

# The Power of Social Connection

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Explore the Evidence-based Impact of Friendly Calls on people, communities, and the healthcare system



**Canadian  
Red Cross**

**Croix-Rouge  
canadienne**

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*The BC Centre for Palliative Care  
is the provincial hub partner of the  
Palliative Care ECHO Project in British  
Columbia*

The BC Centre for Palliative Care, works with partners across the land colonially known as British Columbia. The work we do occurs on the territories of many distinct First Nations. We are grateful to all the First Nations who have cared for and nurtured the lands and waters around us for all time.

We recognize that all of you joining us online may be participating from traditional territories of other Indigenous peoples. From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people that call this land home.

# The Palliative Care ECHO Project

The Palliative Care ECHO Project is a 5-year national initiative to cultivate communities of practice and establish continuous professional development among health care providers across Canada who care for patients with life-limiting illness.

**Stay connected: [www.echopalliative.com](http://www.echopalliative.com)**



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# Thank You

The Palliative Care ECHO Project is supported by a financial contribution from Health Canada.

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# Introductions

## Presenters

### **Asha Croggon**

Director of Friendly Calls program, Canadian Red Cross

### **Doris Sun**

BCY Friendly Calls Coordinator

### **Michelle Rajani**

BCY Friendly Calls Coordinator

# Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

*Understand the health impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness (SI/L)*

*Understand the benefits of the Friendly Calls Program on people, communities, and health systems*

