

# youth mind



the adapting to change issue

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Youth Mind is published quarterly, online.

# for the youth by the youth

Youth Mind is an online magazine made for the youth, by the youth. Our editors and contributors aim to cover content that we believe young people care about.

Whether it's school, the job market, the environment or social justice, we know that these areas affect — and will continue to affect — our demographic the most.

For this reason we wanted to cover such content with the utmost respect and attention that it deserves.

We hope that Youth Mind will inform, motivate, and empower the young people of today.

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# Letter from the Editor

Hi,

Welcome to the second volume of *Youth Mind* magazine! Whether you’ve been here since day one with *The Persistence Issue* or you are a first-time reader, *Youth Mind* could not have done this without you. Thank you, dear readers, for your support in making this magazine what it is today as we go into our second year.

If you’ve already skimmed to the bottom of this letter and realized Ramona’s signature isn’t there, I suppose it’s time to introduce myself. I’m Emma, the new managing editor, and it’s really nice to meet you all! I worked on the summer issue as a contributing editor, and I am absolutely honoured to be back again in my new position. I know, I know, I have a lot to live up to. Ramona was on the original team of editors who created this magazine from scratch. She is *Youth Mind*’s backbone and will be missed here.

But I also know that when she asked me to step into this role, she knew that I would uphold the magazine’s mission of producing stories that today’s young people care about while always aiming to inform, inspire and motivate our readers. And that’s exactly what I’ll do.

I know change can be hard to deal with. So much so, in fact, I made it our fall theme. So, without further ado, welcome to the fall edition of volume two: *The Adapting to Change Issue*.

Oddly enough, I didn’t realize how fitting the theme would be with me stepping into my new role until I started to write this letter. When I began to shape the topic of this issue, my mind was focused on

the pandemic and the changes we’re currently seeing. With vaccinations becoming widespread and places beginning to reopen, I can’t help but wonder what will happen next.

We spent so long adapting to the “new normal” that came with the early lockdowns and stay-at-home orders, are we now at the stage where we should change back to how we were before? Is that adjustment even possible ([p. 42](#))? What will school be like in the fall, and how have students been impacted by online learning for almost two years ([p. 10](#))? What about work; will people have trouble getting back into the work force after being laid off during the pandemic ([p. 16](#))?

While some of these questions are answered in this issue, there’s still a lot unknown as I write this letter. As the situation changes so rapidly, there’s a chance that everything will be different by the time the magazine is released. Who knows? But changes are afoot as it feels like we’re all waking up after a very long dream (okay, nightmare) and while there is still a lot unknown and new, we’ve already done this dance before.

We’ve already transitioned to an online, virtual world and learned how to grow and maintain relationships through a screen. We’ve found ways to keep busy, to find new hobbies and to cope during this upside down year and a half.

So, as we enter a new chapter in the pandemic, will the changes be scary? Absolutely. Will we adapt and overcome? You know it.

Sincerely,



**Emma Siegel**

P.S. If there are any article ideas you’d like to see in an upcoming issue, or stories you want to pitch, send me an email at [editor@youthmind.oidf.org](mailto:editor@youthmind.oidf.org). I’d love to hear from you!



## Land Acknowledgement

Youth Mind Magazine acknowledges the Indigenous land on which we work that has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples since the beginning.

As settlers, we’re grateful for the opportunity to meet here and we thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land -- for thousands of years.

Long before today, there have been Indigenous peoples who have been the stewards of this place.

We wish to acknowledge the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place. We also recognize the contributions of Métis, Inuit, and other Indigenous peoples have made, both in shaping and strengthening this community in particular, and our province and country as a whole.


As settlers, this recognition of the contributions and historic importance of Indigenous peoples must also be clearly and overtly connected to our collective commitment to make the promise and the challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities, and in particular to bring justice for murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls across our country.

# The Adapting to Change Issue

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A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a green short-sleeved shirt, is leaning over a young girl. The girl, with dark hair and wearing a white shirt with a pink patterned scarf, is sitting at a desk and looking at a laptop screen. The woman is pointing at the screen with her right hand. The background shows a window with sheer white curtains and a wooden desk with a laptop and some papers.

## The impact of virtual learning on marginalized students

How online schooling has widened the achievement gap in Canadian education

Written by REBECCA BENITEZ-BERONA

**THE SIDE EFFECTS OF MOVING** in and out of lockdown has exposed a growing issue for marginalized youth in the Canadian education system. While most at risk in terms of health and well-being, these students had to quickly adapt to a transition to virtual classrooms and juggle challenges such as economic hardship, cultural pressures and finding access to technology.

A [study](#) by Wilfred Laurier University found that students most affected by online classes and isolation are those who identify as racialized or Indigenous, newcomers or individuals from disabled populations.

These groups suffer from an achievement gap, in which there is a significant learning loss compared to students living in high-income environments. This is often caused by a lack of tools that are not easily accessible to low-income families, creating more barriers towards achieving passing grades and graduation.

“These are students who don’t even have the basics,” says Laura Lin, a volunteer finance manager at Youth of Canada. “For online school, you need stable Wi-Fi and a good learning device at the least. You also need a safe space or shelter. Sometimes students struggle to have basic necessities like food or electricity. This is what makes it so much more difficult.”

### Addressing the digital divide

The pandemic has forced school boards to think of new strategies to support the most impacted households with a lack of digital resources. Toronto District School Board (TDSB) spokesperson Ryan Bird says they have learned that equal distribution of devices was most important.

“This [pandemic] has taught us that from now on, electronic devices will have to become a vital addition to the classroom,” Bird says. “So far, we have distributed approximately 75,000 devices for students, which include Chromebooks and iPads to make virtual learning more accessible.”

[Pathways to Education](#), an educational organization for marginalized youth, has conducted research on the impacts of the digital divide—an increasing gap

between those with access to quality technology and those who do not. According to the research, it’s about environmental context. Many low-income students only had access to technology and a safe space in their local libraries, schools or community centres. These public services were vital for students’ social, emotional and cognitive development.

**“For online school, you need stable Wi-Fi and a good learning device at the least. You also need a safe space or shelter. Sometimes students struggle to have basic necessities like food or electricity. This is what makes it so much more difficult.”**

Pre-pandemic, Pathways to Education reported that in low-income communities, dropout rates were as high as 50 per cent, and it is predicted that this number will rise in the wake of the pandemic.

As of 2020, Statistics Canada found that over 90 per cent of households within a metropolitan area had working internet. However, a previous survey in 2018 has shown that 24.1 per cent of families with children under 18 in the lowest income bracket typically resorted to mobile devices for internet access. In an online learning environment, this poses extreme difficulty for students with certain learning challenges, or educational assignments that require extensive reading and writing.

In terms of university, flaws in technology and digital literacy have become a widespread issue. Ren Guidolin, a youth council member from Youth Aspire Canada, says that test proctoring softwares commonly used by universities during the pandemic are continuing to place students at a disadvantage, not only towards their success but for their online safety.



“It’s a safety hazard. Basically you’re giving somebody, who’s not always your instructor, access to your computer,” he says. “A couple clicks, and all of a sudden they’re controlling your mouse. There was no warning about them being able to move your mouse around and viewing your files.”

Guidolin further explains that testing software is discriminatory towards students without access to a quiet space. “Sometimes a student can’t afford to have a quiet space to take tests, and a parent or sibling will forget that. They will look away for a moment and they’ll be accused of cheating.”

**Mental health matters**

For students without resources, the loss of an outdoor study space has led to a prolonged time of isolation within a home environment that may not be as beneficial. Lin, who is also a student at University of Toronto, says that there were resources for students to reach out to but she did not feel like she was a priority.

“It was hard to reach out to mental health facilities at my school because they’re appointment based,” says Lin. “Sometimes I would need help right now and I would have to wait a week.”

For the TDSB, Bird says that mental health is going to be a top priority moving forward for students recovering from trauma or struggling from mental health conditions.

“What we try to say at the TDSB is that there is a caring adult in all of our schools. It doesn't necessarily mean speaking to a counsellor or social worker,” says Bird. “We want to encourage those conversations but at the same time we want students to know we do have those next tiers of support, such as social workers and psychologists.”

**Overcoming barriers**

Schools are not only a place for academics, they are a place of opportunity to help adolescents become

prepared adults. Clubs and after school programs have been ideal for students who don’t have the tools to network outside of the classroom, but these important developments had to be paused during lockdown.

Guidolin says that even before the pandemic, these resources were hard to find. This is especially the case for disenfranchised youth who have to put extra work into building their networking skills. However, most of them have to work an extra job to help pay tuition while struggling to maintain a high grade point average with no extra time to network.

Guidolin says this is a flaw in the secondary and post-secondary system.

“When schools don't inform or provide helpful opportunities and treat assignment deadlines as absolute for their diploma or degree, students can start to think that grades matter more than work or experience,” he says. “Students are going to put a lot of pressure on school and that's not fair because, while having a degree is great, you need experience to back it up.”

More programs outside of standardized education institutions are acting towards narrowing the achievement and digital gaps. Organizations such as Pathways to Education have been removing barriers towards secondary school graduation by providing services not available in standard school systems that address financial, academic and social individualized support.

Bird is confident that the pandemic has better prepared not only Toronto districts, but all school districts across the country for future challenges. But most importantly, he wants returning students to know that pandemic or not, they can rely on the staff.

“We know it’s been challenging, and we’re here to help,” he says. “We want to make sure that we can support you as best we can to make this transition as gentle as possible.” ♦

