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Ontario Learning Development Foundation Inc.

youth mind



the resilience 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.

youth mind



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Letter from the Editor

Dear readers,

When deciding on the theme for the first issue of Volume 3, I couldn't help but think of the past two years and what theme would resonate most with our audience. The word resilience means to recover from something quickly – something that can spring back into shape. Resilience was all I could think of when I thought about how our world has recovered from these extremely difficult two years. During this time, we've gone through a pandemic, climate change, political unrest and so much more. We have risen above all this the best we could, and in 2022, we have seen a bit of light at the end of the tunnel.

I, myself, have learned to be resilient this year. I decided to go back to school, which can be difficult to adjust to after being out of school for the past few years. On top of that, I was in a new city, managing work and school. There were times I felt defeated, but looking back on what I was able to achieve, I know I can face adversity or challenges in my life with resilience.

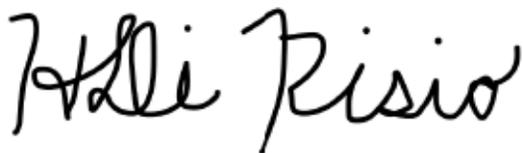
So, without further ado, I present Issue 1, Volume 3: *The Resilience Issue*. This is my first issue as managing editor, and I have learned to be resilient. In taking on this new role, I have had to learn how to manage a team and be resilient when things don't go as planned.

Our stories featured in this issue look at environmental resilience in *Origins of a green thumb* and the resilience against hate in *Finding home elsewhere: Toronto's emerging Asian communities*. The past two years of the pandemic have taught us and our planet to be resilient. Every day, we practice resilience when dealing with tough situations, such as struggling with our mental health or understanding life through a different lens. Each of us faces our own obstacles that we must overcome in order to move forward.

I hope this issue of Youth Mind echoes some of the difficulties you have faced and conquered through your own resilience. Or that these articles teach you more about resilience all around us.

Happy Reading!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Haeley DiRisio". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Haeley DiRisio



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 Resilience Issue

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Wellness within academia

Post-secondary student resilience in the face of bad grades.

Written by GRACE NELSON-GUNNESS
Illustrations by AISHARJA CHOWDHURY

A LONG STANDING PRACTICE in academia is the categorization of students based on their grades. Students feel being ranked by grades in post-secondary determines their next steps and whether they should stay within their chosen field of study.

Attending post-secondary comes with a heavier course load that doesn't discriminate. Toleen Abdul, a fifth-year fashion design student at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), says high expectations come from professors regardless of program or major.

"As ableism is woven into the fabrics of higher educational institutions, universities are built to make students believe that if you can't deliver to these high and often unrealistic expectations, that it's a problem of your abilities and not anything to do with them not providing more resources and support for students," says Abdul.

Unfeasible expectations make it more difficult for students to achieve the high grades that got them into post-secondary. However, receiving bad grades can be a result of issues beyond the traditional grading system.

Professor Craig Jennex in the department of English at TMU says his undergraduate experience was affected by communication issues and hesitancy with assignments due to a lack of direction from professors.

"My main mistakes were not adequately reading syllabi, not understanding assignments and what was being asked of me, not starting on assignments early enough, not proofreading my work and not being in communication with TAs and instructors," says Jennex.

Communication between professors and students is key when it comes to improving marks. Providing appropriate feedback helps improve a student's problem-solving skills in future assignments.



"It's futile to let a student know they did something incorrectly without extending the knowledge to them

of what can be done to achieve better results in their work," says Abdul.

The pressure to meet the requirements set by professors and overachieve their expectations can wreck a student's confidence in their chosen field of study. Those in creative programs can get discouraged when the grading system becomes too narrow to take individual creativity into account.

"When an instructor doesn't understand or rather disregards what you've worked to achieve in your piece and makes certain critiques based on their own marking scheme, which oftentimes does not consider the aspects that make up your own individual capabilities as an artist—for instance, style and medium of expertise—it becomes discouraging," Abdul says.

In order to stay resilient, the first step is to try to separate oneself from their grades.

“We are proud of our work and we put ourselves into it and want it to be well-received, but we are not our work,” Jennex says. “Sometimes we mess up or misunderstand the assignment. Sometimes we need more time to develop our skills. This is fine.”

Students avoiding the urge to identify with their grades, open communication with professors becomes easier. The discussion around grades becomes one of learning how to improve them instead of a student trying to defend their work.

“In my final year of undergrad, i was comfortable enough approaching instructors about my work,” Jennex says. “Not in a defensive way, but in a ‘how can i do better’ sort of way. I wish i started doing this earlier.”

The resources that help guide students to succeed academically whilst suffering from mental health challenges expand, as do the mental health conversations.

Post-secondary institutions are slowly recognizing that one in five post-secondary students meet the

criteria for a mental disorder. Furthermore, students should reach out if they feel their grades or ability to hand in assignments are being affected by their mental health challenges.

“Sometimes we mess up or misunderstand the assignment. Sometimes we need more time to develop our skills. This is fine.”

“The best advice that i was given that i like to share with others with related challenges is to access the institution’s accessibility and accommodations support services,” says Abdul. “This really helped me to have support in place when i needed it.”

Student resilience is not about pushing to the breaking point with all-nighters, poor nutrition and neglecting social relationships. Students will often exhibit these behaviours when they believe they must finish their degree in the standard four-year period. Rejecting that expectation can be beneficial to a student’s wellness.

“In the times where i put my health first by taking breaks from studying, asking for extensions, meeting with professors during office hours to discuss my access needs and enrolling in fewer courses per semester, i was advocating for a better environment for me to access my studies,” Abdul says.

Abdul says that resilience for her is putting herself first and continuing her degree despite the challenges she has faced. ♦



Collaborating successfully

Ways teamwork can be beneficial when completing a project

Written by JORDAN DESMARAIS

Illustrations by BRETT MCDONALD-CURTIS



THROUGHOUT LIFE, one is faced with a wide range of assignments. Some are done alone while others require a team. Working with others is something everyone has to do, whether it's for school or work. But how can it be completed effectively?

The answer is dependent on preference, since there are plenty of ways to collaborate. However, there are certain things everyone should strive to do or look for when working with others.

For starters, things like getting a second opinion on work can be a collaboration. Having a second set of eyes can be very efficient, even if it's just to spot spelling mistakes. Overall, having someone look at a project is bound to improve the final product.

Hearing what others say about the work can also rekindle someone's confidence. There are plenty of people who come up with great ideas but doubt themselves before pursuing them. Bringing up a concept in a small group allows others to give their thoughts on it. Which can give someone the opportunity to get ideas on how to improve it.

Collaborating has more to offer than just sharing ideas. Doing projects in a group setting gives people plenty of chances to improve their skills.

Mesten Hiltz-Andre, a third-year student at Algonquin College in Ottawa, says his collaborative experiences have played a huge part in his success as an artist.

"It gives you a chance to experience how other people do things. In art, there is no wrong way to do things," he says.

Being able to work with others has allowed Hiltz-Andre, and many others, to learn from each other. This process has helped them sharpen their respective skills.

When working with others, communication is vital. It's important to be on the same page. Whether in sports or writing, it's crucial to ensure all group members know exactly what they're supposed to be doing.

Communicating is also important because it plays a role in determining who works together.

Tamer Soliman, owner of March Forth Creative, says

team building is essential. While working on his films, Soliman relies on various people to complete the project.

"I need a whole bunch of people to put it all together. So, try to find people who don't have your skillset," he says.

Having people with a variety of strengths sheds light on multiple perspectives and gives the project the ability to advance.

Soliman says it is important to value what others have to say. Having a group who has shared interest in the project is great. However, making sure the team is happy is the most important part of collaboration. Ensuring every group member has a voice helps strengthen trust between teammates. It also makes the activity easier for everyone.

"It gives you a chance to experience how other people do things."

Being skilled or talented can get someone far. However, when looking at the bigger picture in almost everything in life, a single person can't do everything.

Some people don't understand this at first, and it destroys team chemistry. In some cases, it even causes the team to abandon them.

Kevin Marks-Beaubrun, a teacher and coach at Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School in Ottawa, says team sports are a great way to learn about efficiently working with others.

"The benefits you get from sports aren't just physical," he says. "Sports teach you to hold your teammates in high regard. This allows people to push each other to do the best they can."

Marks-Beaubrun says communication is an undervalued lesson learned through sports.

"When people try to control the group or team, the result is often failure. Don't try to have a louder voice. Try to listen to your teammates with a positive and open-minded attitude. Without collaboration, you won't have any success," Marks-Beaubrun says.

