a master's degree in social work and a leadership role in the "helping profession."

Today, she works as the agency's executive director, providing leadership to a team of dedicated and compassionate staff and volunteers, many of whom have experienced their own personal struggles. "We've all faced adversity in the past—including me," says Jerilyn. "There were times, growing up in a small town, when I didn't have anyone to talk to."

When Jerilyn learned about the agency's crisis line and on-site counselling services, she was amazed. "To be able to call a line where you know someone is there waiting for your call—that would have meant the world to me. To not feel so alone at that time," she says.

In fact, this vital community resource for people from all walks of life is what inspired Jerilyn to put her own experiences to work for the benefit of others. She's incredibly grateful to United Way donors, like you, who are helping to ensure that help is there—when and where it's needed—for many of the one in five people who will struggle with a mental illness in any given year.

"I definitely wouldn't be the person that I am today without the Centre," Jerilyn says. "This is not only a career; it's part of who I am as a person."



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