

WELLNESS JOURNEY

**What we do for youth, we do for staff—
creating a mental health support model for
youth workers.**

YESS

youth empowerment & support services



WELCOME TO YESS!


Based in Edmonton, Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS) provides immediate and low-barrier 24/7 shelter, a drop-in resource centre, temporary supportive housing, temporary independent cohort housing, and individualized wrap-around supports for young people aged 15–24.

We work collaboratively within a network of care focused on the prevention of youth homelessness by providing youth with the necessary supports to stabilize their housing, improve their wellbeing, build life skills, connect with community, and avoid re-entry into homelessness.

Currently 100 staff across 5 departments; Programs, Operations, Fund Development, Finance, Executive

In 2021, YESS served approximately 760 young people between the ages of 15 and 25 who had experienced housing instability and trauma. These young people did not choose to experience homelessness; instead, they are fighting to survive their experiences with trauma: abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, violence, discrimination, and more. Living in survival mode comes from trauma in the home, trauma within families, and trauma within their communities. Most often, youth in survival mode need access to resources for basic needs first and have to build up trust that services and agencies are able to help them build their own future in the community. We know from brain development research that healthy connections and relationships are needed to move past trauma and grow into healthier adults.

Process for Wellness at YESS

- 1) Understand this work is necessary**
 - 2) Audit your staff needs, demographics and capacity**
 - 3) Create action plans for hiring onsite supports and creating internal and external tools and resources for staff**
 - 4) Educate and train youth and staff on wellness**
 - 5) Continue to audit as you go!**
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True Transformation Comes from Relationship – a youth's journey



Defining Terms of Wellness

- **Burnout:** physical and emotional exhaustion from holding onto and carrying stress for prolonged periods of time
 - Requires time, space, healing and rejuvenation



Defining Terms of Wellness

- **Compassion Fatigue:** Infinite capacity to be compassionate with other people, limited capacity to be compassionate with ourselves
 - Must physically interrupt the perceived threat in our mind



Defining Terms of Wellness

- **Self-care:** Practicing techniques to interrupt perceived threat
 - Practice involves taking breaks when carrying stress, clearly identifying role capacity and working within these boundaries, asking for what they need for support


Defining Terms of Wellness

- **Safety:** Keeping staff and youth safe across the agency
 - H&S committee involves all departments
 - Reviewing processes, procedures, handbooks, trainings, emergency drills
 - Identifying safety risks, impacts and problem solving as an agency to increase agency safety and individual confidence in responses

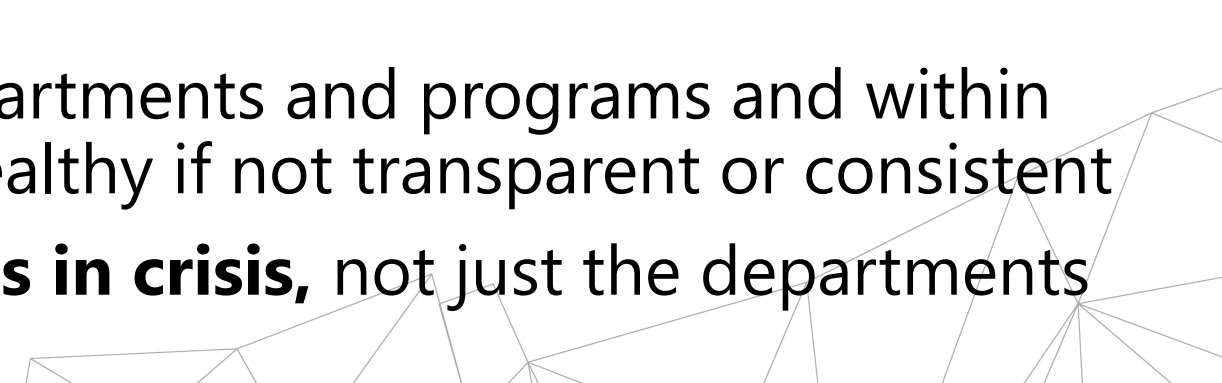
True Transformation Comes from Relationship – a staff's journey



Understanding Staff Dynamics – CRISIS ARISING

- **Trauma from previous employers or prior work placements**
 - **New to the field;** staff can struggle to understand power dynamics, education vs real life experience and lack of experiences
 - Staff with **longevity in field;** potential rigidity in their experience and knowledge
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Understanding Staff Dynamics - Crisis

- **Young demographic**; sometimes within the age range of the youth we serve
 - **Inconsistent** training, understanding of practices and lack of shared language across the field of service
 - **Livable wages and low pay** affecting attraction and retention of high quality staff
 - **Communication** across departments and programs and within power structure can be unhealthy if not transparent or consistent
 - **Supporting all departments in crisis**, not just the departments directly working with youth
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Understanding Staff Dynamics – Healing and Transition