So when it comes to working in a group, making sure everyone is happy should always be a priority. Although these strategies work for a lot of people, they should not be restrictive. Getting to know oneself and their team can help people discover what will help their projects succeed. ♦

Misunderstanding autism

Fighting stereotypes and adversity

Written by ELIOT GILBERT

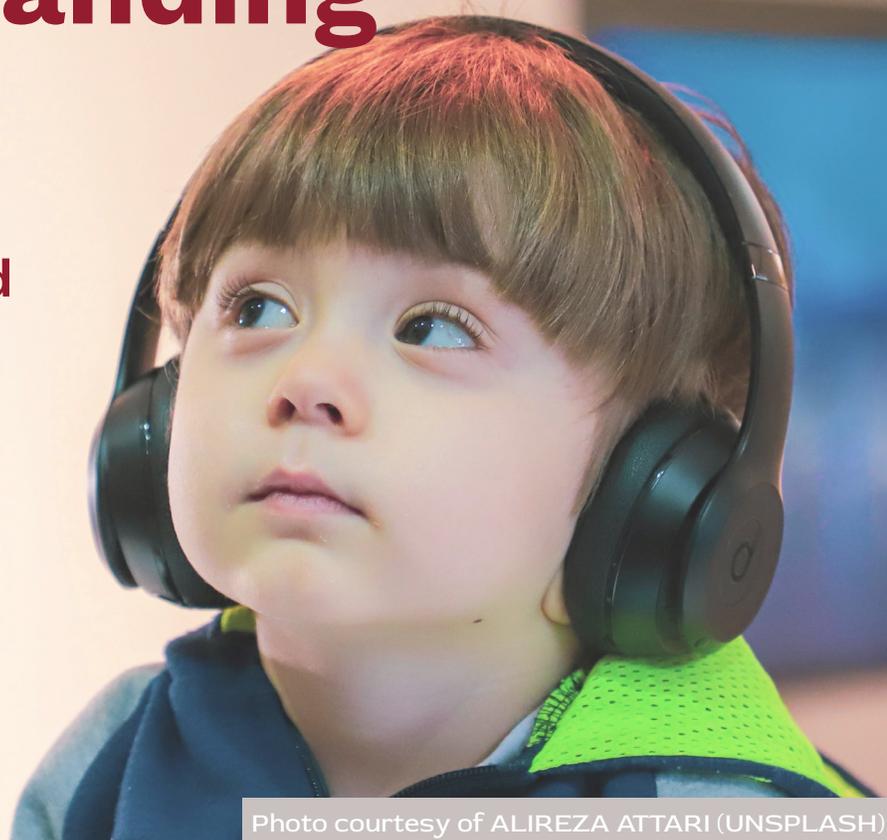


Photo courtesy of ALIREZA ATTARI (UNSPLASH)

The cultural narrative of autism

The current narrative of autism in today's culture is wrong, according to a growing number of advocates.

"I think a lot of people get stuck in this very narrow, medical model of disability that really doesn't work well when talking about autistic people," says Harmon Pope, an Ontario-based autism advocate.

The "medical model" Pope references is a body of research and advocacy efforts from the past several decades that suggests autism should be treated like a disease. More specifically, a disease that should be cured, despite it not being viewed as a disease by experts. Even still, great efforts have been made to "cure" autism since the early 20th century that have continued into the modern era.

Alex Smith, an autistic 22-year-old research assistant and student says "people tend to think of autism as either an intellectual disability or a behaviour disorder when it's really not how it works."

According to 2022 research published in *Disability and Society*, research participants consider their autism to be "value neutral," much like skin or hair colour. Participants also noted that, in contrast, they believe others view autism as a negative quality.

The problem with media representation of autism

"People really have a stereotypical view of autism," Smith explains, adding that the world tends to see autistic people in the media as extremes. Often, they're portrayed as the science-minded genius or the intellectually impaired individual who cannot function without a caregiver's help. The characters are nearly always young white men, leaving out anybody who does not fit into those stereotypes.

Smith's problem with representation is an area of research that is taking off in some academic fields.

"Media representation practically never accurately portrays social groups as they actually are in reality,"

Alexandria Prochnow comments in a recent study. While these views on autism are incomplete, experts caution that people shouldn't completely erase them. These groups still deserve representation, but they deserve better representation. Currently, most representation is driven by negative stereotypes.

The majority of autistic people who do not fit into one of those boxes deserve to be acknowledged, argues Smith. Autism "forms a community of diverse people," Prochnow writes in her study.

This is echoed by Pope. "While autism may be a noun, it has far more in common with an adjective," she explains. Pope adds that autism has a unique cultural identity that should be treated as such.

No support into adulthood

Smith recalls a recent grueling 12-hour day at work which was interrupted by a panic attack in front of her colleagues. She felt she had to hide that the reasons were related to her autism. Smith chose to lie and say she had a panic disorder "because the stigma was lesser for that type of anxiety than autism."

The autism community suffers from mental health issues. Recent research supports the idea that anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are higher in the autistic community than in the general population. These mental health issues mostly remain unaddressed. Unfortunately, most autistic people do not receive the effective help they need.

On top of mental health issues, many autistic people have to pay out of pocket for essential autism-related health services. One surprising service some autistic people need to cover is an autism diagnosis itself.

"You need to shell out a good \$2,000 to see a private neuropsychologist [to get diagnosed]," Smith explains.

It's possible to get an adult autism diagnosis through the Ontario public healthcare system. However, women are less likely to be taken seriously in these settings. Complaints of not being taken seriously as an adult, in general, are commonplace in online autism spaces.

Therapy, medication and career counselling are just a few examples of things that require autistic people to pay out-of-pocket. Though many Ontarians pay for these services themselves, autistic people can struggle disproportionately without access to them.

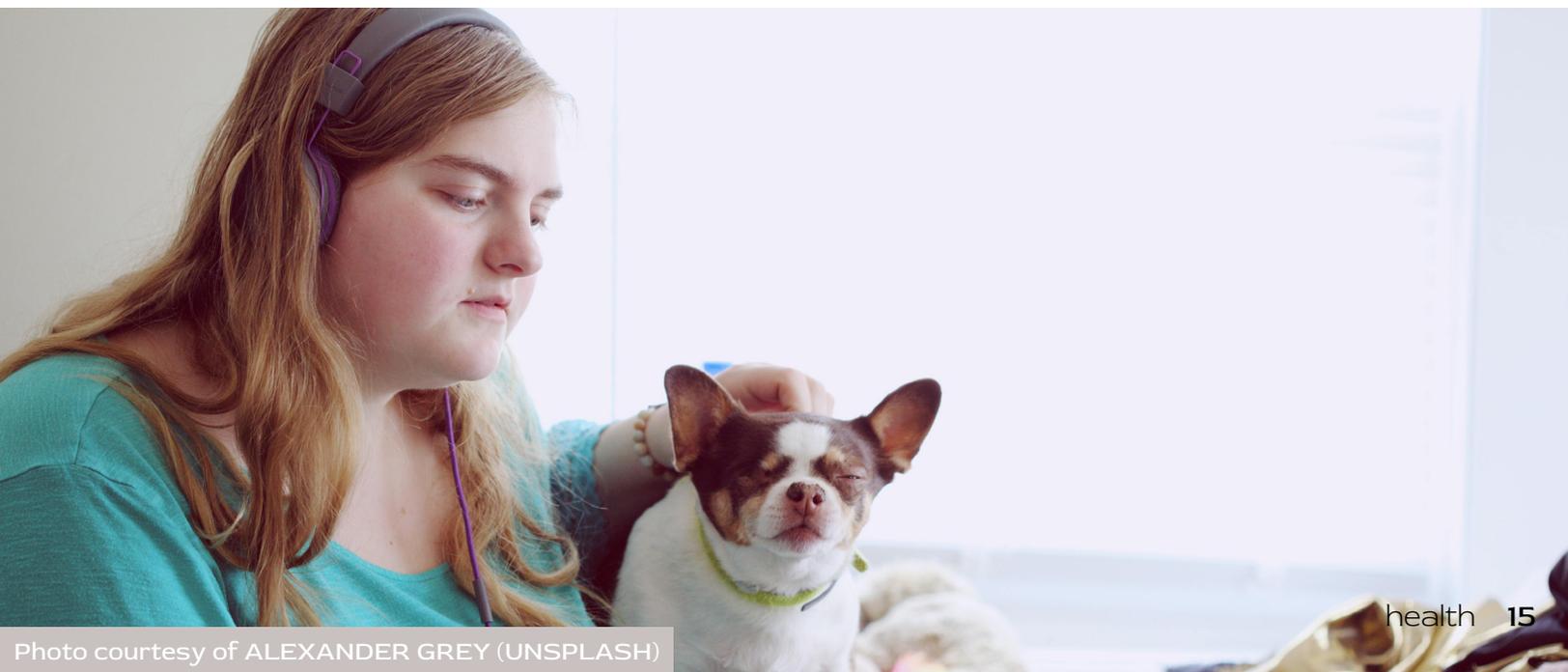
"On an individual level, the biggest issue I'm facing is the scraps I get on ODSP," says Pope. She explains that rent takes a large portion of her Ontario Disability Support Program payments. Pope adds that she knows of many other autistic people who face similar challenges of poverty.

Community building despite challenges

Despite the challenges autistic people face, one of the great wins is the unique cultural identity the community is building.

"If we truly want to live in a multicultural society, then we need to respect and accept that autistic people are going to have different social customs," Pope explains.

Society is slowly becoming a healthier place for autistic people to survive and flourish, thanks to advocates like Pope. ♦



A black car is parked on a dark asphalt surface. In the foreground, a deflated yellow balloon with a smiley face printed on it lies on the ground. The balloon is crumpled and its string is trailing off to the left. The background shows the side of the car and a manhole cover on the pavement.

Navigating depression and anxiety in youth

Depression and anxiety affect many young Canadians but can be treated

Written by JORDAN DESMARAIS

ACCORDING TO RESEARCHERS at Youth Mental Health Canada, around 1.2 million youth in Canada suffer from mental illness. Only about 20 per cent receive appropriate treatment such as support from mental health services.

Statistics Canada also reports that Canadians aged 15 to 24 have the highest rate of depression. Roughly a quarter of deaths in this age group are caused by suicide.

Depression and anxiety are among the most common disorders that affect youth. In more severe cases, either can lead to consequences like isolation or death. In fact, most of those affected don't receive proper help.

Options like exercising frequently or talking to a therapist can be inaccessible and uncomfortable for many. Individuals who don't like the idea of talking to strangers about their personal struggles or exercising can become frustrated if those are the only solutions given to them.

That doesn't mean there are no other options, many are overlooked despite being more accessible.

It can be helpful to learn about the illness and identify what might be at the root of it. Doing so can lead to many solutions such as discovering methods to get help and acquiring better habits.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association the type of anxiety youth normally suffer from is Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). They state that "young people with generalized anxiety disorder tend to be perfectionists and worry about what others think of them."

GAD can lead to a variety of issues for youth such as trouble sleeping, concentrating and restlessness.

Gaining knowledge about anxiety or depression is helpful. However, social media can also be a contributing factor.