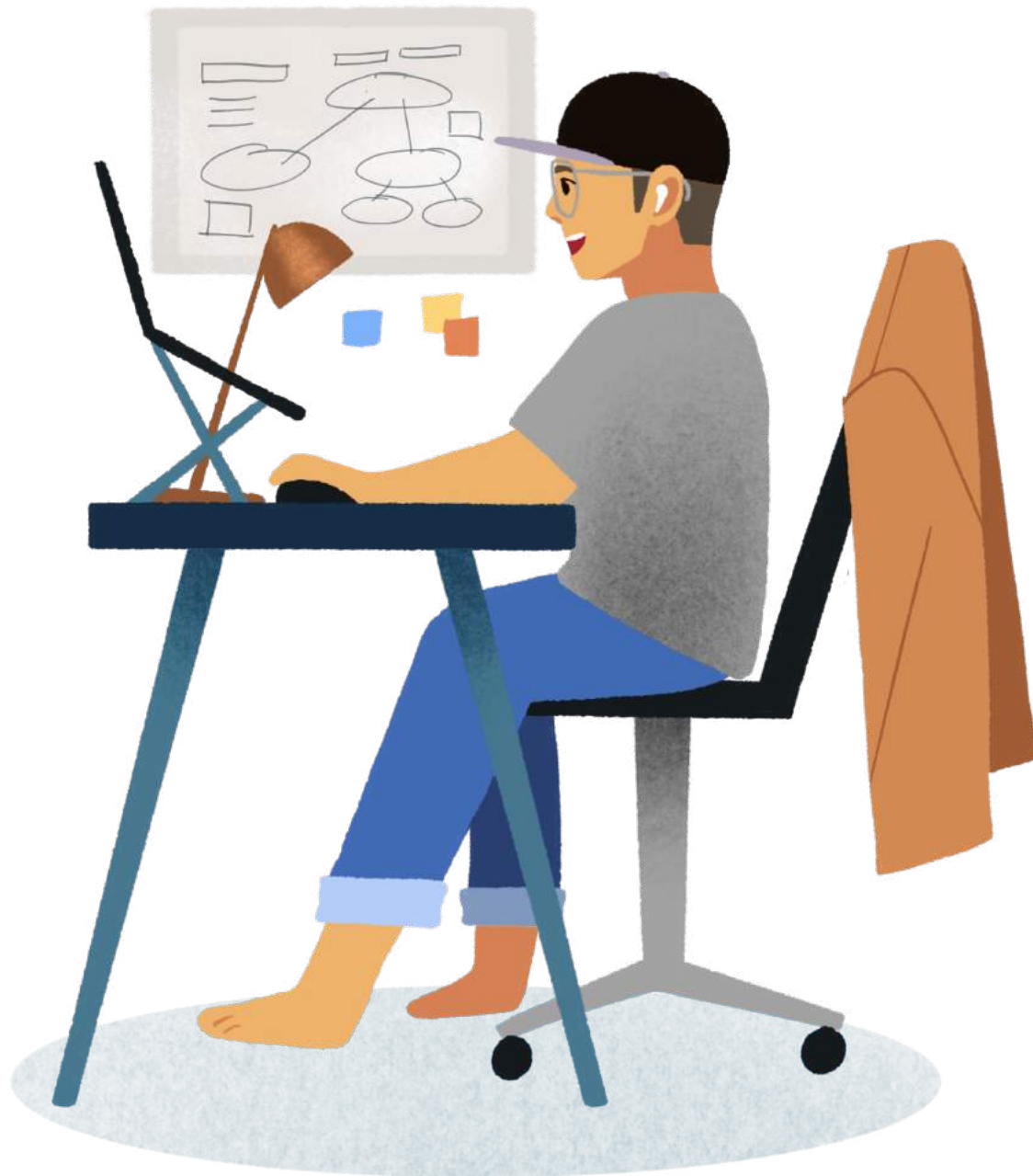


Photos courtesy of JULIA M. CAMERO, PEXELS

# How to transform your home desk into a remote workspace

Adapting to the changed definition of a work environment is essential during the age of COVID-19

Written by GRACE NELSON-GUNNESS



**SINCE THE PANDEMIC HIT**, there has been a sharp increase in virtual work. According to an [article](#) by PwC, 59 per cent of Canadian employees were working remotely as of July 2020. In addition, Ontario students went from enjoying extracurricular activities and exciting social lives to sitting for the majority of the day and staring at a bright screen. These students and virtual workers have had to learn how to work from their beds and crowded desks, all while sharing a space with roommates, talkative parents and barking dogs.

Regardless of the obstacles, many employees have gotten comfortable working from home with [64 per cent](#) of remote workers saying they aren't comfortable with the thought of returning to an in-person workspace. Accenture, a consulting company, [predicts](#) that numerous positions will remain virtual after the pandemic due to an increase in company productivity and efficiency. Even Ontario [schools](#) are providing virtual learning as an option this school year, despite the fact that in-person learning is also in effect.

But being comfortable can produce bad habits, such as slouching and sitting in one place for too long. Dr. Diana De Carvalho, a professor in the faculty of medicine at Memorial University of Newfoundland and the lead of the Spine Biomechanics and Interventional Ergonomics Laboratory, says that "sitting for as little as one hour will provoke temporary but clinically relevant levels of low back pain."

De Carvalho also warns employees and students about working on soft surfaces like a bed or a couch. She says that not only will this create a tendency to slouch more, but they will also "sink into these surfaces over time and end up in some pretty flexed postures which are not good for your back or hips."

Ergonomics in the workplace are crucial, but with a rise in virtual positions the line between work and personal life is nearly nonexistent. Other than the obvious struggles with aspects like Wi-Fi connection and household noise, the actual space around you and how it is organized determines your work ethic. A disorderly workspace can lead to a rise in work stress, an increase in physical discomfort due to awkward positions and a drop in work quality, according to an [article](#) by Humantech.

De Carvalho and Melania Nadj, certified ultimate professional organizer of Muskoka Maven Organizing, share their tips and suggestions to turn your home into an organized and comfortable remote workspace.

## Get creative with furniture

De Carvalho recognizes that not everyone can buy ergonomic equipment like new chairs and proper desks. "The guiding principles of ergonomics is to fit the workplace to the worker and to minimize awkward postures, force and repetition," she says. If you don't have an office chair, De Carvalho suggests that you take whatever chair you have and use pillows or rolled up towels as lumbar support.

To minimize awkward positions, work at a lower desk that prevents you from having to lift your elbows and shoulders when you sit down. Make sure the space underneath you is not cluttered so you have enough space above your lap. The only thing that should be under your desk is a shoebox to act as a footrest.

## A distraction-free workplace

"A cluttered environment in turn clutters your mind," says Nadj. She explains that there should be a place for everything, and to use folders, bins and binders for different projects and subjects.

"Consider digitizing your files by scanning them into your computer," she says. "Switching over to electronic bills and statements keeps your physical space clear of extra loose paper." In order to ensure that you only have what you need, throw out dried pens, unnecessary paperwork and sharpen your pencils.

## Tidy up and walk away

Nadj suggests taking a couple minutes at the end of the day to clean up your workspace. "[It's] important to help you relax after work, and to not have that stress trigger of 'oh, I should have sent that quote out today, it's not too late, is it?'" This tip can make the line between work and personal life more defined because putting your work away can act as a visual acknowledgement that you have finished what you needed to.

Lastly, Nadj emphasizes the importance of writing a to-do list for the following day before going to bed in order to have less angst waking up in the morning. "This one simple thing changed my life," she says. ♦



# Disrupted Dreams

What comes next after being laid off during a pandemic?

Written by OLIVIA MATHESON-MOWERS

## **PRE-PANDEMIC, CHRISTIANE TARANTINO WAS BUSY.**

She was juggling grad school, working as a teaching assistant and holding down a part-time job as an administrative assistant at a community centre. Tarantino was commuting over an hour downtown six days a week and sometimes pulling 14-hour-long days. She was exhausted.

That's why, last March when her university announced the transition to online classes and her supervisor informed her that she was being laid off, Tarantino was a little relieved. She thought of it as an unplanned break, one that would allow her to focus on finishing her master's thesis and offering more support to her students.

But then the pandemic continued. Tarantino's time off from work stopped feeling like a break and started feeling more like a prison. "I think like so many other people, I really bought into the idea that this would be temporary," she says. "That's how I cushioned the blow of being laid off."

Tarantino is not alone. The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario reported that more than 350,000 people were laid off in Ontario throughout 2020, the highest number in Canada. Others suffered cancelled internships while also combatting restrictions enforced by provincial lockdowns that have effectively transformed the job market. Many have had their career trajectories diminished or disrupted, leaving them wondering: what should I do next?

First, acknowledge that it is a disappointing situation, advises Wincy Li, senior manager of career education at Ryerson's career and co-op centre. But don't

allow the disappointment to keep you down forever. "Remember that just because you didn't get it this time, it doesn't mean that you're never going to get that opportunity," Li says.

Tony Nguyen understands being disappointed. As a recent graduate of George Brown's hospitality program, he's had to accept the drastic effect that the pandemic has had on the industry. In a report published by Destination Toronto, it was found that Toronto alone lost \$8 billion due to travel restrictions that prevented tourists from visiting the city and it will take time for the industry to bounce back.

**"Remember that just because you didn't get it this time, it doesn't mean that you're never going to get that opportunity."**

Nguyen found himself at a loss of what to do. His internship at a prominent hotel was cancelled a few weeks into the first lockdown and he felt like all his hard work had been for nothing. "I had just finished school and had all these amazing opportunities lined up," he says. "I felt like I was finally doing something right and COVID just swept it all up."

Li always reminds students that career goals rarely move in a linear fashion and encourages them to keep an open mind about where their journey will take them. "Ask any role models you have," Li says. "I'm willing to bet that most of them didn't set out to do what they're currently doing."

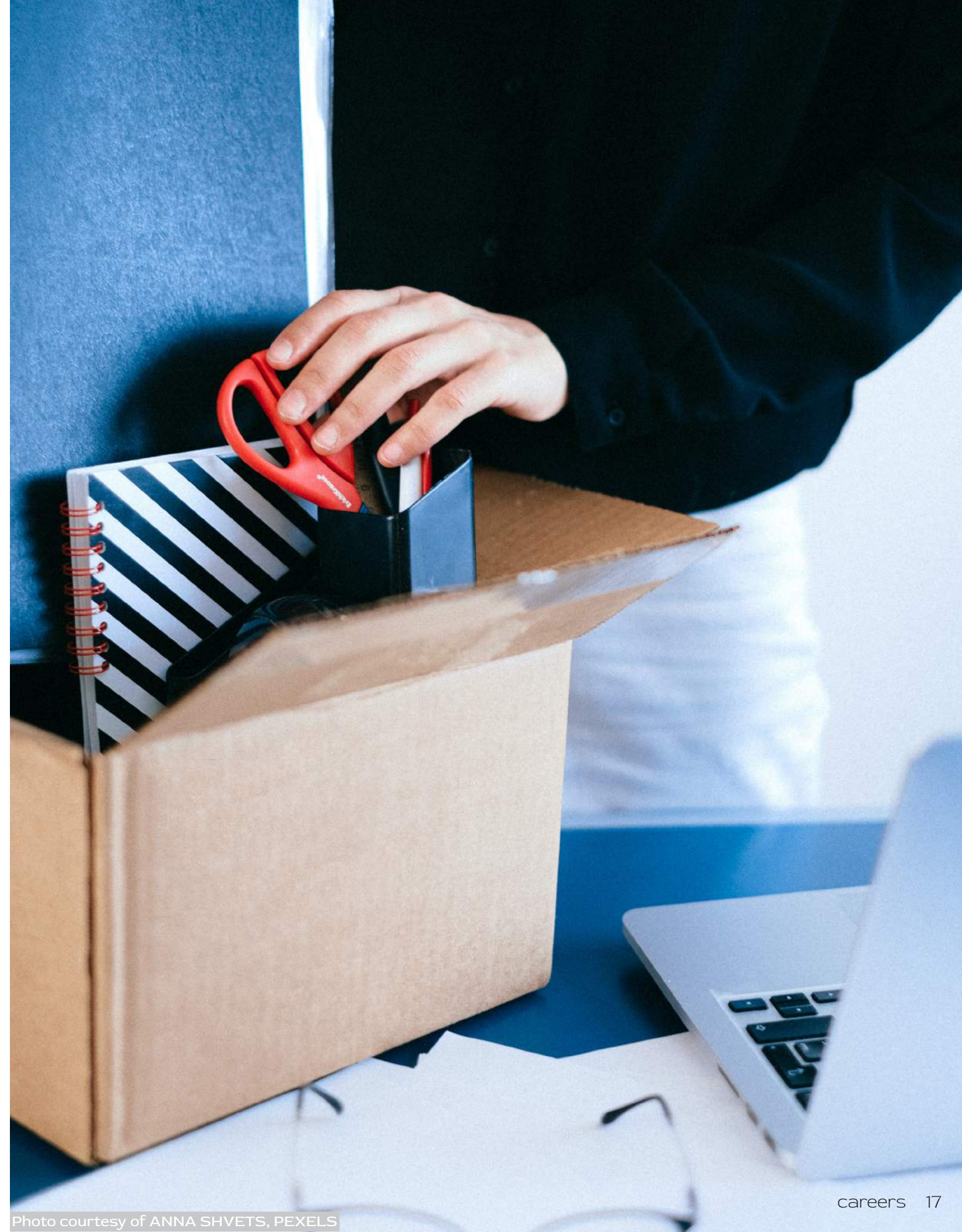


Photo courtesy of ANNA SHVETS, PEXELS



After allowing himself some time to adjust, Nguyen began seeking out alternative ways of immersing himself within the hospitality industry and enhancing his skills. He partnered with a couple of friends and is in the final stages of launching his own bubble tea shop, something he would have never imagined himself doing prior to the pandemic.