*Understand how the Friendly Calls program can assist the palliative community*

# Interactive Poll

## Spot the Myth





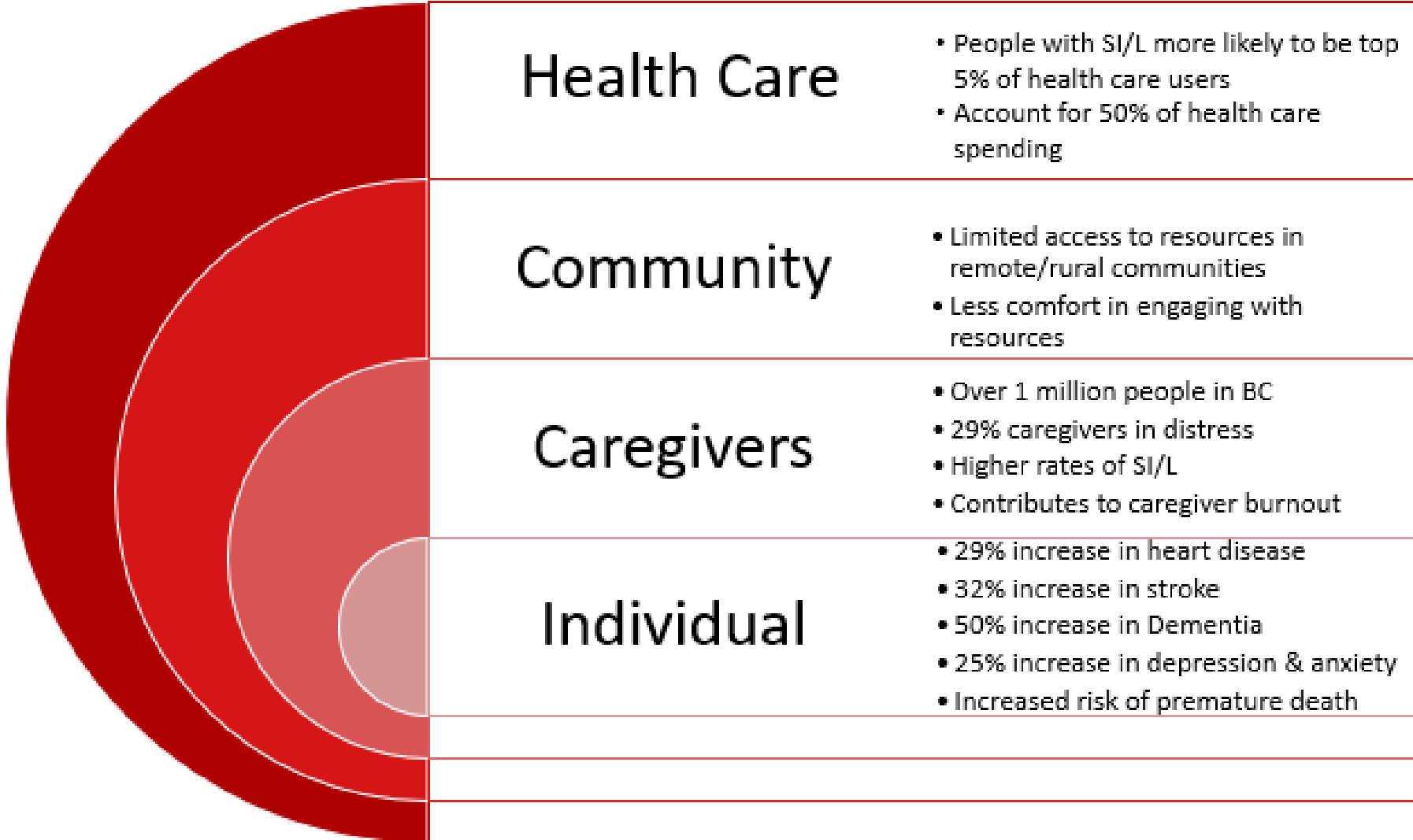
# Social Isolation & Loneliness



- A significant public health concern and global health priority identified by WHO
- International Commission on Social Connection in November 2023
- 2024 report raised alarm with 6/10 older adults in Canada identify as lonely, 4/10 at risk of social isolation (National Institute on Ageing, December 2023)
- December 2023 poll showed more than half of people living in Canada (18-34 yo) experience feelings of loneliness



# Social Isolation & Loneliness Impact



# Activity

How do you cope with  
isolation?

# Friendly Calls

Friendly Calls is a national program from the Canadian Red Cross that provides evidence-based culturally safe accessible connections for people over 18 to address the impacts of social isolation and loneliness on people, their communities and the health care system.



# Benefits of Friendly Calls

## PEOPLE, COMMUNITY & SYSTEMS

- Protection through **Connection**

Address the impact of social isolation and loneliness on people living in Canada through evidence-based emotional support, coping strategies and strengthened connections.

- Strengthen **Community Resilience**

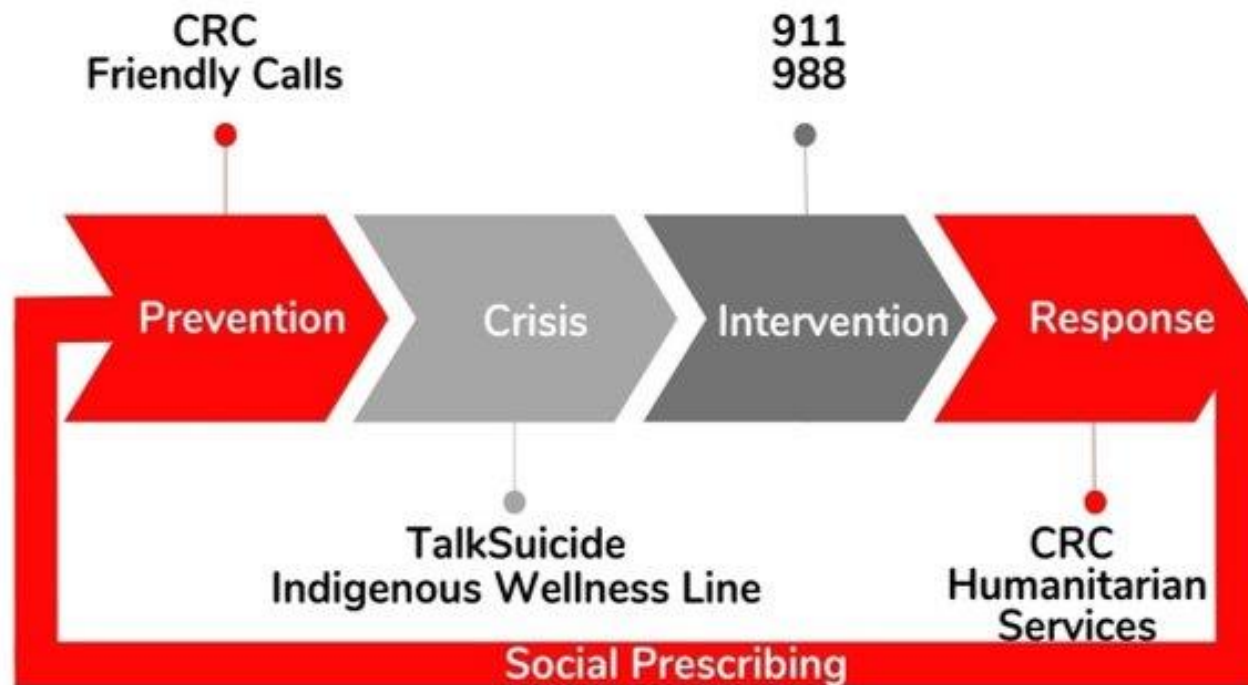
Engage with community partners to identify referral pathways and provide enhanced support to at-risk community members everyday and during extreme weather events.

- Reduce strain on **Health Care System**

Reduce impact of social isolation and loneliness on Canadian health care system which equates to \$43.7billion annually.