Social media plays an important role in the lives of youth, but it can also amplify anxiety and depression. An article written by McLean Hospital reported the results of a British study on social media use. The study concluded that social media negatively impacts our sleep schedule which is tied to depression.

Adoni Vassilyadi, a third-year student majoring in human kinetics at the University of Ottawa, says his anxiety is heightened by the usage of social media.

"Always seeing what other people are doing makes us afraid of missing out," says Vassilyadi. "Rather than focusing on everyone else, we should take

a step back, go for a walk. Mental breaks are important."

Focusing on the lives of others can make people feel inferior. Everyone posts about the part of their lives they want others to see. In reality, their lives may look very different.

Despite the toxicity, Vassilyadi doesn't think one should immediately delete apps like Instagram and Snapchat. He stresses the importance of reducing hours spent online before disconnecting completely.

"You can't just get rid of an addiction—it's a slow process you need to invest in. You need to have patience. It won't go away overnight," he says.

Learning about mental illness can help, but in some cases, it isn't enough. Sometimes, the best solution is to speak to a mental health professional.

The process is often difficult to start. Talking to therapists and counsellors can be uncomfortable. Luckily, this isn't the only option. People tend to open up to those they trust like a friend, family member, teacher or co-worker.

However, youth with depression often avoid talking about their issues altogether. They can often fear judgement from their peers. But the fear of being judged should not stop someone from speaking up about their mental health.

Mary Enns, a Hillcrest High School teacher in Ottawa shares that one of her students asked for permission to open up about their depression in class. The students' reactions were positive.

"He was moving from his depression to his well-being in that moment and everyone was encouraging him because he kept asking 'Should I stop?'" she says. "It wasn't very sensitive material, it was just necessary for him."

Moments like this one aren't uncommon. According to a survey conducted by HealthPartners, depression and anxiety are starting to be seen less as an excuse amongst youth. The survey concluded that more people feel comfortable talking about their mental health and less people hesitate to reach out for help.

Recovery is difficult but it's important to push forward.

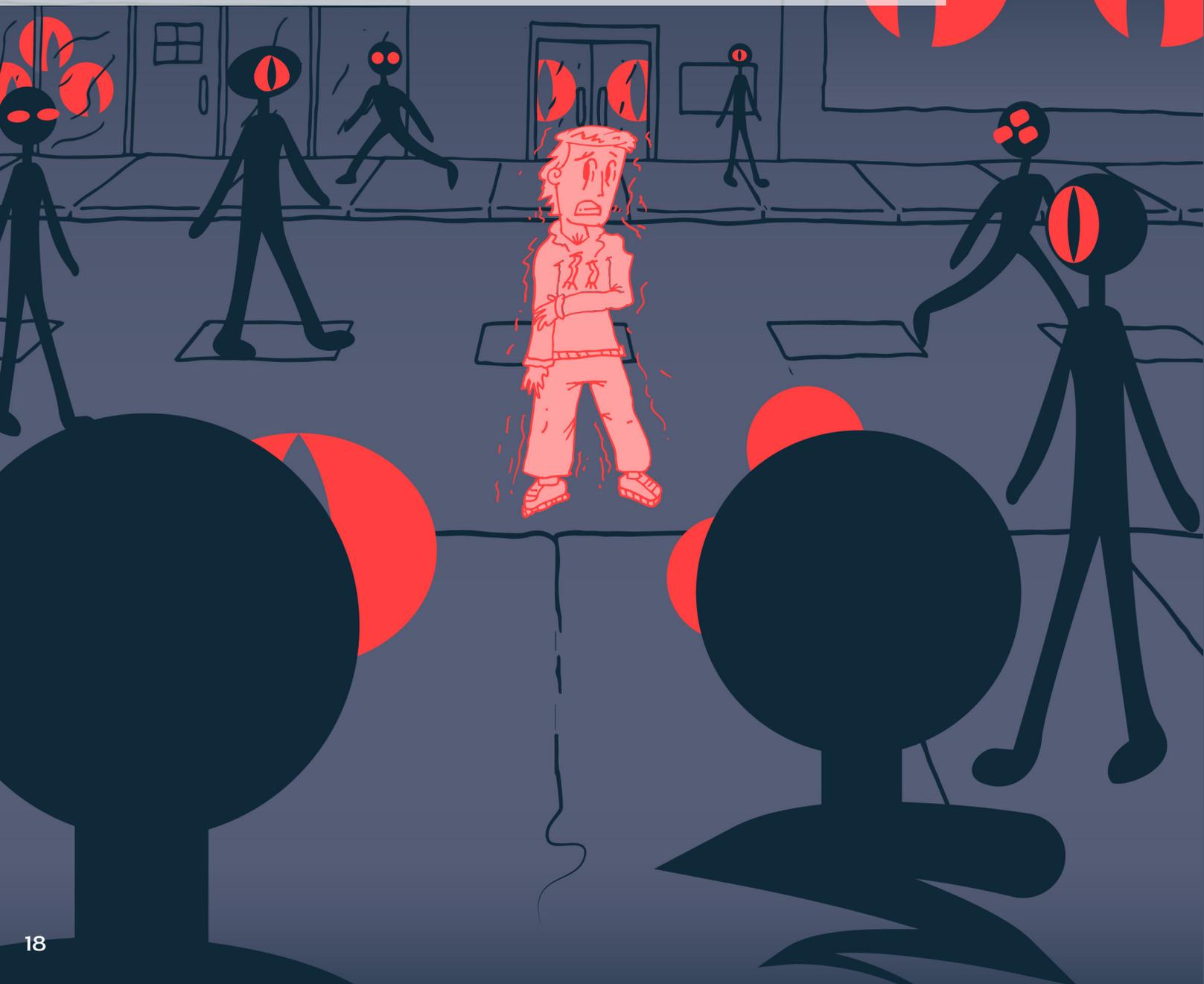
No one is truly alone and others can help when they're made aware of what their peers are going through. Those who are struggling need to lead their own recovery with the help of support from those around them. ♦

Safe at home

When agoraphobia causes fear of what lies beyond the front door

Written by DRU GRAY

Illustrations by BRETT MCDONALD-CURTIS



CINDY HERSHAL*, AN ENGLISH MAJOR studying at the University of Toronto (U of T), has always struggled with anxiety. She dealt with social anxiety and the fear of public speaking throughout all of elementary and secondary school.

When Hershhal had her first panic attack during class, things began to spiral. Feeling lightheaded, dizzy and short of breath, she abruptly left the classroom. Hershhal found a private washroom to be alone and calm her nerves.

The terror was visceral.

“I thought I was going to die. Or just completely lose my grip on reality. It was so scary,” she says.

This first attack left Hershhal frightened about it happening again. She started avoiding that class altogether. Eventually, she switched to online classes out of the fear of having a panic attack in public.

“It just felt safer to stay home. The idea of having a panic attack paralyzed me,” she says. “I didn’t want to venture too far from home because I felt like I had more control the closer I was to my safe space.”

After seeing her doctor, Hershhal was diagnosed with both panic disorder and agoraphobia. According to Statistics Canada, this diagnosis is quite common. Having a panic disorder can lead to withdrawal from activities outside of the sufferer’s comfort space.

Agoraphobia can often be misunderstood. The phobia being defined as a fear of leaving home or a fear of open spaces. Both are components of agoraphobia but do not encompass its complexity.

Statistics Canada characterizes agoraphobia as “a disorder characterized by an intense fear of public places, particularly places where help or immediate escape might be difficult (e.g., a bus or train), or places where the individual has previously had a panic attack.”

The fear of having a panic attack in public is an important fear for most who suffer from agoraphobia. This fear of panic and being unable to easily escape a situation will often drive agoraphobia sufferers to stay home.

Agoraphobia can also be present in those who do not have panic disorder or panic attacks. However, it is common to have both agoraphobia and panic disorder. There are many reasons an individual may develop agoraphobia. They range from trauma and panic attacks to social anxiety and health anxiety.

Beth Cost*, a Master of Social Work Student at U of T, discovered that her fear of illness left her

housebound.

“I had always been a hypochondriac and had a lot of health anxiety, but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the health anxiety became overwhelming for me. It felt safer and less stressful to stay home all the time,” Cost says.

The threat of a deadly illness is enough to cause anyone stress, especially those with existing health anxiety. The threats of the outside world can be factors in keeping those with agoraphobia housebound.

According to Stats Canada, the onset of agoraphobia is typically in late adolescence or early adulthood. They also state that the phobia affects between 0.5 to 1 per cent of the Canadian population.

“It just felt safer to stay home. The idea of having a panic attack paralyzed me,”

Agoraphobia has an extremely high recovery rate. Health Canada states that in Canada, 12-month and lifetime prevalence rates are 0.7 per cent and 1.5 per cent. This means the likelihood of recovering from the phobia and living a life without persistent agoraphobia is very high.

After Hershhal’s diagnosis, she sought treatment from her family doctor. Through her unique treatment plan of medication, cognitive behavioural therapy and exposure therapy, she has made significant progress in her road to recovery.

“Getting help was so integral to my healing and recovery process. I’ve been doing so much better and slowly but surely getting back to where I was,” she says.

Hershhal sounds optimistic about her future and capabilities, which she says, is far from where she was a few months ago.

“I’m feeling so much better. A couple of months ago when I was first diagnosed, I was feeling scared, hopeless and just down,” she says. “With time and support from my friends, family and medical professionals, things are looking up, and I’m working through the anxiety, panic and fear every day.”

*Interviewees requested to have their names changed for privacy reasons ♦



Origins of a green thumb

Exercising ecological and agricultural resilience from an Indigenous perspective

Written by GRACE NELSON-GUNNESS

Photo courtesy of JONATHAN KEMPER (UNSPLOASH)

MORE ECOSYSTEMS ARE DETERIORATING In the current climate crisis. Humans inhabiting the land is a heavy contribution to the depletion.