“At first, I needed a long term way to pay the bills,” Nguyen says. “But I’ve found myself enjoying creating the menu and designing the store. It also allows me an opportunity to provide hospitality services, just in a different capacity. And it never hurts to be your own boss!”

Tarantino also opted to be flexible in her initial job search, leading to her working as a cart girl at a golf course for three days and later as a merchandiser for an alcohol company. But this eventually came to an end too, as she faced her second lay off in less than a year.

She switched gears and turned her attention to securing a role within human resources and enrolled herself in continuing education programs, earning certificates in human resources and government policy. She also updated her LinkedIn profile and tailored her resumes to fulfill specific job postings, instead of just using a generic resume detailing all of her experience.

Li invites others to employ Tarantino’s strategy, as too often she sees students who cram everything into one resume instead of focusing on relevant experience. It’s always best to speak directly to the job requirements, she advises.

Sometimes Tarantino finds herself still disappointed at losing out on certain opportunities, like not being accepted into any of the PhD programs she applied for, but she tries to remind herself of everything else she’s accomplished. “I did get a masters during a pandemic!” she says. “I just have to keep looking forward.”

Ultimately, Li wants to offer young people struggling with confusion and disappointment a reminder: “Trust in your ability to learn, trust in your ability to be resilient, and trust in your ability to find a way.” ♦



Photo courtesy of COTTONBRO, PEXELS





# One size does not fit all

How COVID-19 heightened body dissatisfaction and eating disorders

Written by AMY FOURNIER

**LINDSAY DOBSON, PROGRAM COORDINATOR** at Hopewell Eating Disorder Support Centre in Ottawa, saw a dramatic increase in clients registering for support group services in summer 2021.

Hopewell is a support centre that offers low-cost accessible services such as group therapy and arts and yoga classes. They also offer educational programs for both those struggling with an eating disorder, as well as friends and family members who are affected. Dobson says that the day she opened online registration to the public, the spots were filled in less than 24 hours.

“Before COVID there was already a high demand for support. Now there is even more,” she says. “This is not going to go away once the pandemic is over. There is no flip switch to turn an eating disorder off.”

Social isolation, increased screen time and general anxiety due to the pandemic has escalated body dissatisfaction. Kyle Ganson, assistant professor at Factor-Inwentash faculty of social work at the University of Toronto, says that disrupted routines can perpetuate eating disorders as individuals seek other opportunities to create control, such as food and exercise. Ganson’s research is primarily focused on eating disorders present in youth and adolescents, with a specific focus on men and boys.

“Adolescence is a particularly stressful time,” he says. “From ages 10 to about 25 is a period of social evolution and physiological evolution. Our bodies are

changing, we become involved in relationships, have expectations put on us and lots of transitions are happening, so certainly younger age is a higher risk factor.”

Marginalized communities experience additional stressors that may contribute to the onset of eating disorder behaviours in an attempt to fit in. “Most research points to people who identify as gay or lesbian, bisexual, or queer often experience disordered eating, eating disorder behaviours, body image issues, at higher prevalence than their heterosexual peers,” Ganson says.

In the spring of 2020, social media use skyrocketed as in-person social connection with friends, family and peers outside of the household was prohibited. As at-home workouts gained popularity, there was an overwhelming pressure from fitness influencers and diet culture to get in shape to lose the so-called “quarantine 15”—a term that reinforces implicit weight bias. “At a time when survival should have been prioritized there was an added pressure, coming from social media, to perfect our body,” Dobson says.

Ganson says social media is a problematic piece of today’s culture that should be used mindfully because it can construct a false narrative of someone’s life. “A photograph is a millisecond of what people look like and we don’t really consider that when we’re scrolling,” he says.



**“A photograph is a millisecond  
of what people look like and we  
don’t really consider that when  
we’re scrolling.”**

For boys and men especially, there is a push to be muscular, lean, athletic and strong.

Fitness tracker apps that allow users to record their activities and share with others can also become troublesome if used to constantly compare and compete with peers. Ganson says that knowing your bandwidth when it comes to partaking in these online communities is crucial. “You have to know yourself and be honest with yourself and why you use these apps. What are my limits and my capacities?”

When it comes to drawing the line between love for fitness and obsession with it, there is still a lot more research to be done. However, if exercise is taking priority over other parts of life such as relationships, school or work, it may be useful to reconsider what is important.

Ways to increase body neutrality and acceptance include challenging advertisers through online petitions, having open conversations around body image with family members and friends and being aware of the language used to talk about bodies.

As lockdown restrictions ease in Ontario and people are allowed to get together with friends and family again, body image anxiety may arise. “Don’t comment on anyone’s body, like, ever,” says Dobson. She challenges people to compliment others on their personality instead.

As for resources, the [National Eating Disorders Association](#) offers parents, teachers, coaches and caregivers toolkits to educate themselves on eating disorders and on ways to intervene in a helpful manner. [Kids Help Phone](#) is also a free resource and point of contact for youth who may be experiencing body image distress or eating disorder symptoms, while remaining anonymous.

Ganson says that bodies are always evolving. “We don’t stay 7 pounds, 5 ounces from the day we’re born until the day we die,” he says. He encourages people to think about what their body can do rather than how it looks, and to acknowledge that some people’s bodies may not be able to do the things that others can.

“You’ve survived a pandemic, and that is an amazing feat.” ♦







# Steering friends through rough waters

Lockdown induced isolation and plummeting mental health has left high school students leaning on each other for support

Written by OLIVIA MATHESON-MOWERS



**EARLIER THIS YEAR, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT** Sophia Ruselle noticed a shift in her close friend's behaviour.

Her friend was withdrawn and distant. He had no motivation, his outlook on life had become hopeless, he was always sleeping and his moods were all over the place.

Ruselle recognized that her friend was suffering from depression. When he began to self-harm, she notified his family before the situation could escalate.

She knew all too well the seriousness of untreated depression. In November of last year, she attempted to take her own life. Her suicide attempt was a culmination of the stress invoked by the frequent lockdowns and school closures.

A study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that suicide attempts among teenage girls were 50.6 per cent higher during the pandemic.

"The constant switching from online to offline made it hard to feel like there was consistency," Ruselle says. "Which is something I need."

Ontario schools have been closed for [20 weeks](#) throughout the pandemic, longer than any other Canadian province or territory.

Many parents have noticed a shift in their children's behaviour, says a middle school social worker who has requested to remain anonymous.

Parents reported their children as having no motivation, exhibiting prolonged low moods and avoiding virtual school.

"The issues raised were all connected very close to the pandemic situation and the disruptions of routines—both at home and at school," the social worker says.

High school student Lillie Fauteux says that while she never really liked school, she misses the structure it offered her. She admits that the initial school closures left her feeling depressed and struggling to do basic activities like showering and brushing her teeth.

"I just felt like there was no reason to take care of myself," she says.

Fauteux has also found herself feeling more isolated during the pandemic, as the lockdown restrictions have prohibited her from seeing people outside of her household.

Social media has been a great tool during the pandemic, but it cannot replicate the much needed person-to-person interactions adolescents thrive on, says the social worker.

High school student Rori Phillips has also found herself feeling isolated and depressed during the lockdowns. While she finds it difficult to monitor her own mental health sometimes, she is very diligent towards keeping track of the mental health of her

**"The constant switching from online to offline made it hard to feel like there was consistency, which is something I need."**



friends because she feels there is a lack of resources through her school.

It's a sentiment that Fauteux and Russelle echo; aside from a few lessons discussing depression and anxiety during health class, they say there hasn't been much done to help and the responsibility has fallen onto their shoulders to monitor their friends' mental health.

They've each taken measures to support their friends, like daily check-ins on Snapchat, monitoring shifts in behaviour and reaching out to family members if the situation grows serious, like Russelle did for her friend earlier in the year.

"I don't want to lose anyone," Russelle says. "I couldn't deal with that."

While it's too soon to know the long-lasting effects the pandemic will have on youth and their mental health, it's safe to say they've displayed an enduring dedication to their friends.

Throughout the confusion and chaos, Phillips explains that her friends were her anchor and they got each other through the pandemic.

"All that mattered," she says, "is that we had each other throughout this shitty year." ♦

## How to spot friends struggling with their mental health

**DEPRESSION CAN BE ALIENATING AND LONELY**, making it that much more difficult for those experiencing it to seek help. Knowing how to spot when friends are struggling with depression isn't always easy, but there are ways to keep track of their mental health and offer them support.

### Watch for changes in behaviour

Is your friend snapping more than usual? Do they usually go out for jogs but now can't seem to muster the energy to get out of bed?

Changes in behaviour and demeanour can be a sign of depression. If you find your friend not acting like themselves, keep a closer eye out for other symptoms.

### Monitor physical symptoms

Depression can produce various physical effects like stomach pains and headaches. It can also cause some people to neglect basic hygiene, such as showering and brushing their teeth. Since these symptoms can sometimes be easier to spot, it's important to monitor them.

### Ways to help

If you discover a friend is dealing with depression, one of the most important ways to help is to simply listen and validate their feelings. It can also be helpful to offer to do errands or other tasks for them, like groceries or laundry.

If they are expressing suicidal thoughts or self-harming, urge them to seek medical care immediately or call a mental health crisis

hotline, such as Canada Suicide Prevention Service, Kids Help Phone or The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

### Remember that there is no "cure" for depression

A person who is depressed can have good days, but it doesn't mean they're cured. Depression doesn't go away overnight—be prepared for your friends to experience bad days and try to remain patient.

High school student Sophia Ruselle has come a long way since her suicide attempt in November 2020, and now meets regularly with a therapist. But she still has days when she wants to disappear and her friends are understanding when she needs to unplug for a while. Perform periodic check-ins on your friends, but don't be hurt if they just want to be alone for a while.

### Take care of yourself too!

It can be tempting to want to drop everything to help a friend with depression, but you won't be much help to them if you neglect yourself. Etch out time for self-care and remember that while you care about your friend, you are not a health care professional and it's OK to set boundaries if you are feeling emotionally drained.

