

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## **Record-Breaking Year for Interior Crisis Line: Crisis Line Awareness Week March 21-25/22**

Interior, BC – Every 13 minutes, someone in the Interior is reminded that they matter. Just by calling the Interior Crisis Line Network. And with Covid, wildfires, landslides, 2021 was another record-breaking year for the lifesaving and life-changing service.

Crisis Line Awareness Week (March 21-25) is an opportunity to reflect on the invisible safety net that stretches under every service and every person in the Interior. And to celebrate that in 2021, more than 38,000 calls were answered by Interior Crisis Line Responders.

“In 2021, Interior Crisis Line Responders provided close to 540,000 minutes of empowering support, life-saving intervention, safety planning and self-care planning. Extraordinary challenges require extraordinary caring and we are so proud of the commitment our team of staff and volunteers showed for the people who reached out for support,” explains Asha Croggon, Program Director for the service.

The Interior Crisis Line provides evidence-based crisis de-escalation, short-term emotional support, suicide prevention and intervention to people across the Interior Region. And calls are increasing with 30% more calls than 2020 which itself broke records. “Though the increased need stretched our resources, we really view this as a positive because it means people feel safe to reach out when their usual coping strategies are not working. There is still a lot of uncertainty and it is normal to feel overwhelmed and also very normal to reach out for support,” says Heather Silvester, manager of the Williams Lake site.

The Interior Crisis Line Network supports people in the Interior through six services including the regional crisis line (1.888.353.CARE) and chat (available Thursday to Sunday 5-9pmPT), the provincial suicide line (1800SUICIDE), the provincial mental health line (310-6789), and the national suicide phone service and text.

“We try to be there for people in our communities, regardless of the service they reach out to because we understand the unique challenges and resources available here. Our staff and volunteers come from communities across the region” shares Sheila Dudek, coordinator of the Trail site. Staff and volunteers come from communities like Cranbrook, Kelowna, Trail, Vernon, Kamloops, Williams Lake and across the Interior.

Fortunately the record-breaking incoming call numbers are also attracting people from the community interested in volunteering for the Interior Crisis Line. “Their commitment and care for the people of this entire region has been a real source of inspiration. We are having people reach out asking how they can help,” explains Natalie Hake, manager with the Cranbrook site.

Another strength working for the Interior Crisis Line Network is rather than having one central location which could be negatively impacted by the wildfires and landslides, it is built on a network of partner agencies (CMHA branches in Cranbrook, Vernon and Williams Lake, along with Kelowna Community Resources and Trail FAIR Society). When wildfires initiated evacuation alerts across the regions last year, the Interior Crisis Line created portable crisis lines, engaged remote responders and fellow Interior Crisis Line sites to ensure the critical service

would be available 24/7 when it was needed the most. “Our portable crisis line kits are now being reviewed by the national service as a promising practice and we are very fortunate none of our sites needed to evacuate though several of our staff and volunteers were directly impacted,” shares Emily Hollenbach, coordinator at the Vernon site.

With the ongoing increase in call volume, complexity, climate crises and community crises like the devastating findings at Residential Schools in the Interior, there is the need for heightened care for the wellness on both sides of the phone. The Interior Crisis Line Network also launched a Wellness Initiative for its staff and volunteers that is being replicated in other regions of BC. “We are able to provide external counselling for our volunteers as well as staff and launching new wellness supports this year in addition to the ongoing support they receive,” shares Michelle Nelmes, coordinator for the Kelowna site.

One of the supports all Crisis Line Responders receive is in the initial 60 hours of training and mentoring before they answer calls. Topics include the impact of trauma, navigating stress and self-care, mental health continuum, and evidence-based de-escalation and assessment. “We often hear people saying how useful their crisis line training and tools are in their ‘regular life’ and that is a very positive ripple effect from our training out into the community,” Alyssa Christmas, Director at the Vernon site.

With research suggesting the mental health impact after a crisis can continue up to 18 months after the initial incident, the impact of the pandemic and the intensity of 2021 is expected to be seen in ongoing record call volume in 2022/23. The integration of promising practices, wellness initiatives, improved technology and the commitment of staff and volunteers is setting the Interior Crisis Line to continue to ‘answer the call’ from the communities it serves.

*Interior Crisis Line Network can be reached by phone at 1.888.353.2273(CARE), 24/7/365 or by chat at interiorcrisisline.com (Thursday to Sunday 5-9pmPT). It is a network made up of the five local crisis lines in the Interior Region and is funded by the Interior Health Authority. Interested in volunteering, go to interiorcrisisline.com.*

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