However, Indigenous Peoples today have never lost sight of their relationship with nature. Their treaties about trade, animals and fishing activities showcase their connection and respect to the land they inhabit.

Anna Flaminio is a professor in the department of criminology at Toronto Metropolitan University. Flaminio says the legal principles around such activities are in place to respect the land and animals.

“Indigenous nations have their own laws which espouse conservation and sustainable models of harvesting in order to ensure their kinship responsibilities to animal and fish relatives and to uphold responsibilities to protect and care for the land,” says Flaminio.

Colonialism forced Indigenous Peoples to witness their land being destroyed for the first time.

Samantha Williams Barrantes is the coordinator of an urban farm initiative called the Indigenous Foodways Program. Williams Barrantes says ideas around environmental sustainability were not discussed

because climate issues were not present before European settlement.

“The words ‘sustainability’ and ‘conservation’ are only relevant today because of the degradation and depletion of the land,” says Williams Barrantes. “So now, people are actually looking to Indigenous Peoples for their wisdom in agriculture practice. Those words in Indigenous languages never existed because we didn’t have a need for it.”

Indigenous Peoples support sacred ecosystems that depend on the regulation of their ecological knowledge and practices. They do so despite the environmental trauma that they still endure today.

One example in which Indigenous Peoples demonstrate ecological resilience is the maintenance of the Black Oak Savanna. It is located in the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant. Indigenous Peoples conduct periodic burns to preserve the diverse amounts of rare flora and encourage the growth of plants used for medicine and food.

Indigenous Peoples also create their own ecosystems where their agricultural knowledge and practices will be respected, thus creating agricultural resilience.

An example is the urban rooftop farm at Toronto

Metropolitan University that houses the Three Sisters and Medicine Garden. Both gardens are looked after by the Indigenous Foodways Program.

“The goal and the mission is that we have space that is Indigenous-led for Indigenous faculty and students on campus. It also provides a space where we know there is an appreciation for our traditional practices. So, it’s not just an ‘us’ space. It’s a place where knowledge exchange takes place,” says Williams Barrantes.

One of the reasons both gardens are so successful is because they utilized Indigenous agricultural practices. These practices improve the entire farm ecosystem since they involve intercropping. According to Williams Barrantes, intercropping improves the soil on the plot and is the basis for the Three Sisters garden.

“You plant the corn first, and then when that grows about a foot, you plant the beans around the corn and the beans provide nitrogen to the corn. So the beans are a nitrogen fixer and that’s the relationship between the first two sisters,” says Williams Barrantes. “Then, the last you plant is the squash at the bottom of the mound. The squash provides ground cover which will help suppress weeds.”

In addition to intercropping, the Indigenous Foodways Program utilizes Indigenous planting designs to enhance soil and increase harvest. The Medicine Garden is planted in the same pattern as the sacred medicine wheel and uses traditional mounds.

William Barrantes says, “A mound is about a foot high and around the bottom of the mound is a reservoir. They use reservoirs because in super dry conditions a mound will help retain moisture in the soil.”

One of the easiest ways to produce agricultural resilience is to let nature take its course without

human interference. This is one of the best courses of action. It is also the one Williams Barrantes takes at the end of each season. That said, it differs from the typical procedures of other urban farms.

“So, for my crop cover, I literally let everything die naturally. Eventually, that composts itself, and it covers the ground as it would in nature without people having to put a tarp over it,” says Williams Barrantes.

The plants then grew back with more abundance the following year, Williams Barrantes explains.

However, operating a farm in the heavily urban city of Toronto brings the challenge of limited space. This is especially true when Indigenous practices cause an abundance of crops.

“When I’m planting something, I have to think about next year. So, if I plant a strawberry, strawberries spread and they will take over. If everything I planted was not on a roof and on the ground, I wouldn’t have to worry about that,” Williams Barrantes says.

Valuable Indigenous agricultural knowledge tends to be ignored because it is different from traditional western practices. However, there is so much to learn from Indigenous Peoples. In fact, they have had this scientific knowledge for thousands of years.

These two knowledges can be used together in order to help with sustainability and food security.

Flaminio says, “We need both knowledges at this time, especially to empower Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth leaders who are honouring Indigenous laws and principles while helping to protect earth and water.”

This way, more farms across Canada that respect Indigenous methods can develop their own agricultural resilience. ♦



Photo courtesy of JOÃO JESUS (PEXELS)

Exploring biodiversity loss and its solutions

What can people do to help the extinction crisis?

Written by ELIOT GILBERT



What is the problem, and why is biodiversity important?

Humans are causing a biodiversity loss — but they can help solve it. Biodiversity loss is one of the most pressing environmental issues of modern day. Yet, researchers say there isn't enough being done to halt the extinction of species.

“To a certain extent, our ecosystems can buffer the loss of some species, but there is a tipping point where systems will radically change and can never be recovered,” says Victoria MacPhail, a research associate at York University’s Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change.

Joseph Bennett, an associate professor from the Institute of Environmental and Interdisciplinary Science at Carleton University agrees. Bennett states that there may be a loss of 1,000 times more species per year than the background rate.

Though some sources disagree that the extinction rate is so drastic, a more modest 2019 UN-endorsed report acknowledges that species are being lost at an “unprecedented rate.” They warn that species extinction rates are “accelerating.”

So why is biodiversity important in the first place?

MacPhail urges that the benefits of biodiversity are immense. They include many examples—from climate regulation and recreation opportunities, to spiritual reasons and increased water quality.

A similar perspective is shared by Marie Quinney from the World Economic Forum. She explains that biodiversity is integral to food security, economic stability and growth, protection from natural disasters and protection from infectious disease.

The final point being an ongoing topic during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2022 avian influenza epidemic in bird populations and the 2022 monkeypox outbreaks. Infectious disease and biodiversity are intertwined; the more humans interact with ecosystems, the more animal diseases will spill over and affect humans. By protecting and increasing biodiversity, we may be able to limit infectious disease outbreaks.

Aside from the clear and tangible benefits biodiversity provides for humans, both MacPhail and Bennett say that every species has an inherent right to a chance at survival.

Citizen science helps scientists and biodiversity



Photo courtesy of DANIYAL GHANAVATI (PEXELS)

So, what can the average person do about biodiversity loss? It's easy to get overwhelmed by large systemic issues, but these problems are solvable with human intervention. "It's only hopeless if we let it be," says Bennett.

One area where ordinary people can help is citizen science. Citizen science is vital to our understanding of ecosystems and biodiversity. Additionally, it is an activity that virtually anybody with internet access and a camera may be able to help with.

A current citizen science project is Bumble Bee Watch, administered by MacPhail and staffed entirely by volunteers. A volunteer simply takes a photo of a bumble bee and identifies it. They then submit the photo and its location to experts for review. The initiative helps researchers understand bee migratory patterns, which can help protect them.

"Citizen science is fast becoming a way to increase our knowledge of the world around us and also get the public involved and engaged in research and their community," says MacPhail.

Bennett adds that citizen science allows researchers and scientists to focus efforts on protecting and restoring ecosystems—rather than monitoring targeted species.

What else can the average person do to help?

Aside from citizen science, MacPhail and Bennett explain that the average person can help by eating less meat. A study published in *Science* indicates that lowering global meat consumption would lower ecosystem pressure and in turn raise biodiversity levels.

MacPhail and Bennett also highlight the importance of consuming fewer material goods. According to 2020 research published in *Nature*, overconsumption of material goods has a negative impact on biodiversity by increasing demand for energy usage, natural resource extraction and water use, so it fits that less consumption may help biodiversity.

Bennett stresses the importance of youth engaging with politics, adding that young people are more likely to work towards putting new ideas into practice. MacPhail echoes this sentiment, further emphasizing that "we know many of the causes and solutions to the problem of biodiversity loss. The task now is to put those into action." ♦

The future of homeless justice is climate justice

The population may not be ready if they don't prepare for both the climate and homeless crisis

Written by REBECCA BENITEZ-BERONA

SVP
SANS ABBE TE BORS MEHORS
UNE PIECE OU UN
TICKET RESTAURANT
—MERCI—

SWELTERING HOT SUMMERS. Torrential rain turned to floods. Freezing cold winters. None of this is a surprise when living in Ontario and each year, weather disasters return stronger than before. The Ontario climate change and health modelling study warns Ontarians of record-breaking rises in temperatures in coming years. These will bring more storms, droughts, forest fires and heat waves. However, those that will experience the consequences most severely, are those suffering from homelessness across Ontario.

Mariya Bezgrebelna is a York University PhD psychology candidate working with CAMH on research between climate change and homelessness. According to Bezgrebelna, being homeless is more than living without a home—it is living without permanent shelter with factors such as systemic, individual and structural. Additionally to these barriers, 80 per cent of the homeless suffer from pre-existing health and mental health conditions that can be brought upon by prolonged exposure to air pollution and poor conditions on the street.

“When you add climate change, survival is more precarious,” says Bezgrebelna. “The response in Toronto’s case has not been that considerate.”

Toronto is implementing more green plans. These include sustainable buildings to protect from climate disasters and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. Some of these plans include a reduction in materials like concrete, which contribute to eight per cent of global emissions.

However, Bezgrebelna says that a lot of the time, these improvements come with increases in property value. As a result, homeless people and low-income residents are further displaced to the outskirts of the city.

“In the end, the homeless are only relocated and the problem may continue,” she says.

Another factor that Bezgrebelna adds to the well-being of the homeless in Toronto is the heat-island effect. The effect occurs when urban spaces don’t implement enough green infrastructure and experience hotter temperatures than elsewhere in the region. This is due to concrete sidewalks and buildings easily absorbing heat. This creates an unbearable suffocating feeling during heatwaves in the summer.

The homeless population is often displaced on these streets with higher chances of experiencing potentially fatal accidents from heatstroke. The homeless then seek a cooler location, which tends to

be in places like parks.