# SAFE AND STRONG

## RESEARCH PROJECT

The Safe and Strong gender-based violence project is seeking to address gender-based violence in the pandemic era for black girls, women, and gender-diverse individuals ages 12+ in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA) through research, education and advocacy.

### Do You Identify as:

- African, Caribbean, Black?
- 12 or older?
- A girl, woman, or gender-diverse individual?
- Living in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA)

## VOLUNTARY • PRIVATE • CONFIDENTIAL

You will receive a \$25 gift card of your choice for participation!

### To sign-up:

<https://forms.gle/oovBgzapxPkCJMLG7>

### Or Scan:



## PANELS AND WORKSHOPS

There will be a series of panels and workshops on various topics related to healthy relationships and gender-based violence. Each workshop and panel will cover a different topic. The panels and workshops will occur on a bi-weekly basis on Wednesdays beginning July 14th and ending September 8th.

### Topics

- Healthy Relationships
- Sexual Education
- Communication, Mediation and Conflict Resolution
- Dealing with GBV
- Self-care

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Panels and Workshops are open to those 12+

## BlackVoice Publication

An online magazine including a section that addresses gender-based issues in the COVID-era

**Blackvoice.ca**

For more information, questions, or concerns please contact: [safeandstrong@oldf.org](mailto:safeandstrong@oldf.org).



# From overwhelmed to reinvigorated

Four ways to conquer burnout during the school year

Written by ALYSSA BRAVO

**AS THE SEMESTER BEGINS**, it is easy to become caught up in the hectic mess of essays, quizzes and other assignments. This can especially be the case when juggling other responsibilities such as jobs and personal matters.

The term “burnout” was first coined by German psychologist Herbert J. Freudenberger in 1974. He defined burnout as a work-related condition in which individuals experience exhaustion, depression and an overall disinterest in everyday function.

Recent University of Toronto graduate J. Wang found himself grappling with these symptoms during his time in school, particularly the loss of motivation. “Not wanting to attend classes, being unable to focus and disassociating from my body,” he says. “I knew where I was, but I didn’t know why I was there and I certainly didn’t feel very present.”

Wang says he dealt with burnout for a long time and struggled to overcome it. “I thought if I just worked harder, I could escape these feelings,” he says. “It required me to shift how I viewed my life and grades in order to really change.”

If you find yourself in a similar situation, it’s important to take the steps you think are necessary to get back up on your feet again. Here are some ways you can beat the burnout blues:

## Don’t ignore it

If you’re feeling overwhelmed, it’s important that you do not undermine your struggles, says Ary Maharaj, a registered psychotherapist from Hard Feelings Toronto.

“Burnout is something that’s really, really normal,” he says. “It’s something that, especially in post-secondary, can

sometimes even be glorified to hustle, hustle, hustle and work yourself to the point of exhaustion. And sometimes you don’t even feel like you want to do that.”

Rather than brushing off the feeling of being burnt out, Maharaj recommends recognizing it as an obstacle instead that can be overcome.

## Put yourself first

Instead of pushing yourself until you reach your limits, take some time off and breathe. You can use this period to re-evaluate your workload, spend some downtime with friends or simply relax.

“Realize that your grades and your school activities are not priority number one. Your mind and body are worth infinitely more than a number or a committee,” Wang says.

## Do what makes you happy

The stress of school and work often leads to fewer opportunities to indulge in personal interests. Whether it be rewatching your favourite TV show, listening to music, working out or cooking, indulging in your interests can be the perfect way to wind down.

“Some of the coping strategies we use are physiological ones,” Maharaj says. “We incorporate your senses and help you ride that initial wave of distress so you can feel like your brain can be back online and use all of its wonderful coping skills.”

## Don’t be afraid to ask for help

One of the most important steps in conquering burnout is seeking help when you need it. This can be from your friends, family, colleagues or mental health professionals. Often, a support system can be really helpful in aiding you through troublesome times.

“What I usually ask [my clients] is, ‘How can I surround you with a web of support?’” Maharaj says. “So you can not feel hopeless, but you can feel like there’s some kind of control you can have with the scenario.”

Overall, it’s important to remind yourself that it takes time and patience to bounce back from stressful periods. Burnout is temporary, but prioritizing yourself and your own well-being is forever. ♦





# Protecting people at the cost of the planet

While PPE acted as a shield during the pandemic, the waste left behind is worsening plastic pollution

Written by KAYLA EMPEY



Photo courtesy of ANNA SHVETS, PEXELS

**JUSTINE AMMENDOLIA AND HER PARTNER** Jackie Saturno were on a trip to the supermarket when they first noticed a problem. Only days after the pandemic was declared in March 2020, they were already seeing piles of disposable face masks, hand gloves, disinfectant wipes and other personal protection equipment (PPE) surrounding them on the streets of Toronto.

Both being environmental scientists whose summer plans had been cancelled due to COVID-19, they set their sights on a new goal: picking up the waste and tracking how much there really was.

In a matter of two weeks, Ammendolia and Saturno found 1,300 items of PPE waste in one Toronto community and since then have picked up thousands more from hospitals, residential areas, grocery store parking lots and hiking trails.

“The amount of PPE wasn’t really kind of a mind blowing part, for me at least. Looking at the problem, I think it was just how quickly it started to happen in the environment,” says Ammendolia. “It’s just become a staple of our litter environment.”

COVID-19 has caused a vast increase in public use of disposable PPE. Face masks have been required throughout the pandemic in every province in Canada. But this is a new type of plastic that has never been part of the Canadian consumption diet before, and many people aren’t sure how to properly dispose of their PPE once they are finished with it.

## The environmental effects of PPE

Most PPE is not recyclable because the items often clog the systems that sort materials and would cost more for local recyclers to collect and process than the materials would be worth.

Throwing PPE in recycling bins also poses a health risk to collectors during the pandemic. As a result, the United Nations estimates that 75 per cent of used masks and other pandemic-related waste will end up in landfills or oceans.

It’s a problem around the world, and as Ammendolia and Saturno have demonstrated, here on the streets of our own Canadian cities too.

Ammendolia is a marine biologist who researches plastic pollution, and explains that PPE is harmful to the environment because of the contamination it creates. While many people misunderstand masks and wipes to be paper, they are made of micro plastics that break down over time.

“If you leave them there long enough, you end up with these really, really tiny fragments that literally become impossible to clean up. No amount of effort or money can really address that problem,” Ammendolia says.

This becomes a larger issue with COVID-19 because people don’t want to touch used PPE without proper protection for themselves, which results in the waste sitting in the environment for longer.

PPE can also pose a threat to wildlife. “There’s been a lot of dialogue on animals being trapped and entangled in plastics or animals eating plastic by accident. You know, that was shown fairly early on in the pandemic, where people were going on social media and sharing pictures of birds with masks around their necks,” Ammendolia says. “How do you value an animal’s life?”

## Finding a solution

With more people worrying about the waste they are creating during the pandemic, a few recycling initiatives have popped up to prevent PPE from being taken to landfills.

TerraCycle is a program that allows individuals, businesses or municipalities to mail in their waste to be recycled. Those who use this service receive an “All Zero Waste Box” to fill with their PPE to be sent back to TerraCycle, which then sorts the waste and recycles the materials into reusable forms. In terms of PPE waste, the materials are crushed into a crumb that can be used to make plastic lumber found in decking, outdoor furniture and shipping pallets.



While this prevents PPE from entering landfills and oceans, the boxes cost a minimum of \$120. This makes it difficult to get people on board when it is easier and cheaper to throw PPE away.

20-year-old environmental activist, Mackenzie Brochu, believes the way we will see change is if youth step up and start caring about this issue.

“We’ve heard all about straws, we’ve heard all about plastic bottles, but this is just another form and it’s kind of a constant cycle of destruction happening to the planet,” she says. “I think it’s very pertinent to young people because it is our future. The older generations have played a big role in the environmental destruction that has occurred thus far, but they aren’t going to have to live through all the effects.”

Brochu says that if people don’t try to take care of the environment, then climate change will only make pandemics more frequent. “It’s kind of a chicken and egg thing because we have this pandemic, but we are still being wasteful to the planet at the same time in the way that we are dealing with it.”

But while individuals are accountable for much of the garbage that ends up on the streets, Ammendolia says that the government should be putting more effort into educating people and improving waste management systems across Canada.

The government has had clear instructions on wearing a mask, but not on what to do with the mask when finished wearing it. This especially becomes problematic when people are away from home or on public transportation.

Ammendolia notes that a lot of people were putting their masks into overflowing public garbage cans. She believes that garbage cans should have been labelled or had instructions to raise attention to the fact that PPE is not regular waste and needs to be disposed of in a more thoughtful way. “The messaging wasn’t clear, nor were the collection methods,” she says.

For now, Brochu recommends cutting off the strings of face masks and properly disposing of them or buying reusable masks if possible. It is easy for PPE waste to become out of sight and out of mind, but Brochu wants to remind people of how actions have continued effects. ♦

**“I think it’s very pertinent to young people because it is our future. The older generations have played a big role in the environmental destruction that has occurred thus far, but they aren’t going to have to live through all the effects.”**



Photo courtesy of ANNA SHVETS, PEXELS



# The breakup

Growing and evolving post-relationship in an pandemic-induced, isolated world

by OLIVIA MATHESON-MOWERS

**ALEXANDREA FIORANTE** GLUED A PAIR of feathery false eyelashes to her glittered eyelids as she chugged down a beer. She then slipped into a backless black dress before piling into an Uber with her friends.

Destination? Any club she could get a cute picture to post on Instagram, simultaneously making her ex jealous and proving that she's "winning" the breakup.

At least that's how she imagined dealing with the heartbreak of ending her long-term relationship with her partner last November. But the continuous lockdowns in Toronto have restricted Fiorante from taking the rom-com suggested formula for getting over a breakup.

Instead, she had to sit alone in her bedroom with her grief, anger and confusion.

Fiorante is not alone. The outbreak of COVID-19 led to a spike in breakups in Canada, with around 15 per cent of couples calling it quits over the course of the pandemic, according to a report published by Finder Canada. Couples between the ages of 18 to 24 reported the highest relationship fatalities at around 25 per cent.

Sarah Knudson, a sociology professor at the University of Saskatchewan, says that younger couples crumbled at a higher rate because the stress from the pandemic amplified the stresses and chaos young adults were already experiencing.

It's a period full of upheaval and unpredictability, explains Knudson, because lives are constantly shifting throughout young adulthood as people figure out who they are. When the pandemic hit, it brought with it a whole new realm of stresses that collided with these existing ones.

"There have been massive changes in our routine," says Knudson. "We're being overexposed and underexposed to certain situations and people."

Couples who were living together had to learn how to manage being home with one another 24-7, something that is not normal or healthy, says Knudson. Couples living apart had to face the opposite problem of not being able to see one another due to lockdown restrictions.

In the best case scenario, it left the couples living together feeling overstimulated by their partner's presence and resulted in petty bickering matches. The couples living apart had to combat transitioning into a new version of long-distance dating and find other ways of spending time together.