# Continuum of CARE



- ✓ May 2023 pan-Canadian launch
- ✓ First national CRC Community Health program
- ✓ Largest nationally accessible social prescription program
- ✓ International promising practice, including Polish FC launch to support displaced people from Ukraine

# FC Impact

## Social Isolation & Loneliness



Equivalent to smoking **15 cigarettes** a day

26% increase in **anxiety & depression**

30+% increase in **stroke & heart disease**

50% increase in **dementia**



**\$43.97**  
billion annually

People with weak sense of community belonging are more likely to be in **top 5% of health care users.**

## Friendly Calls

81%  
Feel less lonely

85%  
Feel safer and/or better with Friendly Calls contact

65%  
Feel better able to cope with stress

42%  
Developed healthier habits & feel more comfortable reaching out for resources



**96.4%**

Satisfied with the program

**\$10.98**  
million saved

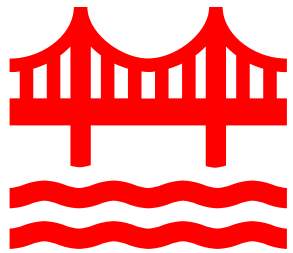
Estimated reduction of **50,807 health care visits & 6,568 police-based wellness checks.**

**\$1 = \$4.58**

invested saved

# FC Expansion Highlights

January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2024



## FC Centre

Access to skilled FC staff  
for intakes/vol support

Bilingual

M-F 9am-5pm local time

Culturally safe

National database



## 2.9million

minutes of support

## 79,043

Friendly Calls Contacts



## 27,045

People Supported

## 1147

Volunteers doubled  
(116%)



## 18million

Social media impressions

## 75million

Reach through broadcast/  
print/online media





# FC Process

## INTAKE

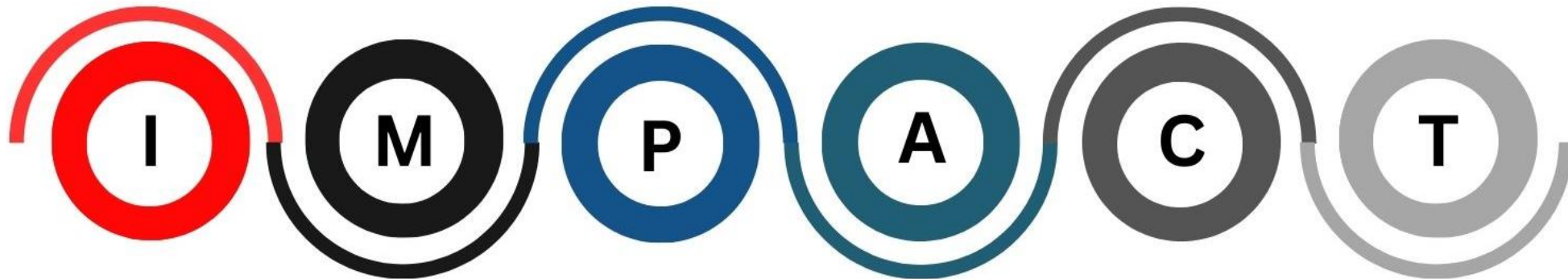
Responsive, trauma-informed intake by skilled staff via national toll-free

## PLANS

Collaborative, person-centred plans to strengthen coping & healthy habits

## CONNECTION

Ongoing connection with primary FC volunteer/staff (1 call to 1+years)



## MATCH

Participants matched with a trained volunteer for regular social calls

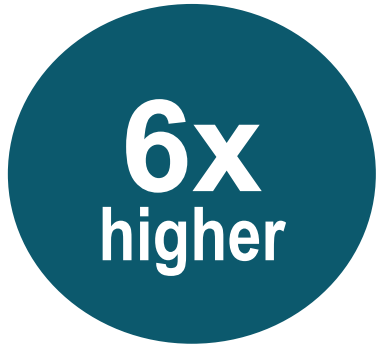
## ACCESS

Referral pathways to community resources addressing needs & barriers

## TRANSITION

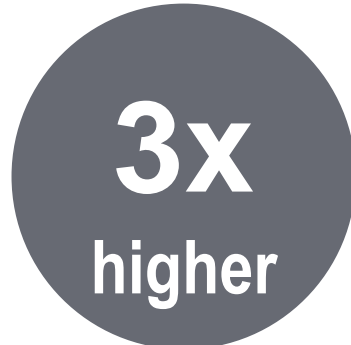
Agreed close with coping strategies, resources and community support

# Learning #1: Reaching Those in Need



## LIVING ALONE

9 out of 10 FC participants live alone compared with 1 in 7 (2021 survey)



## POOR TO FAIR MENTAL HEALTH

Over half of FC participants identified their mental health as poor to fair compared with 14% (Stats Canada, 2022)