W“The park is a great place to be in when you don’t have access to cool areas,” Bezgrebelna says. “But unfortunately, what sometimes happens is forceful eviction to pacify people who don’t want to see it – those who live better off in middle and high-class neighbourhoods.”

Program coordinator Daphna Nussbaum of Peel Alliance to End Homelessness, has witnessed similar conditions brought on by COVID-19 fears. The pandemic worsened these conditions by forcing many small businesses to shut down. Homeless individuals who once relied on them for washrooms or temporary shelter from harsh weather no longer had anywhere to go.

“It shouldn’t take a crisis like the pandemic or climate for people to react. We need to be more proactive in addressing these incidents before they happen,” Nussbaum says.

It’s not enough to have a weather climate evacuation plan. Cooling and warming centres with access to showers help address some basic needs that people may have, but it is not a permanent solution. To Nussbaum, the solution is affordable, permanent housing and shelters made available all year.

“Housing is a social determinant of health,” says Nussbaum. “But when there is no access to housing and no climate security, we are failing the lives of so many people.”

Fortunately, the future of homeless protection in the climate crisis is not entirely hopeless. According to Nussbaum, what has worked is the Encampment project. This project sought to lessen shelter capacity by bringing affected homeless people to clean hotel rooms. It provided accessible resources and three meals per day. Although funding has run out for the program, this was a step towards potentially keeping the homeless off of the streets.

“As a society, we are all responsible for each other,” Nussbaum says. “Until our three levels of government address a collaborative approach to change policies and provide funding, we need to listen to our communities and policy experts and educate ourselves to make real changes.”

As the weather becomes more extreme, the increasing effects it has on the well-being of the homeless directly reflects the safety of everyone. However, the future depends on how well we work together to reverse the effects of climate change whether it’s on a local, regional or global scale. ♦

The sound of silence

Noise pollution and its effect on Toronto students

Written by BRITTANY STUCKLESS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRETT MCDONALD-CURTIS



THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC brought a sense of peace and quiet. In the early days of 2020, the Toronto streets were practically a ghost town.

Pandemic memories highlight that cities don't have to be inherently noisy. Some laws help, like banning noise after 11:00 p.m. and before 7:00 a.m. But does everyone follow these rules? City officials ask for tolerance but may need to do more to address the problem.

Noise pollution is a common problem for city dwellers. Harmful levels of city noise can also have a damaging effect on students trying to study and absorb information.

What is noise pollution?

Noise is a term for unwanted sounds. Noise pollution is sometimes referred to as environmental noise or sound pollution. This invisible threat is a major part of city life. It includes transportation, industrial and neighbourhood noise.

Types of noise pollution

Construction is arguably one of the most distracting sources of industrial noise. In Toronto, construction projects happen during daytime hours when many students are trying to focus.

Erin Mick, a cinema studies PhD candidate at the University of Toronto (U of T), notices the city's construction schedule.

"I often work very late at night to avoid this factor," she says.

Other types of industrial noise include equipment sounds from machinery, like motors and air fans from commercial vehicles.

Neighbourhood noise usually comes from the city's residents. Some examples include dogs barking, groups of children and apartment living. The latter may include poor sound insulation causing vibrations and exaggerated noises, like a loud upstairs neighbour.

Transportation noise is one of the worst environmental pollutants. It refers to alarming noises associated with congested traffic.

All sound pollution can increase stress levels.

Unforeseen noise

Certain types of environmental noise can be unexpected and more alarming than others. It may be easier to block out constant noise, like nonchaotic traffic without horns and sirens.

Sophia Bannon is a social sciences student at U of T.

"Sudden sounds are more difficult to block," she says.

The issue with momentary noises is that students can't always prepare for them. It can be quiet one minute and then the surprising nature of these noises can break focus. They're also often associated with anxiety and curiosity.

"When I'm stressed and working on a deadline, I often find that the disruptive sounds of the city overstimulate me or break my focus," Bannon says.

There are numerous sources of sudden noise in Toronto. Some examples include outdoor yelling, an

unexpected thud from a neighbour or a sudden crash from a construction project.

Mick agrees that it's easier to accommodate continuous noise and that unanticipated sounds are more distracting.

"Things like voices and crowd noise don't bother me quite as much. And neither does the ambient sound of the city in general, like steady traffic," she says.

Mick says certain types of irregular city sounds bother her.

"Sporadic, loud noise such as car alarms, garbage trucks, construction and loud music from passing cars is what I find most distracting," she says.

Dealing with noise pollution

To focus properly, students living on major city streets must take matters into their own hands. Luckily, there are a lot of ways young people can reduce the unpleasant effects of noise.

"I use headphones. Sometimes, I don't even play music. I just use them as earplugs," Mick says.

Sometimes, creating sounds can help.

"I might turn on my own noise, like the TV or music," Mick says.

Bannon also practices ways to reduce noise levels.

"I often listen to quiet music with no lyrics. And if I have access to a quiet space, like a library or study hall, I will study there so city noise can't reach me," she says.

Having regular access to a library can make a big difference. But many students can't use their school's library or quiet areas. This is the case for students enrolled in online learning or attending a strictly online institution.

School libraries also don't guarantee continual

access.

"During my first year of university, the majority of the libraries would close at 5:00 p.m. This meant students would gather in the two major libraries, making them more noisy and congested," Bannon says.

Some students have quieter home lives. They may live in residential areas of the city that experience less noise pollution.

"Students who can't readily access a quiet space face disruptions, both from noise and others around them. I do think that students who have quiet spaces have an advantage," Bannon says.

Noise levels are reverting to what Torontoians were used to before the pandemic. Students continue to block it out but the desire for peace and quiet is at the forefront of some of their minds.

Like Bannon says, "noise can add to my anxiety, sometimes meaning I am unable to even attempt working." ♦





Solving hunger in Ontario

How can society ensure food access for our most vulnerable?

Written by ELIOT GILBERT

ALMOST A QUARTER of Canadians can't afford groceries. Food insecurity affects low-income households the most. With food shortages, supply chain issues and inflation on the rise, food insecurity in Canada is increasing.

"Food insecurity is a symptom of poverty," says Elaine Power, a professor in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen's University. "You can't really fix food insecurity without fixing the underlying problem."

The Food and Agricultural Association of the United Nations (FAO) explains that a food insecure individual is someone who doesn't have enough money or resources for food.

To some, this might seem obvious. Yet, the solutions to solve food insecurity are mostly focused on providing food to hungry people, a temporary solution that does not solve the poverty factor.

Solving food security by solving poverty

Canada has an official poverty reduction strategy, it features 2020 and 2030 goals to reduce poverty by

20 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively. Reduction of food insecurity is listed as a main goal. The strategy was successful with a 30 per cent reduction in Canada's poverty between 2015 and 2019.

The report mentions a limitation: it does not include the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on marginalized groups specifically relating to poverty and food insecurity. Officials do not know yet just how much COVID-19 has impacted marginalized groups in Canada. However, the report acknowledges the effects have been overall negative.

"It's been a tough time," says Kim Zhao, a 23-year-old dishwasher from Toronto. "I usually skip lunch and when I'm working, my dinner is a staff meal."

Zhao explains that restaurants will often cook a dinner for all the staff. That is so they can eat something while working through the night. "I don't know how I'd be eating dinner if I didn't have that."

Some experts believe this could be a sign of a broader systemic issue.

"Governments have a responsibility to ensure that everyone has adequate income to meet basic needs,"



Photo courtesy of AARON DOUCETT (UNSPASH)

Power says.

What would government intervention actually look like aside from pre-existing income support programs? These programs include the Canada Workers Benefit and the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

An old idea gaining popularity is basic income. Basic income would involve guaranteeing every resident would have a fixed amount of income per month. They would receive money if they did not earn enough. Some advocates, such as the Canadian Centre of Economic Analysis, argue for a universal basic income. This would involve giving every resident, regardless of income, a fixed amount of money to increase income.

The 2017 Ontario Basic Income Pilot, though abandoned early on, showed that pilot participants were happier and healthier than before. This was the result of simply earning more money to pay for necessities such as food.

Can food insecurity be reduced by growing food?

Some believe that a solution to food insecurity is by empowering people to grow their own food. In an era where self-sufficiency and hobby farms are gaining mainstream appeal, the idea makes some sense on the surface. If people are hungry, can't they just grow and eat their own food?

"I have a small garden on my patio where I grow some veggies," says Zhao. Her garden is made entirely of recycled buckets she got from work that her kitchen was throwing out. "I read this book on patio gardening which kind of exaggerated how much food you could get."

Zhao says gardening is a fulfilling hobby. However, it isn't as cheap, easy or effective as people might think. She recalls reading she could grow 10 pounds of tomatoes per plant, but only managed two pounds per plant. "Plus you have to buy the soil, the seedlings, the fertilizer — it adds up. I only save a few dollars in the end," she explains.

Power says, "For the most part ... [it's] insulting to both those living in food insecurity and to farmers."

She explains that growing food is difficult and

involves a lot of resources — namely, land. Since many food insecure individuals and families do not own land, they couldn't grow food even if they wanted to.

Community gardens, to Zhao, were a potential solution to the problem of land ownership. However, she is currently on a three-year waitlist to get a plot. "When I eventually do get there, there's only so much I can grow in a single raised bed," she adds.

"The idea that you could grow enough of your own food to solve your food insecurity is, well, not a reasonable idea," adds Power.

Reducing food insecurity with free food?

Before COVID-19, demand for food banks in Ontario already exceeded the supply. The pandemic turned a pressing issue into an even larger crisis. The number of people experiencing food insecurity grew significantly. A 2022 Mainstreet Research report revealed that 38.5 to 41.5 per cent of Canadian

households making under \$50,000 might be eating less than they should. This is due to rising food costs.

The crisis has led to the invention of projects like Food Rx. This project is run in collaboration with FoodShare and the University Health Network. It targets food insecure individuals and consists of delivering a free box of fresh food every week.