But for couples who were already experiencing difficulties or uncertainties, the stress of the pandemic culminated in some people reaching their breaking points and calling it quits.

While Knudson believes some of the breakups that occurred during the pandemic could have been victims of bad timing, ultimately she says that

most of them likely had communication issues and different values from the beginning.

Dorina Sluka had always felt like her and her partner were at different chapters in their lives. Their relationship was one of convenience, not partnership. They didn't really communicate, they just lived in the same city and were around the same age.

When the pandemic hit and she made the decision to move back home with her parents, all her doubts about the relationship came to the surface and she decided to end it.

When she reflects on the breakup, Sluka says that it was inevitable and the pandemic just gave her a "valid reason."

"I didn't believe that my unhappiness was a good enough reason to end the relationship," she says. "I needed to grow and develop the ability to voice my needs."

This need to grow is also another contributing factor to the spike in breakups amongst young adults, Khudson says. Some relationships are meant to be learning blocks and are not destined to be long-term.

"Through those experiences you learn more about yourself," she says. "You learn what you want in life."

**"I didn't believe that my unhappiness was a good enough reason to end the relationship. I needed to grow and develop the ability to voice my needs."**

Fiorante found that the isolation helped her healing process, despite it being debilitating at first.

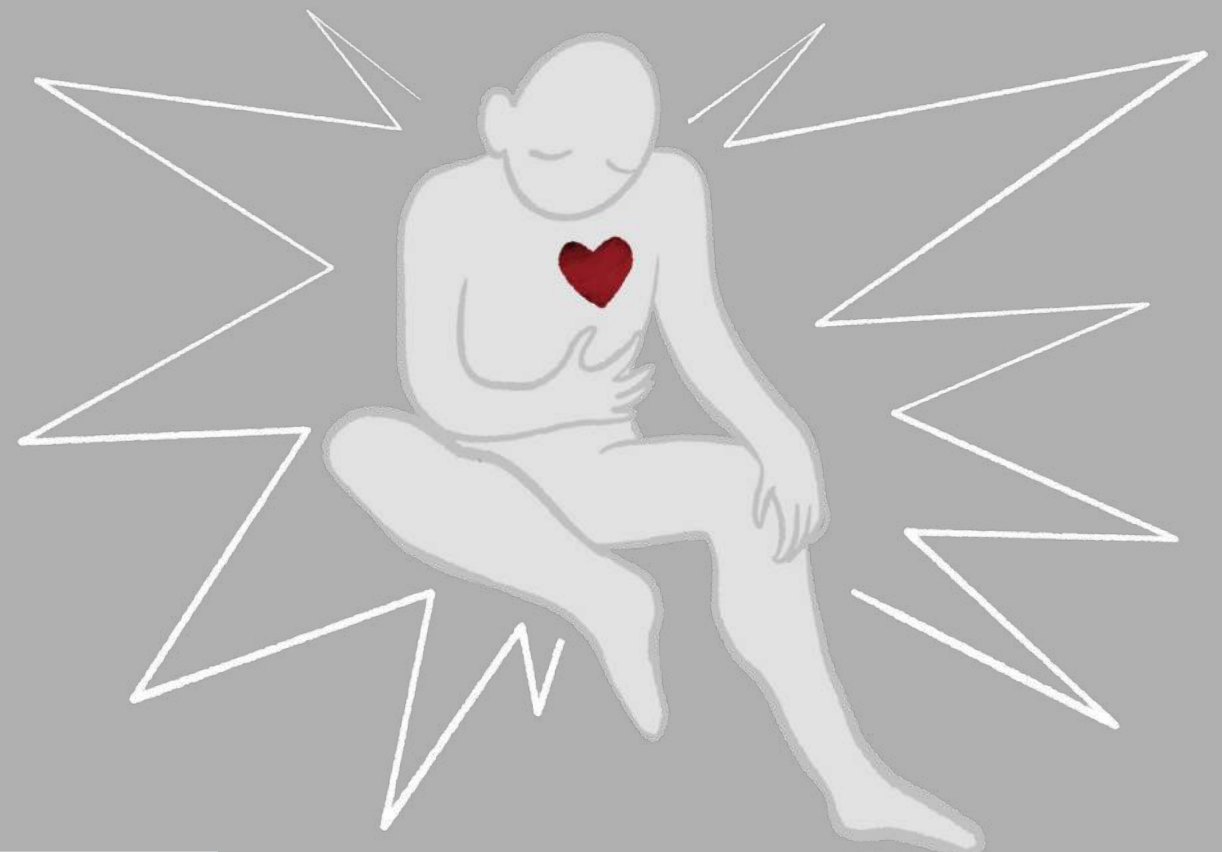
"It felt like the movie Groundhog Day—it still does sometimes," she says. "It was scary, but also comforting. I didn't have to rush to get over it."

Sluka too benefited from the isolation. When dealing with previous breakups, she would always find herself immediately trying to find a new partner. Instead, she was able to strengthen her connection to her family, her friends and to herself. Now she understands and respects her needs.

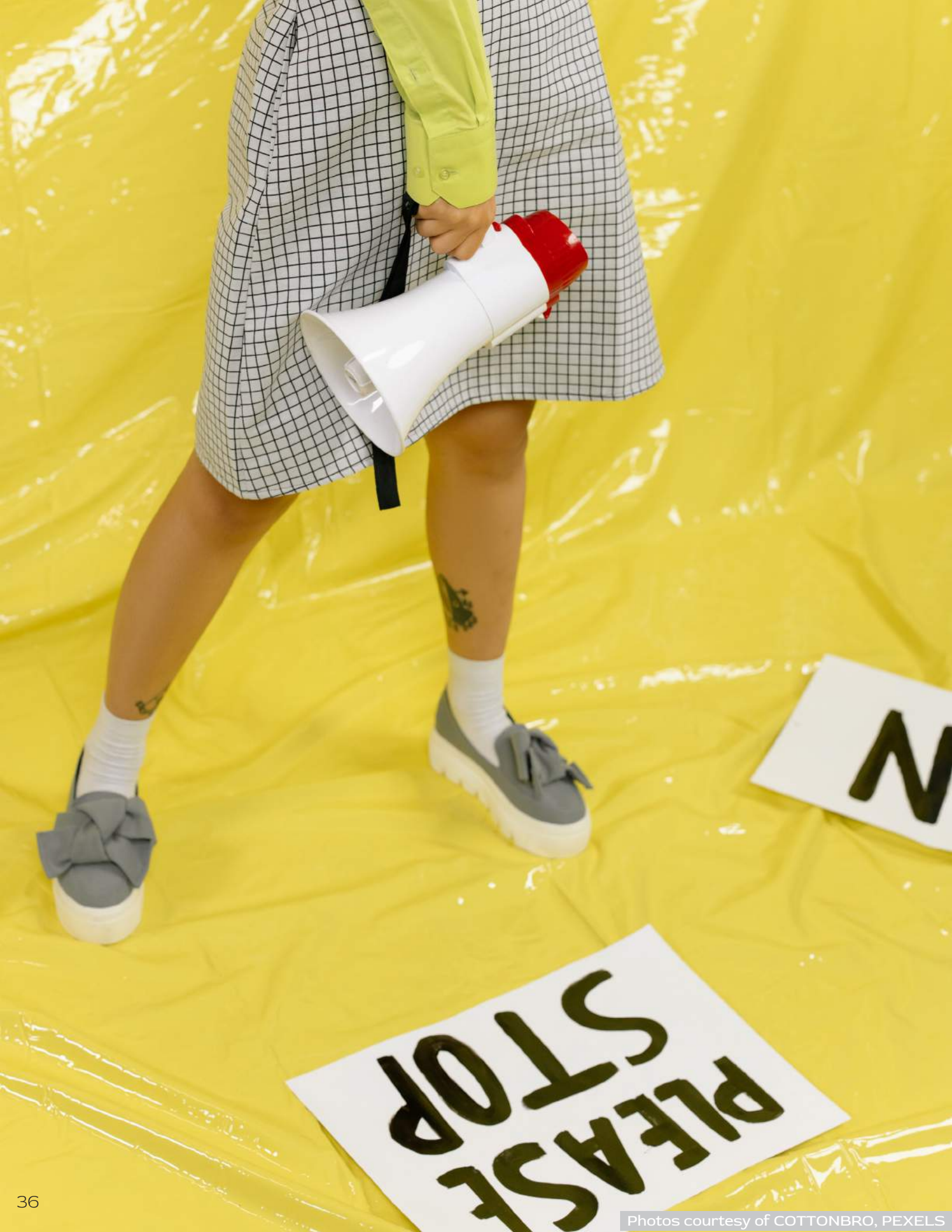
Ultimately, Fiorante feels like she is lucky to have had a pandemic breakup. The isolation-induced introspection kick-started a creative project she had sat on for years, giving her a renewed sense of purpose through channeling her energy into something she could be proud of.

Fiorante says she now has the time to nurture the many facets of her personality and is looking forward to continuing to grow as an individual.

"It's a never ending journey—you're in constant evolution," she says. "You're dynamic, baby!" ♦







# Should cancel culture be **#cancelled**?

The cancel culture debate continues as the difference between holding people accountable versus silencing voices is called into question

Written by REBECCA BENITEZ-BERONA

**IN THE PAST DECADE, THE MEDIA** has not been easy on popular influencers and celebrities. Old mistakes or tweets that would have gone unnoticed 10 years ago are now resurfacing as evidence to ‘cancel’ people from social media or their careers.

Critics of cancel culture denote these call outs to mob mentality, evoked by the “[overly sensitive](#)” Generation Z and millennials. In terms of politics, some critics address cancel culture as a [censorship tactic](#) to silence political enemies rather than an approach for healthy debate.

As part of the older Generation Z population, Ciarra Ramsaywack does not think current youth are to blame for being overly sensitive. She says that the adverse effects of suppressing issues for years is finally being recognized, and it’s no longer tolerable.

**“It’s hypocritical because we tell people to express yourself how you want, but when you actually do that, you can offend someone’s beliefs and be called out for it and then [you] get cancelled.”**

But she warns that this constant push for forward thinking and less room for controversial ideas comes with its own side effects as well. “I feel like it’s harder to speak your mind,” Ramsaywack says. “It’s hypocritical because we tell people to express yourself how you want, but when you actually do that, you can offend someone’s beliefs and be called out for it and then [you] get cancelled.”

For many, calling out others for their actions has been a tool to combat racism. In the past few years, the largest movements calling for change have risen from social media hashtags. Recently, the #BlackLivesMatter, #ACAB and #StopAsianHate hashtags have sparked massive attention towards the racial injustice towards Black, Indigenous and Asian communities.

Maggie Reid, a journalism professor at the University of Toronto, says it’s a mistake to fit cancel culture

into a category of good or bad. Looking through one lens obscures the root of its issue—it’s about addressing unjust power imbalances.

## What is cancel culture?

Reid defines cancel culture as a system of control or an “online mob” roused by outrage about someone’s actions. By appealing to whoever is in charge of the cancelled person, the goal is to create some kind of material consequence such as losing one’s job, significant loss of finances, ruining of reputation or a loss of business.