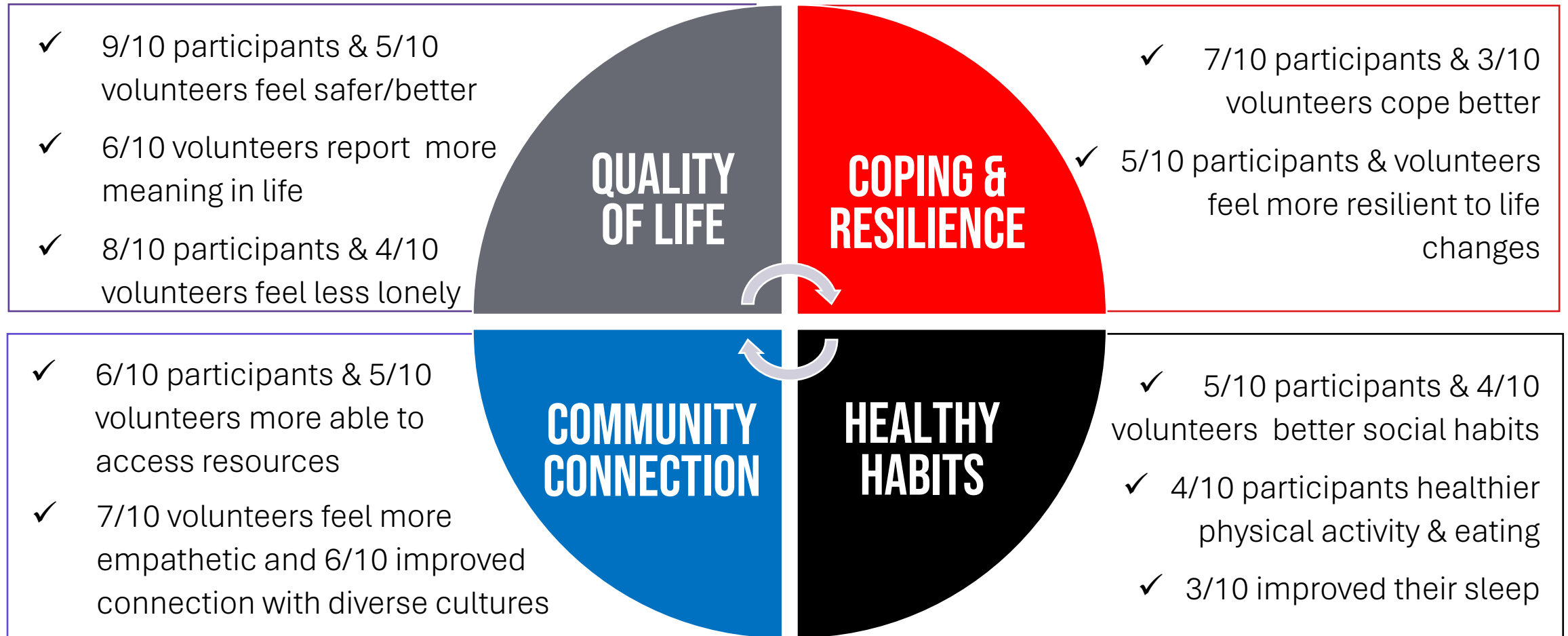


## SOCIAL ISOLATION & FINANCIAL INSECURITY

9 out of 10 FC participants identifying feeling isolated compared with 4 out of 10 in 2023 report. Over half struggle to make ends meet compared with 26.8% Canadian average.

**2024 IMPACT SURVEY SHOWED FRIENDLY CALLS IS REACHING PEOPLE WITH ESCALATED NEEDS COMPARED WITH NATIONAL CANADIAN AVERAGE.**

# Learning #2: Making a Significant Difference



“

*Each volunteer brings something different to the table. It's so helpful that **my regular callers know who I essentially am** and how I can be. I still remember my first volunteer.*

”

- Friendly Calls Participant KO





“ I had given my participant some advice last week that it is better to **face your fears** and immerse yourself in them to get over them to continually live and suffer with them. My participant told me that over the past week **this advice has been very useful** to him and has helped prevent him from overthinking.

”

- Friendly Calls Volunteer JM

“

*Thank you for getting me through 2024. It's my turn to give back.*

”

*- Friendly Calls Participant VB*





“

*To someone who is a caretaker 24/7, this is a heavy responsibility. To be always the one on call day and night. I cared for my mother-in-law and her husband when they were in their 90s for several years.*

*So many misunderstandings come up with friends and family members because no one really understands all that you are having to deal with. To talk with a neutral person, you can vent a little frustration and have a sympathizing and understanding ear.*

”

*- Friendly Calls Participant BJM*



# Questions

1. Do you have any questions from the presentation?
2. How do you see the Friendly Calls program supporting you or the people you support?
3. What are steps we can take to support each other?



- Friendly Calls Volunteer

# Final Thoughts



# Thank you!

For more information

**1-833-979-9779**

Mon-Fri 9am-5pm local

[Friendly Calls Program - Canadian Red Cross](#)



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