"It might be weird to hear me call a project like Food Rx a stopgap solution... But that's what it is," says Sheldomar Elliott, the coordinator of Food Rx.

Elliott explains that although giving food to food insecure people is helpful, it does not solve the issue on a deeper level.

"We are well aware that it is still a temporary solution and will remain one until we see more political leadership actually challenging food insecurity and poverty," he explains. ♦



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Understanding the importance of emotional intelligence

Understanding the importance of emotional intelligence

Written by BRITTANY STUCKLESS

Emotional intelligence or emotional quotient (EQ) is the ability to manage emotions and respond to them correctly. It also refers to understanding, recognizing and handling the feelings of others. Research suggests that young adults need to develop this type of intellect to succeed professionally and personally.

Learning emotional intelligence

Sarah Blackmore is a children's media producer for EastLink community television in Newfoundland. She received her master's degree from Toronto Metropolitan University. Her skill set and personal life experience have given her a lot of insight into what it takes to develop EQ.

Blackmore believes one major part of emotional intelligence is lending an ear to other people.

"Try to keep an open mind and never assume how someone feels or the reason for that feeling. Listen, listen, listen," she says.

Honing EQ skills should also begin at home. Using emotional intelligence in social and professional settings is much easier when youth develop these skills with friends, family and significant others.

"I try to understand why my partner might be upset, even if I don't remember events the way they do," Blackmore says.

Another crucial part of EQ is not making assumptions about people.

"When I meet people in my workplace, I approach them without preconceived notions," Blackmore says.

Lacking emotional intelligence

People may not have developed EQ for many reasons. Growing up in an environment that doesn't encourage emotional growth can be a significant factor.

John Bell works in communications at a Toronto-based international education development organization. Part of his job involves interviewing highly marginalized youth who don't always get the support they need to develop EQ.

"The drawbacks of lacking emotional intelligence include struggling with personal insight," he says.

Bell explains the difficulties people can face without having EQ to help with emotions.

"This means not being able to recognize and name the emotions you feel. Also, difficulty learning to identify the emotion as separate from the actions you take because of it. And lastly, not being able to cope with negative emotions by activating the right coping strategies," Bell says.

He also says that people who experience constant negative emotions are at a disadvantage. Part of his job is showing youth who have been through traumatic events how to recognize their feelings.

"Part of supporting them involves teaching them to name the emotions they're feeling. That helps them understand their feelings as specific emotional states," Bell says.

Another primary goal in teaching emotional intelligence is reminding people that emotions change.

"Part of my work is helping people understand their feelings as specific emotional states — not something that lasts forever. Feeling anger, grief, sorrow, numbness, fear, anxiety and being overwhelmed can change. They're not constant conditions of life itself," Bell says.

Lacking EQ doesn't make someone a bad person. In addition to coming from a traumatic background, mental health issues and addiction can play a role.

However, a lack of empathy, social skills and self-awareness can also come from a lack of practice.

Blackmore says there are drawbacks to lacking emotional intelligence. Furthermore, neglecting to learn it could lead to serious interpersonal conflict.

"This would probably lead to a lot of fighting in your life because you wouldn't be able to meet people where they are or empathize with their situation," Blackmore says.

Young people in work or school environments

can miss out on potential connections without understanding EQ.

“Your arguments would be self-centred and people may distance themselves from you,” Blackmore says.

Observing how often a person experiences conflict can tune them into their lack of EQ. This can then spark the desire to learn empathy, problem-solving and decision-making skills and stress management techniques. These are all crucial components of succeeding in both school and the workplace.

When should emotional intelligence develop?

Nurturing emotional intelligence from a young age is ideal, Bell says.

“People should be acquiring the skills that feed into emotional intelligence across childhood and adolescence,” he says.

It’s never a bad time to reflect on one’s EQ.

“The important thing is that one’s early 20s are not too late to develop emotional intelligence and to put one’s skills into practice by forming meaningful relationships with the people around you,” Bell says.

Blackmore believes she may have begun subconsciously understanding emotional intelligence at a young age. However, it’s difficult to pinpoint.

“On the one hand, I think we learn it in our teens, if possible. It’s hard to prescribe earlier than age 20 though because our brains are still developing,” she says.

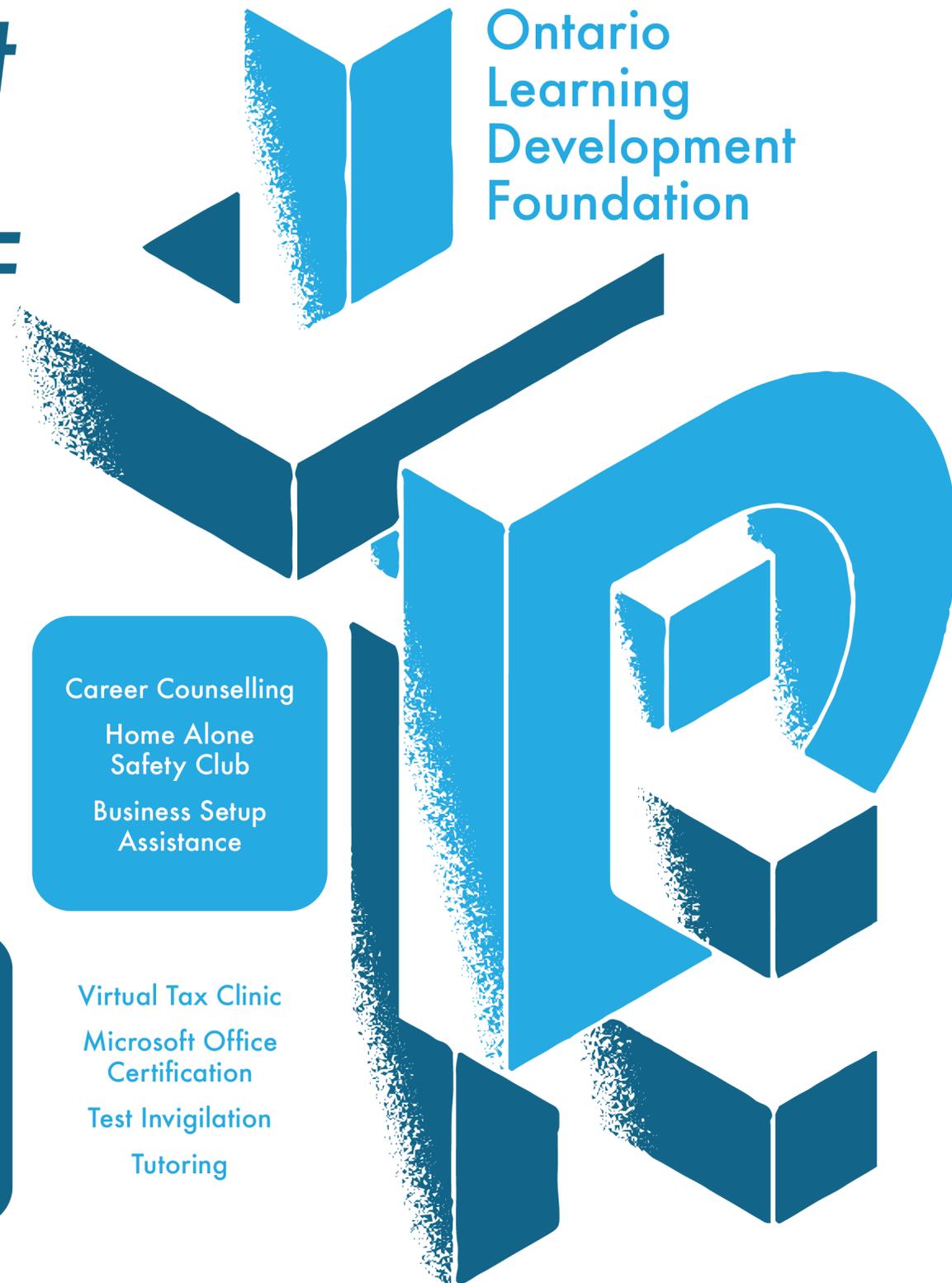
Young people aren’t always in control of when they first learn the concept of emotional intelligence. But, they are in control of learning it later in life. EQ continuously evolves — as long as people take the time to build the framework.

Like Blackmore says, “It’s never too late to take a humbling and curious look at our own feelings.” ♦



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Finding home elsewhere: Toronto's emerging Asian communities

Whether it's combatting Asian hate or creating a place to stay, Asian youth organizers lead the conversation for a better future

Written by Rebecca Benitez-Berona

BEHIND EVERY DELICATELY detailed piece in the Blueprint for a Collective Home exhibit was an Asian artist's story of finding their place in Canada.

But it is not only the individual artists that made the exhibit feel like a home away from home. Beside every piece was another art installation that spoke the same language. They connected with the next like an extended hand. Together, the artworks united into a web of dialogue that explores the Asian diaspora in Canada.

Emerald Repard-Denniston is one of the co-founders of Shoes Off Collective (SOC), the organization behind the exhibit. For the artist, her story looked like video documentation of her and her friend learning Mandarin together. That was an opportunity that was lost to them in childhood from difficulties assimilating in Canada.

By connecting through reclamation of culture and sharing this friendship with her audience, she received a wave of support. Her installation resonated with many Asian-Canadians who struggle to reclaim their languages and culture.

"The feedback was overwhelming," said Repard-Denniston. "Overall, I didn't expect the exhibit to touch so many people and blow up the way it did."

Similarly, sculpture and installation student and SOC co-leader Jason Mendiola expressed how proud he was of everyone who participated. He said the most beautiful part of the exhibit was watching the dynamic of different people within the same room existing

relative to one another.

"The person placed beside your exhibit is sharing the same history. You come to understand that our issues are not unique to us," said Mendiola. "We all come to learn what we need and how we can satisfy those needs by respecting one another's work."

Mendiola reflected on this unity in his installation



Photo courtesy of CALEIGH WONG



Besides daily injustices and a pandemic scare endangering small businesses, there were limitations to in-person resources and community gatherings.