“It’s not anything new,” she says. “The new aspect with online spaces is that there is a bit more democratization of cancellation. For the first time, you actually have people who are able to band together to start action.”

Reid says that it’s often public figures in positions of authority or influence who are targeted, yet they don’t always get cancelled through any material consequence. She says that when an elite is caught spewing racist remarks, they are not permanently silenced but called out for “punching down” to people historically marginalized by society. Yet there continues to be a silencing of powerless people who try to speak against injustice.

“In terms of social media, for example, Palestinian activists have been censored online for years but this conversation rarely dominates,” Reid says. “From my perspective, it’s [cancel culture] always being framed through the lens of famous people facing criticism for the first time.”

Reid warns that if this discourse is not spoken of, depictions of cancel culture risk being one sided



## PROGRAMS

towards people who are unscathed while overlooking those that are truly impacted by repression of speech.

### Harmful legacies and lasting history

When 215 bodies of Indigenous children were [found](#) at a former residential school in Kamloops, B.C. in May 2021, thousands of protestors marched towards the statue of Egerton Ryerson in downtown Toronto and beheaded it. In doing so, they hoped to remove the harmful legacy behind the name of a person who played a role in the creation of the residential school system and supported too many years of institutional violence.

An article by [Sun Media](#) claims that such acts enabled by a university only amount to mob behaviour, promoting vandalism and repression of free speech suited to the demands of cancel culture.

Rai Reece, an assistant professor of sociology at Ryerson University who focuses on race, ethnicity, law and justice, says she is not surprised to hear this critique. “What this is, is another reiteration of white supremacy by the establishment. When you are looking for another way to diminish the work of grassroots organizations and activists by saying that it’s a form of cancel culture, that’s what [white supremacy] is,” Reece explains. “Mainstream media isn’t geared towards folx who are the most disenfranchised and marginalized in society.”

Reece does not agree that beheading the Ryerson statue is part of cancel culture. She says it’s not as simple or convenient as that—it is a form of abolition that is calling for the university to acknowledge and take accountability behind the namesake that has caused Indigenous genocide and continual harm.

However, Reece explains that the symbolic act of a cultural boycott that is popular within cancel culture is still present. This boycott was significant to physically remove what that statue represented. She says this does not ostracize anyone, nor does it cancel history, because history will always be there.

### Navigating discussions online

For people engaging online, it can become overwhelming. Many feel the need to create posts that speak about world events rather than showing their latest dinner, or else they risk being judged for not using their platform or privilege to speak on what matters.

Ramsaywack says that she has felt this way the past year during the Black Lives Matter movement. As a young Black woman, she felt that her experience would not be validated enough if she didn’t make posts about it. At the same time, she was worried about what her white friends would think about her posts.

“I don’t want to get cancelled because of what I’m saying, even though it’s a cause I believe in and should feel free about what I want to post in that sense,” she says. “It’s a looming fear of getting cancelled that’s problematic on social media.”

With the way the media continues to promote both informational and harmful conversations surrounding cancel culture, the debate about its function continues. But in terms of responsibility as a collective to heal and reconcile, Reece encourages people to have difficult conversations that “gently call in” members of their community—not behind an avatar or closed doors, but as human beings. ♦



### Children

- Achievers Summer Learning Camp
- Home Alone Safety Course
- Homework Club

### Youth

- Newcomer Youth Leadership & Mentorship Program
- High Five Principle of Healthy Child Development
- Road Map
- Career Counselling
- Baby Sitting Course
- Youth Leadership Engagement Program

### Students

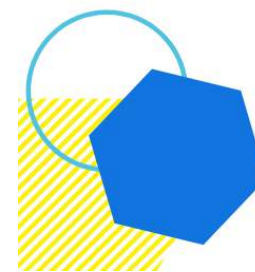
- Authorized Test Center
- Test Invigilation
- Free Income Tax

### Adults/Immigrants

- New Immigrants
- Microsoft Office Certification
- Employment Training
- First Aid & CPR Training
- Business Setup Assistance
- Virtual Tax Clinic

### Women

- Parents of K-12
- Women Entrepreneurship
- Newcomers Parent
- Preventing Violence Against Women





# Faith in the time of COVID-19

The benefits and barriers that come from online religious practices

Written by AMY FOURNIER

**“IT IS A TIME WHERE EVERYBODY** started questioning the validity of everything,” says Zahra Quadri about the outbreak of COVID-19. Quadri is a fourth-year visual arts student at York University who grew up in Southern India, where she currently resides.

Quadri is Muslim, but has a mixed race background as her father is British Indian. “My faith gives me a sense of direction, especially in a time of such unpredictability.”

In order to contain the virus last year, churches, temples, mosques and other places of worship were forced to close and transition to online platforms. Some virtual faith groups have had massive success amidst the pandemic.

Alpha, a Christianity course that helps people explore the meaning of life, launched in May 2020 through the Catholic Chaplaincy at York (CCY).

Dwayne Santos, master of ceremonies and host of the program, says that he didn’t think the program would work online. “A huge component of Alpha is hospitality,” he says. “It’s usually run out of church and includes meal-sharing, watching videos and having meaningful discussions with one another.”

However, with the help of the CCY leaders, 140 people were enrolled in just 10 days. The program generated lots of positive feedback from participants. “Seeing the hunger they had to work on their relationship with God is powerful,” says Santos.

But not everyone has welcomed online religious practice. Quadri says in Southern India, some people were still celebrating Ramadan in person. “Apparently there was a group of people going to the mosques a lot and lots of people going for lectures,” she says. “I feel like this happened with a lot of faiths, even with the Hindu faith, there was a big pilgrimage in North India and it made a surge in the coronavirus cases.”

Quadri says that practicing faith online works for her and her family. “We’ve been doing online discussions or we just have talks about whatever’s going on. When there’s a will, there’s a way. If you do feel like you want to keep practicing, you will find a way. If you don’t feel like it, then maybe you won’t.”

She has also noticed a large increase in much needed mental health resources available online. Organizations such as [Yaqeen Institute](#) combine science, logic and faith to help people get through the pandemic.

However, Quadri also acknowledges that online worship and religious services only benefit those who are privileged enough to have access to the internet.

According to [research](#) conducted by ACORN Canada, more than one-third of Canadians have to make financial sacrifices in order to afford home internet. Not having access to technology or the internet can be a massive barrier to maintaining faith practices while also staying safe during the pandemic.

“Lower class Muslims probably don’t have access to the internet and online communication, which is also probably why they still go to their religious lectures or seminars,” says Quadri.

When it comes to faith in the post-pandemic era, it is difficult to predict whether people will be more or less inclined to turn to religious groups and practices. Every individual has a subjective experience of the pandemic and relationship to the world.

Quadri says that she believes some people will still want to return to religious and spiritual gatherings. “But I also cannot speak for people who are not privileged. I cannot speak for people who are marginalized. I cannot speak for people who have witnessed a lot of trauma or have been in war torn countries and are trying to get vaccinated and they can’t,” she says. “It really depends on what gives the individual strength.” ♦

**“My faith gives me a sense of direction, especially in a time of such unpredictability.”**

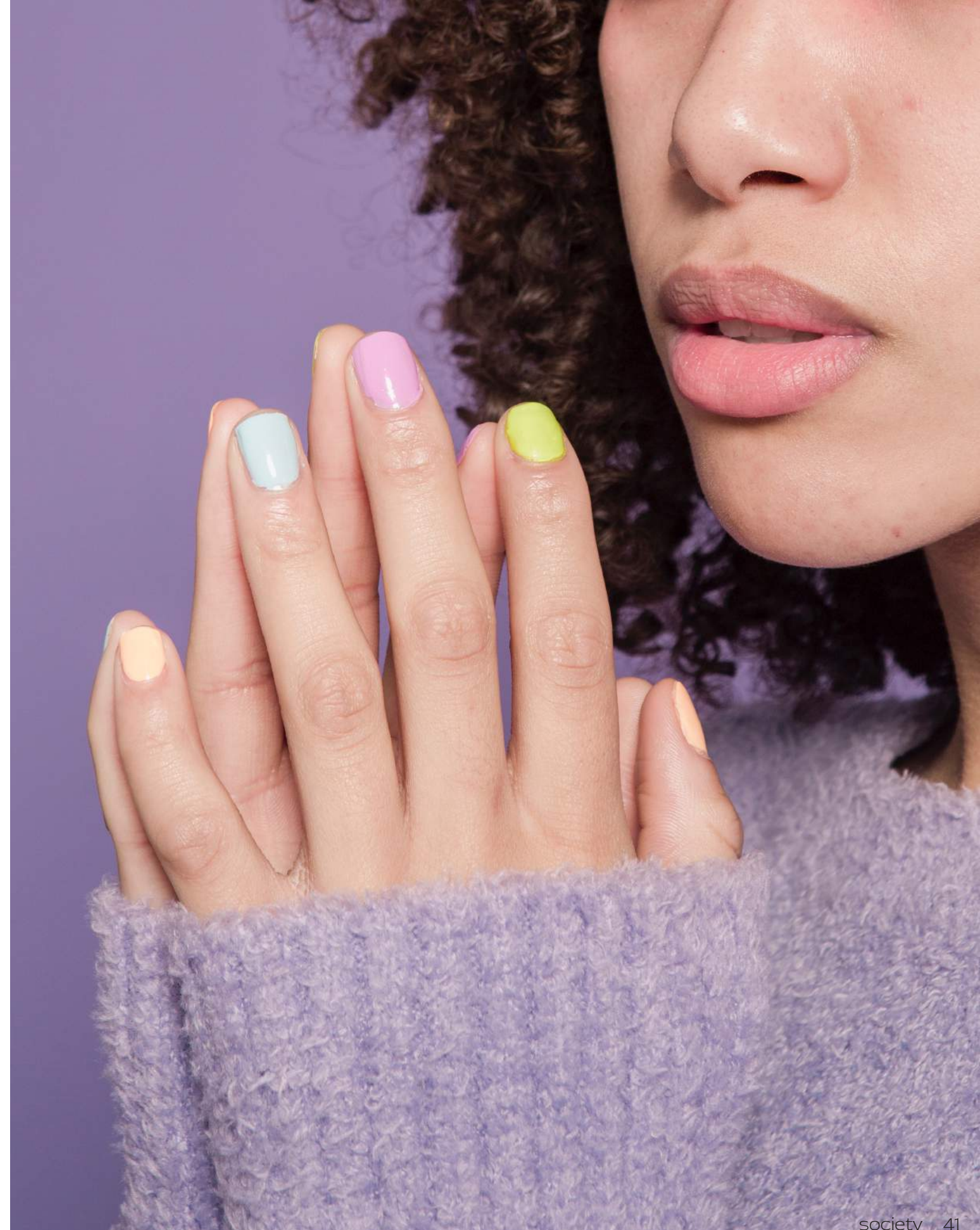


Photo courtesy of MICHELLE LEMAN, PEXELS





# The return to “normal”

Transitioning back to an in-person society comes with mixed emotions

Written by REBECCA BENITEZ-BERONA  
Illustration by LEA CLARIN

**LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS ARE EASING**, more Canadians are becoming fully vaccinated, non-essential services are reopening and gradually, people are meeting each other in person after being isolated since March 2020. For the first time in a while, lockdown measures are not being extended by another two weeks. There is finally a sense of hope.