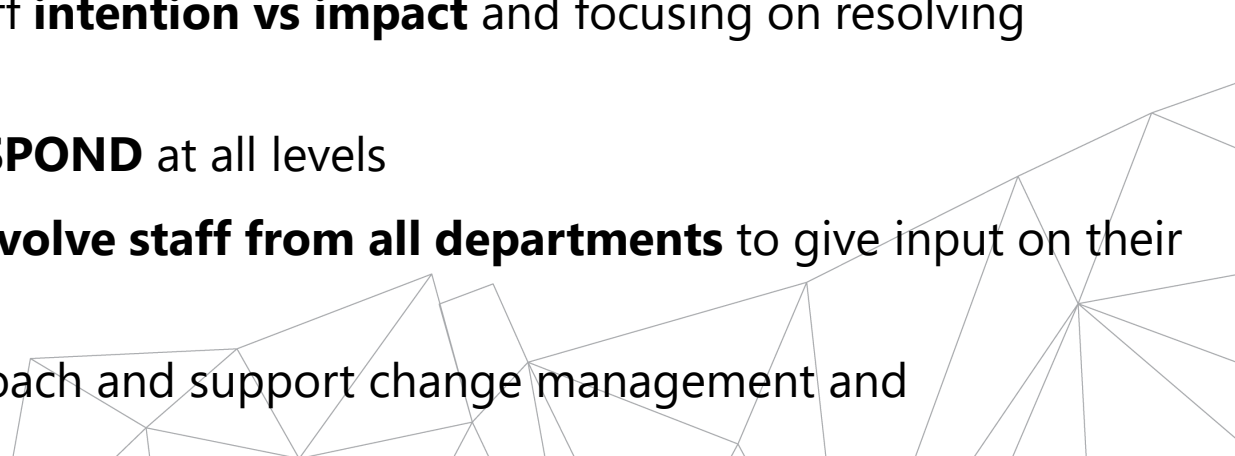
- **Boundaries** are hard for individuals to define and maintain for themselves
- How an agency **debriefs after a crisis** can be varied and create more trauma and hurt
- **Confidence** in their skills and trusting others
- Consistent, predictable and transparent communication across all departments

STAGES OF TRAUMA RECOVERY

- **Stabilization**
- **Remembrance and mourning**
- **Reintegration**



Understanding Staff Dynamics - Belonging

- **Transparent** process for discussion feedback and decision impact
 - **Monthly supervisions** that focus on tasks, duties, feedback model of work and patterns of behaviour in a timely and non-judgemental way
 - Monthly **staff newsletter** with updates from each department provide transparency on work plans
 - Providing opportunities to **provide discussion or decision feedback on process and policy changes**
 - Practicing curiosity on understanding staff **intention vs impact** and focusing on resolving grievances not punishing them
 - Practicing **EXPERIMENT – NOTICE – RESPOND** at all levels
 - H&S committees and emergency drills **involve staff from all departments** to give input on their perspective of safety and consistency.
 - **Collaboration across departments** to coach and support change management and communication
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Wellness In Practice at YESS

- 1:1 individual trauma debriefs; topics include power dynamics, perfectionism, boundaries, overcompensation behaviours, work-life stressors, saviour complex, developing self trust
- Basecamp internal area dedicated to staff wellness
- Group campfire for weekly topic discussions
- Daily journaling or discussion topics for teams or individuals
- Resources to books, therapists, services
- Statements from Wellness Practitioner showing their perspective on topics within agency, within community of practice and within social environment
- Highlighted social themes and normalizing responses to social events
- Team SWOT completed for all departments – to broaden the approach
- Individual team needs were specifically tailored to and not just blanket to crisis or youth focus
- After-crisis debriefs for individuals, teams and vicarious staff participating in crisis drills
- Training and certification in Boundaries, Trauma Informed Care, Psychoeducation, Suicide Assist, Mental Health, Addictions, What is Therapy and more
- Ongoing staff survey reviews for continuous feedback across all departments

Effects of New Focus

- Staff are more constructive on annual staff survey, understanding what it is truly time for in their experience at YESS
- Reduced vicarious trauma and increased usage of time off, benefits and communication around needs
- Resiliency of staff to return to high performance levels after a crisis; understanding their role in the crisis, the impact and how to move through any grief or loss or trauma responses
- Training and practice results in staff understanding the difference between crisis mode and trauma response
- Better performance management; catching patterns of behaviour early and involving individuals in their own performance growth and analysis
- Thorough onboarding and orientation for new staff to be welcomed and engaged with their teams and roles and agency
- Staff mindfulness and self-awareness increased
- Measure staff priority and pattern changes over monthly supervisions, addressing any barriers or performance issues in a timely manner with documentation of efforts to support, provide tools and be clear and transparent on trajectory

**Help yourself, help others, heal the
community!**

**Transitioning through trauma is a wellness
journey we are all passionate about!**