“There was a big lack of Asian community here at OCAD during the online format and even before the pandemic. On top of isolation, the injustices against Asians in Toronto ignited something in me,” Repard-Denniston said. “I wanted to help make a safe place specifically catered for Asians to express and celebrate themselves either through art or a place to hang out.”

Unfortunately, such events are not new either. The 2003 SARS outbreak similarly placed Asians and Asian-Canadians in precarious situations vulnerable to hate crimes. Despite the historic and ongoing occurrences of racial trauma in these communities, there remains the resilience to come back stronger.

Emerging is the Asian Resilience Canadian Collective (ARCC), co-run by South-East Asian graduate students Christina Andaya and Christine Le. It aims to find solutions specific to struggling Asian-Canadians through round table discussions, one-on-one mentorship and networking. To combat Anti-Asian racism, a conversation the collective continues to have is advocacy for policies that ensure the safety of Toronto’s Asian businesses and communities.

“It’s a form of terrorism that shouldn’t be happening at all. We need harsher sentencing, but most importantly, we need to bridge communities outside our local area to have these educational discussions,” said Andaya.

For Le, this platform for youth to discuss politics is the mobilization Asian communities need to bring forward policy changes. “We can’t have anyone else speak for us but ourselves,” she said. “We need representations of these discussions to make community-led changes.”

The ARCC team continues their project focusing on a video series conversing with Asian-Canadian representatives from different fields. Topics range from issues concerning Asian well-being to inspiring stories of personal growth. From city councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam to Olympic athlete Kayla Sanchez, they bring in representation to show that each person can contribute as a resource to the community at large. That’s not even the best part—every video features a warm bowl of local traditional Asian food to celebrate cultural heritage.

“Seeing really is believing,” said Andaya. “Knowing that we have possibilities means a lot, and we want to share that with the next generation.” ♦

centred on the concept of the crab mentality

popularised in Filipino culture. This mentality is described as one person ‘stepping’ on the other, claiming success for themselves. His exhibit features crabs taking up space. They wander curiously as they navigate identity on their own, but continue to influence those around them.

SOC stays true to its name. Prevalent in East-Asian cultures is the age-old custom of removing your shoes before entering someone’s home. It’s a practice of respect and hygiene. The metaphor of respecting space is what SOC organizers Repard-Denniston and Mendiola hope to achieve. Specifically, when navigating vulnerable conversations among Asian OCAD students and the local Asian community.

“When building a community, it’s important to remember how we all come from different places to share a cherished space where everyone brings in their own lived experiences,” Mendiola said.

For decades, Asian-centred organizations in Toronto celebrated and supported generations of Asian youth and families to build brighter futures. But in the past two years, Toronto saw an exponential increase in racist hate crimes targeting Asian communities. The violence ranged from vandalism, physical assault and hateful speech.

In 2020, 220 hate-related assaults targeting racialized populations were reported to the police. The number of these assaults jumped by 22 per cent in 2021, with many more assumed to be unreported.

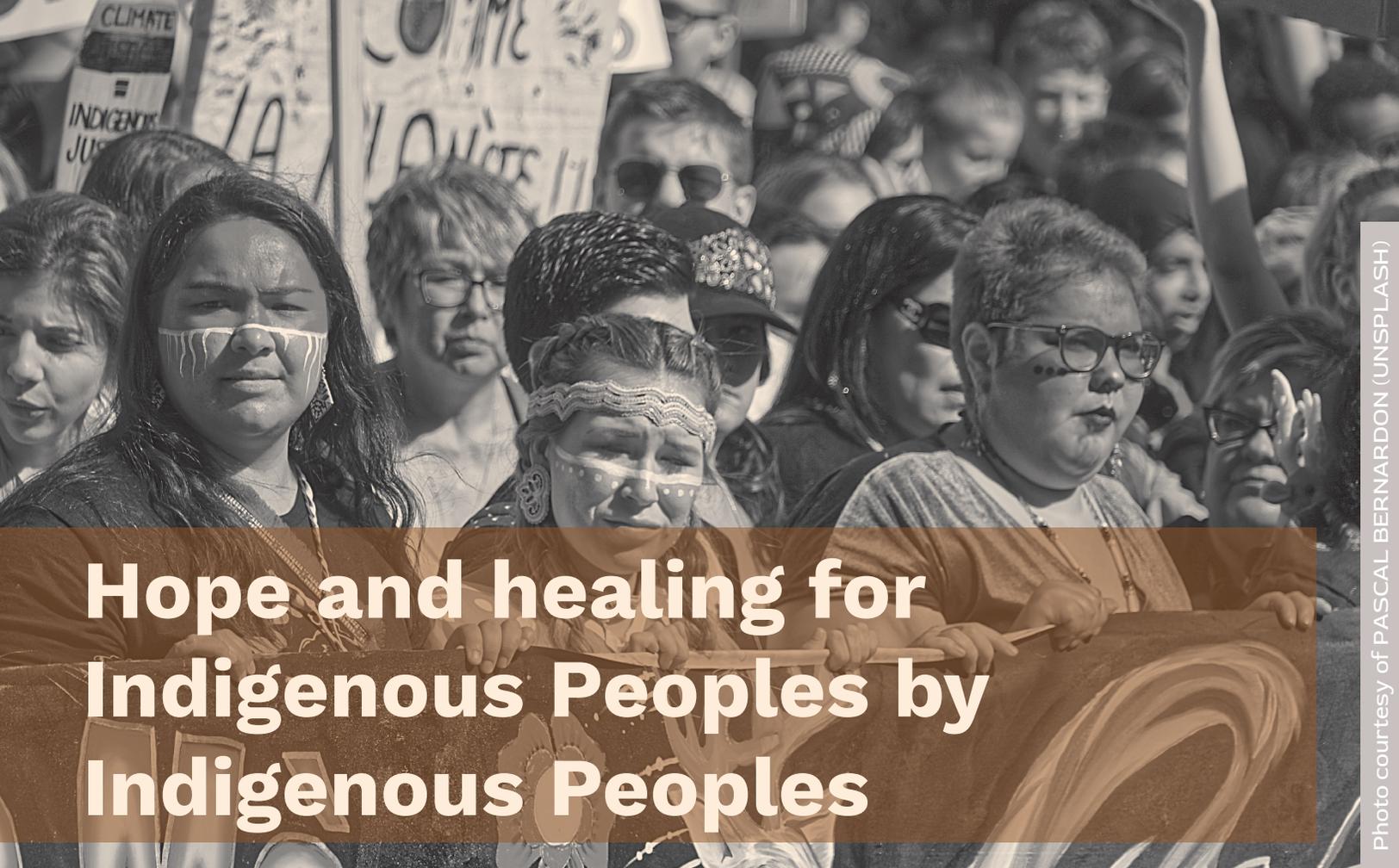


Photo courtesy of PASCAL BERNARDON (UNSP, ASH)

Hope and healing for Indigenous Peoples by Indigenous Peoples

In a new northern Indigenous-centred program, program coordinator Cody Erasmus speaks about his transformative experience fostering the next generation of healers

Written by REBECCA BENITEZ-BERONA

Illustrations by BRETT MCDONALD-CURTIS

CODY ERASMUS REMEMBERS feeling neglected by a healthcare practitioner when he opened up about concerns over his mental health. As an Indigenous man raised with notions of toxic masculinity and ego over feelings, opening up was already difficult.

He had been dealing with seven months of chronic insomnia. He was struggling with healing from substance abuse while balancing life as a single father. Having a practitioner judge his needs and define his situation within a short business-like interaction denied him the care he needed.

“I felt misjudged and misunderstood,” says Erasmus.

Erasmus’ experience is echoed by many people in Canada who were failed by the healthcare system. One of the most affected groups is the Indigenous population. They often face many barriers when accessing healthcare. A Prince George, B.C. study discovered that low-quality care, long wait times and racism were most reported by Indigenous participants.

On top of these barriers, Erasmus critiques the overprescription of pills. He says prescribing pills without targeting the emotional trauma and physical experience will not help patients heal.

“A lot of the time, they diagnose you with medication



without taking in your other needs. Without emotional and client-centred care, a pill only becomes a Band-Aid,” he says
For many Indigenous Peoples, a lack of trust in healthcare is deep-rooted in historical and racial trauma.

Justice Murray Sinclair is the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. In a [Canadian medical association journal report](#), Murray Sinclair cited many incidences forced upon Indigenous families by health professionals. These included abuse, coercion and forced separation.

Sinclair cautioned that historical oppression cannot be viewed separately from Indigenous Canadians’ treatment in their daily interactions with healthcare. If the two are separated, the risk of mistrust and health inequity will only continue.

From the Yellowknife Dene First Nation, Erasmus saw his experience as a sign to get involved in healing and wellness, especially for Indigenous individuals. This dream was solidified after he learned to accept vulnerability in a sharing circle with residential school survivors.

“I saw how much pain there was in our people and how much healing needed to be done. I saw that our people don’t have access to the proper resources that they need,” he says. “I wanted to listen, and I wanted to care for these people, but I didn’t know how to help.”

After witnessing the growth of his parents in the Rhodes Wellness program, Erasmus temporarily moved to Vancouver to help with his own healing. Erasmus says the journey was beautiful, transformative and life-changing.

“I found myself healing through others. I learned to hope and accept my hardships,” says Erasmus. “Over time, I found that I no longer had insomnia.”

Different from mainstream counselling programs, the Northern Indigenous Wellness (NIC) program only focuses on experiential learning and community-based support. Many of the healing practices are applied daily to both the counsellors and the clients. By graduation, students are prepared with many hours of experience and the strength to overcome their own traumas.

“You don’t learn theories from a book and imagine what it’d be like,” Erasmus says. “What you learn, you apply to yourself and once you understand your own triggers, you can reduce harm to the client.”