Recent University of Toronto graduate Nievana Judisthir is excited to start her life again and is already making plans to transition into post-pandemic life. Her main goals are to attend Centennial College’s human resources program and to travel to the United States.

“I’m excited to get my life back on track. I want to meet new people and I want to learn. I just want my life to go back to how it was before because I took life for granted when I had it.”

At the same time, Judisthir admits that while she is excited for the return to in person events, as a recent graduate she is terrified. “Now it’s about looking for a job in an environment that is just getting back on track, and in a job market that has hit rock bottom.”

Judisthir says she has lost the passionate social drive that she used to have before lockdown life. After about two years communicating through emojis, acronyms and delayed responses, Judisthir is worried about how she will navigate a job with face-to-face conversations in the real world again.

“I’m a social butterfly and I thrive off being with people, but 20 minutes into being with people that I’ve known for years was draining for me,” she says. “Now that my social life has changed drastically it’s difficult to know how to function with others again.”

Judisthir is not alone. In a web survey, [52 per cent of Canadians](#) ages 18 to 24 reported feelings of unease towards reopening. This suggests that youth are one of the most affected generations from the pandemic.

At a time when large transformations are supposed to be made in terms of health, identity, education and career planning, a sudden return to “normal” when young people have been interrupted from these processes can feel not so normal at all.

Ryerson University student Sze Yan Lau says that for her, feelings of normalcy will not come back. At least not for a while.

“I prefer to adapt to change really slowly, and I feel like with almost two years being in my bubble, I don’t know if I’m ready to deal with people again,” she says. “Along with my social anxiety, I have to adjust with going back to campus, using a crowded TTC system and learning how to deal with people in person while keeping a face mask [on].”

Lau notes that she has picked up new mannerisms since the beginning of the pandemic that she will have to be conscious of now. “In this sense, there won’t be a return to pre-pandemic life. These adjustments will become the new normal,” she says.

**“The number one thing that people need to understand is that they are a person of their social context, people need to know they are never alone in their experiences.”**

## Transitioning one step at a time

Rebecca Loucke shares that feeling of anxiety as a psychotherapist herself for Beaches Therapy Group Toronto. Transitioning from in-person therapy to virtual isolation and back will be difficult. But she explains that this reaction to change is completely natural.

“The way that I go about that [transitioning] in not only my professional life but my personal life is that I like to pace myself so

that the transition is gradual and that I’m not overloading myself with too much at once,” she says. “Socializing is a skillset that requires

a lot of energy that we tend to take for granted. I find that [pacing] builds me up a little bit.”

As for socializing, she has not felt too isolated.

“I’m so busy working with clients that I get energized interacting with them. But as a human, I have boundaries, too.”

Pandemic or not, Loucke advises learning to acknowledge social limits and restricting social media as a temptation for life comparison.

“The number one thing that people need to understand is that they are a person of their social context,” she says. “People need to know they are never alone in their experiences.”

## Optimistic futures

Despite their anxieties about returning to an in-person society, Judisthir and Lau have great goals ahead of them to achieve at their own pace.

Judisthir hopes to take many of the positive habits she developed during the pandemic onwards. She will be spending her time exploring old creative interests and making up for lost travel time that was not possible as a student.

For Lau, the pandemic reinforced her interest in the mental health field even more. As an aspiring psychotherapist with passions for ending the stigma of mental disorders among Chinese communities, she will continue to use her time to volunteer to help those most affected by isolation. But for now, she looks forward to enjoying having people around her again.

“Even the sensation of holding a door for someone or walking freely around the mall are experiences I look forward to feeling,” says Lau. “The pandemic has made me realize that it’s truly the small parts of daily life that matter.” ♦



# The future of the “lockdown generation”

Disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada’s recent graduates search for long-term employment

Written by HAELEY DIRISIO

**THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HIT** the Canadian employment sector hard. But as vaccination rates rise and workplaces begin to reopen, the question is, what long term effects will the pandemic have on Canada’s unemployment—especially youth unemployment?

The Ontario Government reported that in the first quarter of 2021, employment declined for all age groups compared to the same quarter last year. Youth aged 15 to 24 saw the largest loss of employment with a decrease of 8.6 percentage points, followed by workers aged 25 to 54 with 1.2 percentage points.

Ontario’s unemployment rate in the first quarter of 2021 (9.1 per cent) was also higher than Canada’s rate of unemployment (8.8 per cent).

“We have seen that young people aged between 18 to 24, specifically new graduates, are facing multiple shocks during the pandemic,” says Behnoush Amery, senior economist at the Labour Market Information Council. “In some literature they have been called the lockdown generation.”

The Royal Bank of Canada’s (RBC) Future Launch program conducted a [study](#) in March 2021 on 1,800 Canadians between the ages of 14 to 29. The study found that more than half of young working Canadians have experienced job interruptions such as reduced hours or termination. Additionally, 47 per cent of youth working full-time are doing so from home.

This rise in job losses for young adults and the lack of employment opportunities for recent graduates can also have long-term effects.

“These young people that enter the labour market during a crisis, it really has long term effects on their career,” says Veerle Miranda, an analyst from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Many young workers are accepting jobs for lower wages, have less opportunity for promotion or are unable to find jobs altogether. Miranda said these factors could negatively impact their careers in the future, at least for a few years.

A [study](#) conducted by Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research in 2019 examined the long-lasting effects that the 2008 financial crisis had on “recession graduates.”

“Negative impacts on socioeconomic outcomes persist in the long run. In midlife, recession graduates earned less, while working more.

And they were less likely to be married and more likely to be childless,” the study states.

21-year-old Emily Gadjimousiev has experienced the tumultuous pandemic job market first-hand. With her graduation around the corner from the criminal justice and public policy program at the University of Guelph, Gadjimousiev has been actively looking for jobs in her field and has even expanded her search to other sectors she may not have thought about prior to the pandemic.

“I’ve considered lots of administrative positions and even [Human Resources], stuff that can be done remotely because I know that they need that right now.”

**“If we want our new graduates to be successful in the new future of work, we have to make sure we provide them with the opportunity to re-skill and up-skill.”**

In a way, Gadjimousiev found the pandemic has opened her horizons to other jobs. “I feel like COVID is better for that, because it is making me consider other options,” she says.

But so far she has not had an official interview, only a couple of phone calls. She has continued to build up her resume and is contemplating furthering her education in the hopes of enhancing her chances of landing a job.

Gadjimousiev isn’t the only one struggling to land a job or even an interview. She says her friends have also had a hard time finding full-time employment and are sticking with the minimum wage jobs they worked throughout school.

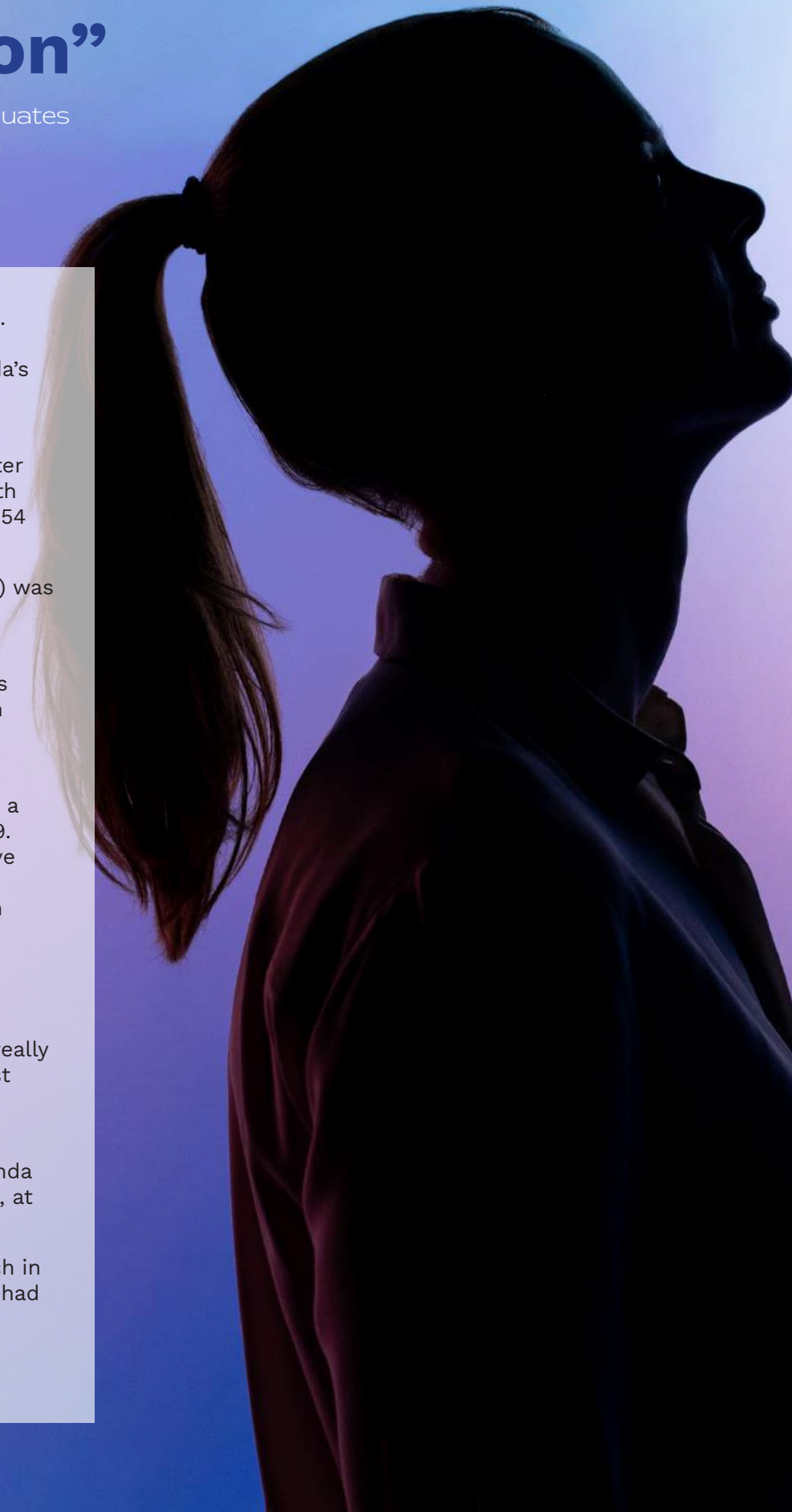
“Those who have recently graduated come into the labour market at a time when there are very limited vacancies available,” Miranda says. “These young people that enter the labour market during a crisis, it really has long term effects on their careers, both on employment and income.”

Miranda and Amery both agree that the Canadian government needs to continue to provide opportunities for young people in order to ensure the economy recovers from the pandemic. “If we want our new graduates to be successful in the new future of work, we have to make sure we provide them with the opportunity to re-skill and up-skill,” Amery says.

The Canadian government has provided incentives for companies to hire interns and recent graduates. Businesses can receive 50 to 70 per cent of an intern’s wage (maximum of \$5,000-\$7,000), and similar grants for hiring recent graduates.

These grants and wage subsidies given to employers help create jobs for young Canadians and in turn, allow them the opportunity to gain hands-on work experience.

“It is really essential to keep youth engaged with the job market.” Amery says. ♦





# Collecting joy

Spending money on K-pop and making friends along the way

Written by LEA CLARIN

**WHEN CANADA WENT INTO LOCKDOWN**, I stopped spending money on commuting, shopping in-person and eating out at restaurants. Like many others, I thought that COVID would quickly be under control. But that hasn't been the case over a year later.

What do you do then to keep yourself distracted from the reality of the pandemic while stuck at home? I found my answer in getting back into K-pop.

Short for Korean popular music, K-pop is a genre of which the modern form emerged in South Korea in the 1990s. It is heavily influenced by other genres around the world such as pop, hiphop, rock, as well as South Korea's own traditional sounds. There's no single K-pop sound, as style can vary from group to group who experiment and evolve their artistry with each new release.

For the last decade, I've considered myself a casual K-pop listener. I had never bought physical albums before, thinking that they are the same as western albums. But in June 2020, [Seventeen](#) released their seventh mini album, [Heng:garæ](#). Having filled the void after work hours by actually paying attention to k-pop industry happenings, I bought all versions of the album to give myself something to look forward to. When it arrived, I unboxed the package in my living room and was stunned by everything included with my purchase. Inside were posters, photocards, postcards and photobooks galore. Everything was designed so gorgeously, with each inclusion matching a cohesive theme. As I scrambled to take pictures of my haul, I knew I was hooked.



Flashforward to the present day, I have a bookcase deemed as the K-pop shelf. On display are albums from groups like [Pentagon](#), [OnlyOneOf](#) and [P1Harmony](#), with my prized [ONEUS](#) and [ONEWE](#) merch on top. I've always casually collected other objects like art prints, DnD dice and lamps, but I've never been more frenzied about collecting until I got into K-pop. Amongst my collection is an unassuming white binder. Lifting the cover, you'll find yourself facing sheets upon sheets filled with photocards. This past year, I've spent hundreds of dollars on these business card-sized cardboard pieces with selfies of K-pop idols printed on them.

I'm part of a group chat consisting of nine fellow ONEUS fans (known as ToMoons) in the Greater Toronto Area. We do casual album and merch group orders because international shipping can be hefty, so it's practical for us to order together and split the shipping and customs fees. Most of us collect ONEUS photocards.

K. Sohn, an engineer and ONEUS fan, says that she "started collecting as a hobby during the pandemic, [having] more disposable income from not taking transit and not eating out." She allots three to five per cent of her total income to collecting merch. Sohn and I connected on the ONEUS Discord server a couple of months after I got into the group, both of us ecstatic to finally meet another ToMoon in the region.

Before I met Sohn, it was only myself and a friend from university who got me into the group, K. Lee, who combined our orders and traded cards with each other. When it comes to collecting, Lee describes herself as "rabid, but not unreasonable."

"I've actually always been a rabid collector, it just used to be for anime and manga merch instead of K-pop. I got into K-pop during the pandemic, so it mostly just changed the interest," she says.

When the pandemic started, I bought anime and manga fan merch to support fan artists online.

**"This is actually my first time collecting anything in general so my hobby started because of the pandemic. I'm really glad I started though because it really brings a lot of joy, even though it is a really expensive hobby."**

But most of the series I like are on indefinite hiatus or finished, leaving no real incentive for me to keep collecting.

S. Acena, another member of the ToMoon group chat, says she didn't listen to K-pop at all prior to the pandemic.

"This is actually my first time collecting anything in general so my hobby started because of the pandemic," says Acena. "I'm really glad I started though because it really brings a lot of joy, even though it is a really expensive hobby."

For young working adults in Canada, like the majority of the people in our group, K-pop albums are relatively affordable given the quality and quantity of what is included inside.

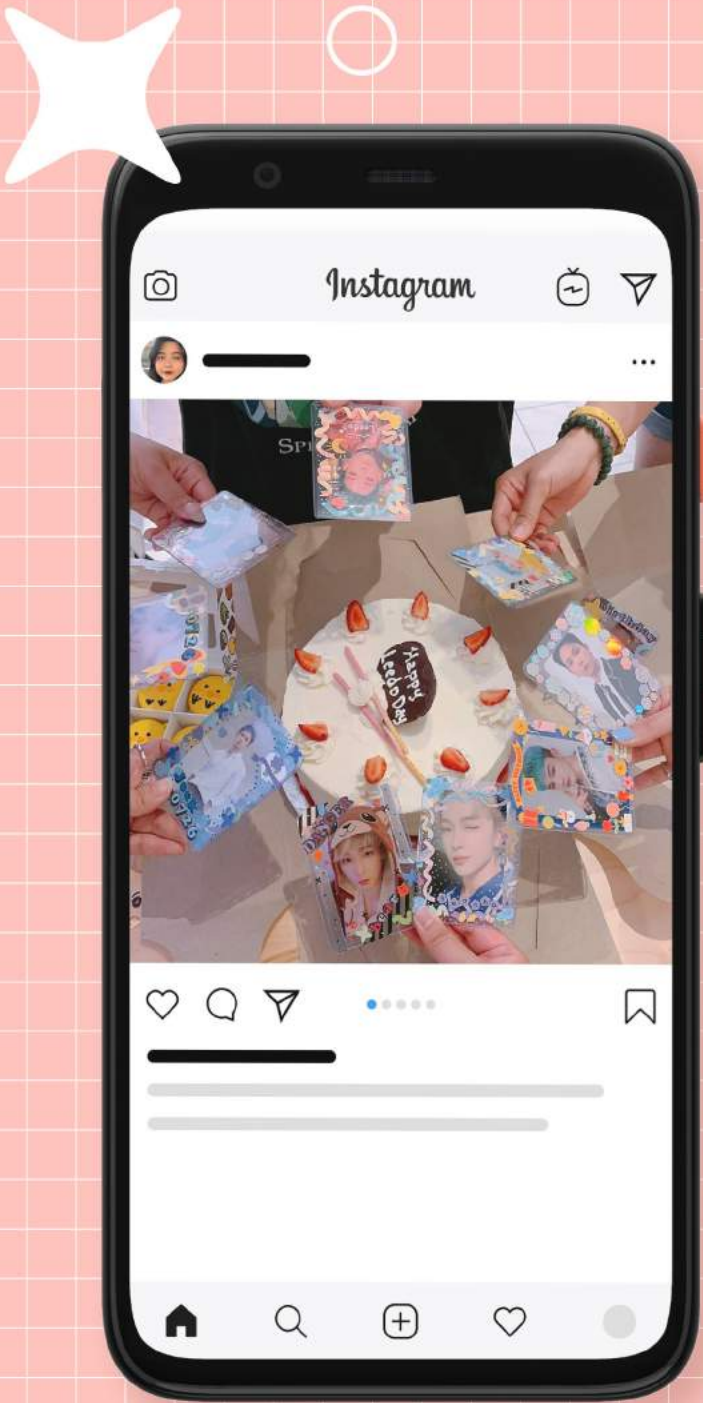
What gets fans buying more, or even buying several copies of the same album, is the chance to collect specific photocards of the members. This is what led me to buy five sets of the ONEUS [Devil](#) albums—three different versions per set for a grand total of 15 albums currently sitting in piles around my room. Whether it is worth it is debatable, but I pulled the

Yeo Hwanwoong album inclusions I wanted, so I'm satisfied as long as I don't crunch the numbers in my bank account. Collecting K-pop merch is fun, but financially it can add up.

Acena says there are many things she loves about collecting, but especially the trading aspect.

"I love interacting with others. I've never really been part of a community like this," she says. "It's great because I can get something I'm looking for and help others with their collection goals too."

Our little group has met up a couple of times during the summer. From café hangouts to celebrate an idol's birthday to a Canada's Wonderland excursion, we've created some special memories through our shared hobby. ♦





## Growth

Written by Rebecca Benitez

We were told to stay down and keep to ourselves  
Planted in toxic soil  
Watered by poisonous words and bruised by jealous hands.  
We were told we could only grow here,  
Locked behind our glass homes  
Hoping that the world would appear as beautiful  
If we could pretend to see it  
But never touch it.

But we are not the same, we are not less than or more  
We resist, we are opportunists.  
We don't know where to go  
So we took our roots and left  
Pushing for flowers even on desert land  
We are wild and untamed.

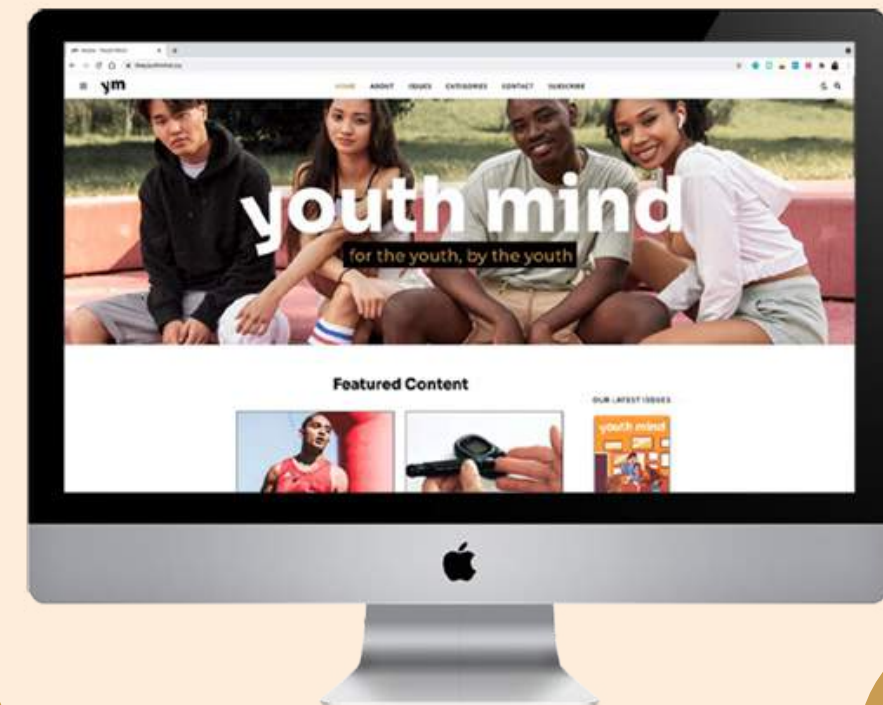
We will not be afraid to chase the sun in an awkward path  
With our heart in the open for all to see  
We will no longer search for growth in the praises of strangers  
We will not hide our wounds behind artificial roses  
We will build our own garden within ourselves  
We will move on.

And when they try to block the sun and say,  
"They look so strange."  
"Their head is in all the wrong places."  
We adapt and bloom, unprovoked and proud.  
Even when we are trampled, we will continue to grow upwards.  
We only know how to rise when we fall.



Photo courtesy of Shadab Pexels

# Stories don't end here.



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