Today, Erasmus practices as a holistic counsellor, life coach, instructor and program coordinator for NIC. A lot of his self-healing and interaction with clients are inspired by traditional Indigenous knowledge of the [medicine wheel](#). It incorporates the mind, the body, the spirit and the emotions as parts to be equally cultivated to achieve full health.

Erasmus says that Indigenous wellness methods further acknowledge that answers to healing are already within the individual. The healers are not placed on a pedestal with all the knowledge. They guide together while holding a close sense of community.

“If the healer tries to tell them [the client] what the answers are, then that will come from the healer’s perspective. Sometimes, that might influence the client to behave the way the healer wants,” says Erasmus.

This is much different from mainstream mental health care approaches that adopt a patient-professional model, which has been critiqued for decades. Mental health counsellors are treated as the all-knowing professional while the patient is a customer on a short time limit.

The most jarring is the inaccessibility to therapy. It continues to be expensive and largely inaccessible to the marginalized groups that need it most. This healthcare system might not take in the complete complexity of struggling individuals and families, further damaging vulnerable Indigenous people from receiving optimal care.

Small communities are bridging together resources that are culturally and locally sensitive to the needs of the people around them. Erasmus feels optimistic about the future of Indigenous mental health care because of this.

“For the first time, Indigenous people will be healed not by people who have only heard about them from a book,” Erasmus says. “We’re going to only grow from here. More Indigenous people will have more resources than before.”

Recently, Rhodes Wellness College had the privilege to celebrate 16 graduates—all Indigenous. Their next cohort is expected to be even larger. The pathway towards more Indigenous-inclusive counsellors and cultural healing is already here—and it’s succeeding. ♦

Back on track

Managing the burden of student loan debt

Written by BRITTANY STUCKLESS

Illustrations by BRETT MCDONALD-CURTIS



MANY YOUNG CANADIANS have to take out loans to attend a post-secondary institution. [Statistics Canada](#) reports that, on average, around half of all Canadian students take on student debt.

The reality is that students accumulate debt before entering the workforce as full-time employees. In many cases, the burden can be both overwhelming and disheartening.

Nothing can entirely relieve the stress of mounting student loan debt, except for complete government forgiveness. Some intervention from the government has alleviated that financial burden.

One example is Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's decision to [eliminate interest accumulation](#). Regardless, there may be a need for more tweaking of the system. This would help new graduates switch their focus to job hunting and honing their skills.

Managing student debt: A personal relationship

Everyone handles the reality of owing money differently. Some need help and are passionate about advocating for government forgiveness. While tackling the burden head-on without waiting for assistance is better for others. The bottom line is that it takes work to pay off.

Researching available resources and learning to be financially savvy can help alleviate the stress of repaying loans.

Dealing with student debt: Tips and resources

There are tools graduates can use to lessen the financial blow of student loan debt. Lifestyle changes and making use of preexisting resources can provide balance and relief.

Apply for the Repayment Assistance Plan

Arguably, the most helpful tool for those in the repayment phase is the National Student Loans Service Centre's [Repayment Assistance Plan](#) (RAP).

The plan adjusts people's payments based on how

much they earn per month. Those who earn \$2,083 or less can pay \$0 a month. Someone can still qualify for lower, more affordable payments if they earn slightly more. The RAP is a great way to save money so students can later make larger payments toward student debt.

Pay more when possible

Making a large payment towards student debt can buy some time before the next payment. Peace of mind comes with knowing a big chunk of the principal amount is paid.

Learn about different types of debt

Canadians can take [up to 15 years](#) to pay off their student loans. However, considering the difference between [good and bad debt](#) can make that time seem less daunting.

Student loans fall under the good debt category, as they're a means of investing in a future career. There is also no interest accumulation in Canada.

Credit cards are a type of bad debt. They charge high interest rates and the possessions people accumulate with credit cards lose value over time. Knowing that student loan debt is "good" can help relieve stress.

Start early

Students don't have to start repaying federal lenders until they've completed their studies. However, that doesn't mean it isn't wise to get a part-time job while in school. Tucking a portion of each paycheque away for repaying loans in the future will lessen the burden, even if it's a small amount.

Assess the budget

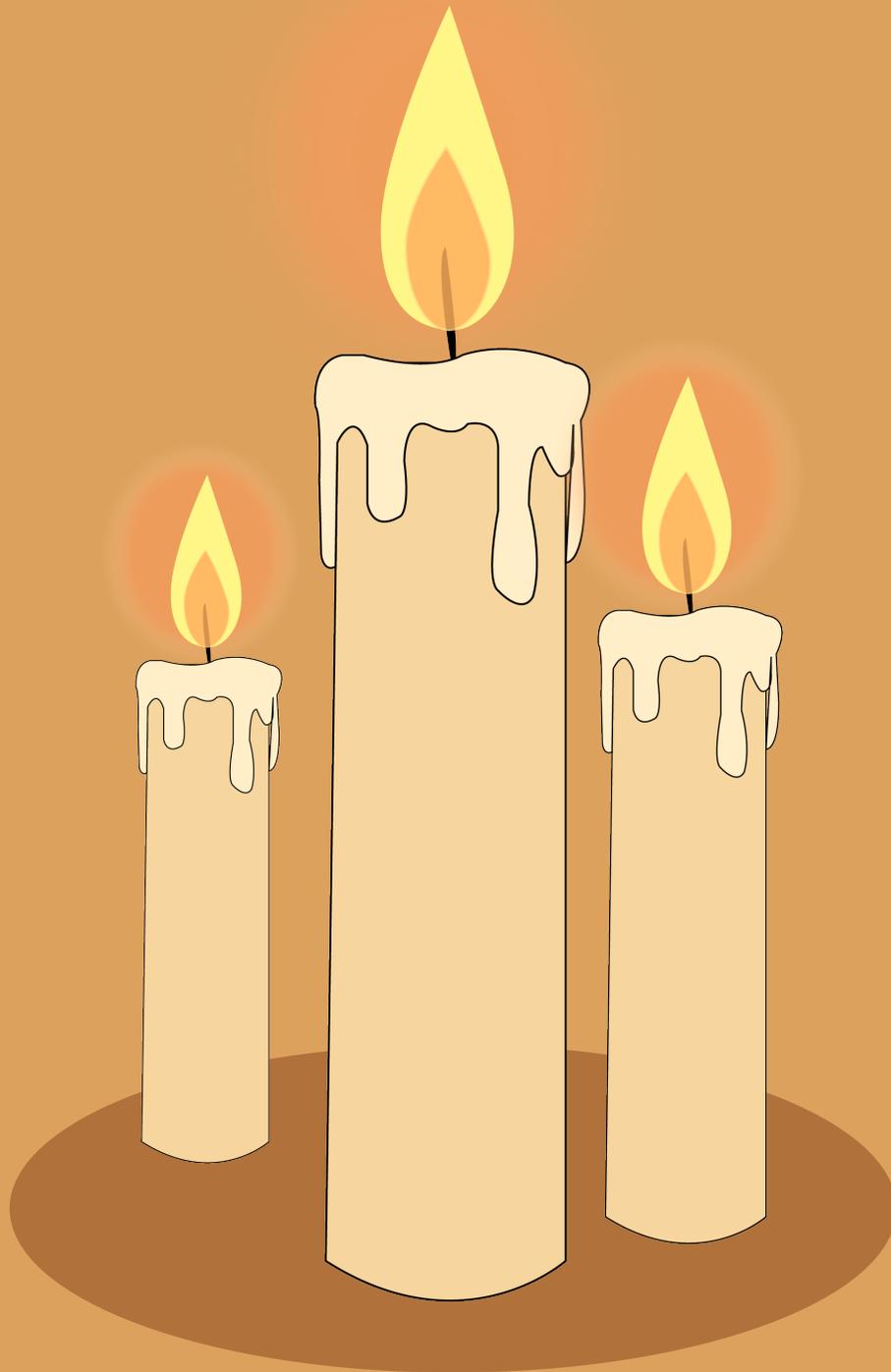
Monthly spending budgets usually leave some room for adjustment. Cutting back on spending and purchasing luxuries when there's extra income can make a big difference towards repaying debt.

[Public debate](#) highlights why federal leaders should forgive student debt in Canada. The government's current stance isn't changing, but hope exists for future reform. With that said, it's important not to rely on this hope or ignore loan debt. ♦

White Whale

Written by DRU GARY

Illustrations by AISHARJA CHOWDHURY



A white whale—I swim in its mouth all year

A darkened room, a maze made of keepsakes
A mauve turtleneck, tight around the shoulders
Cracked, plastic champagne flutes
Your fingers trace my collarbones until they meet in the
middle
A burlap sack race that ends in a tie

My neck snapped and nobody noticed,
I propped it up with a metal rod and a roll of masking
tape,
A makeshift body, broken,
Burnt palms in lace gloves
Cover rock bottom with a flashy rug and maybe they
won't notice.
I was a snake with its tail in its mouth, a cycle too
comfortable to break

Now,
Suspicious peace, a buoy in calm waters

I reevaluate what I hold in my mind, what I hold in my
hands
What I keep in my space
Throw out old birthday cards and letters, sentimentality
an unsuspecting enemy
Purge my bedroom, remove the excess, bare bones

A dam made of twigs
Love leaks in through zigzagged cracks
But there are things I cannot let go,
A fermented peach stuck to the bottom of a basket

Fresh cut flowers in a grey-speckled vase
A zip-up sweater made of soft brown fleece
Reminiscent of the teddy bear I held to my chest when
I slept as a child
I find the familiarity serene

This year, I keep my hands in pockets, recoil from
outside touch
Instead, I practice self-love, wrap my arms around my
waist
Pet my forearms, massage my temples

Cherished companions in tableaux
The end of the night is the end of the beginning of next
year
A blown-out candle means goodbye
A new number to my name,
A symbolic reset
A ribbon pinned to my chest means
My survival is always worth celebrating

