



OCTOBER 2020

# YESS NEWSLETTER

## MESSAGE FROM MARGO



Hello everyone and happy October! October is Mental Health Awareness Month and holds World Mental Health Day. With the Winter months and more potential isolation ahead of us, the mental health of our staff and young people is our biggest priority. The last 6 months have been incredibly stressful and lonely. With

elevated levels of cortisol in our bodies and less ability to connect deeply with our friends, family, and coworkers, we can feel fragile, less able to cope. This month we will be highlighting some of the work that is done at YESS to support mental health, some of the learnings we have had around trauma and brain development and resiliency and some tips and recipes to support your own mental health practice at home.

– Margo

## WHAT IS TRAUMA AND HOW DO WE HEAL?

*By Jessica Day, Director of Program Innovation, from January 2019*



Working in the field of trauma support is hard; my friends and family are often confused about what I do and what trauma is. I am sure you are asking the same question: what exactly is trauma and how can YESS actually help youth heal?

To answer this question, I ask you to close your eyes and imagine standing in your living room, gazing out your living room window into your community. Imagine the safety and security you feel around being in your own home, in the neighbourhood you have come to love and enjoy. Imagine that a person approaches your window—this person could be a friend, family member, a neighbour, a teacher, or a complete stranger. Now imagine that this person breaks your living room window! It could be that they are breaking into your house to steal something, or they could be trying to scare you, or they could just be breaking the window for their own fun. Either way, your window is now broken, your floor is covered in glass and you are no longer protected from the elements outside (noise, insects, animals, weather, etc). We both know that the window breaking wasn't your fault. It scared you and left a mess on the floor and has left you exposed and vulnerable, and none of this was your fault.

You have a choice now: you can avoid cleaning up the glass and replacing the window because this wasn't your fault or you can use the tools in your house to sweep up the glass and find a way to replace the window. If the glass is not cleaned up, you will get hurt walking around and existing in your house. If your family and friends come over, they could get hurt by the glass as well. Your house will start to deteriorate because of the weather coming in and you will not feel safe or protected. If you clean up the glass, you may need to borrow a broom or get help vacuuming up the pieces. You may need

to bring in an expert to help you replace the window. And you can never guarantee that someone won't break the window again. But at least you'll know who to call, what tools you need, and which experts can be brought in to replace the window again. It wasn't your fault the window broke, but it is your responsibility to clean up and repair your safety, security, and home.

This is the trauma our youth face daily. It is not their fault, but they are left with the responsibility to heal, integrate into the community, and successfully sustain their independence. When the youth experience their trauma, their brains and emotions are not developed enough to know what tools, what experts, and what next steps to heal look like. They are frozen in an emotional survival mode that they use to protect themselves from the confusion, the hurt, and their lack of safety.

Here at YESS, and within every youth-serving agency, we work to help the youth feel that safety to begin to understand their trauma. As they do, we can help them access healthy tools and experts to begin to rebuild relationships and a sense of safety. When youth are given the time and support to transition through their trauma, they are able to see success and growth within themselves and understand their responsibilities and possibilities. With these successes, youth are able to heal and the cycle of support will continue within themselves, their new neighbourhoods, and eventually within our city as a whole.

As a community member, I ask that you take the time to really process what trauma means and how it affects youth, families, and communities. We cannot do this work alone—it takes a village to raise a child and it takes a community to heal from trauma. You can help. Your time, your donations, and your voice can all be tools our youth can use to help clean up their home and rebuild a better future.

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## INTERVIEW WITH YESS VOLUNTEER PETER LI

Prior to the pandemic, Peter volunteered in our Nexus Overnight Shelter. Though volunteering looks a little different these days, we wanted to catch up with Peter and talk about his focus on mental health.

### Tell us a bit about yourself!

I was born and raised in Edmonton. After high school I went to the U of A for Engineering. After the first semester I decided drop out and apply to NAIT for Instrumentation Engineering.

Then after the first year of NAIT I dropped out again to work for a financial education company. I realized school wasn't for me.

Through that company, I gained confidence in becoming an entrepreneur. So I started a CrossFit gym with a good friend of mine and ran that business for 4 years. Then I started working in marketing and now I have my own marketing agency where I help small businesses increase their sales.

### How did you come to volunteer at YESS?

I was a point in my life where a lot of pieces had clicked into place for me. I felt very fortunate to have the resources and time at my disposal. I also knew that there were many people who were in a less fortunate situation than me, so I felt drawn to give back and serve.

I chose YESS because I feel strongly that youth in the age range of 15-21 are at a fork in the road. Especially those who are homeless with no real support system or family to take care of them.

I made a lot of mistakes in my late teens and early 20s and I've also learned a lot of information that I feel would be helpful for youth in this age group. I've also had many mentors and friends who were 5-10 years older than me. I feel having these people in my life helped shaped the direction of my life in a positive way.

So if I can share some of my experience and knowledge with these youth, hopefully they can choose a more positive path instead of continuing on a downward spiral.

### In what capacity do you volunteer at YESS?

Before COVID, I was going into the Nexus shelter two nights a week. I would run book club sessions and meditation sessions for those who were interested.

### What benefits do you see from reading and meditation as mental health practices?

With reading, I think of it like this... Someone spends a huge portion of their life (10, 20, 30 years...?) studying a subject. Then spends

another few years taking all that knowledge and distilling it into a book that I can read in a week or so. To me, I feel like I'm gaining time because I'm able to leverage someone else's time to learn a subject or topic that interests me. There's also a saying I heard that goes "the more you learn, the more you earn," I've seen this play out in my life which is why I'm such an advocate of reading. Plus, by reading I'm also able to expand my vocabulary and give my brain a workout in order to create new neural pathways. It's like going to the gym, but for our brain.

Now when it comes to meditation... In this day and age there are so many external elements trying to steal our attention. Attention spans these days are shrinking more and more which is kind of scary. The ability for someone to focus seems like a lost art nowadays. That's one of the reasons why I meditate.

What happens if you don't take out the garbage from your home and you leave it piling up for weeks or months? The same needs to happen for our mind. There's so much clutter and noise that I feel it's important to take the time to sit quietly and "take out the garbage" within our own mind. Give my mind room to come up with new solutions for problems, clear the mental clutter, think clearly, better focus. Less "chasing" and more "being". Connect back to who we truly are instead of what society tells us we should be.

### What is one thing you wish the community knew about YESS youth?

There are many smart and savvy youth at YESS. But unfortunately, due to their circumstances, they've had to grow up in pretty harsh and abusive environments. Often I think to myself, "if I went through what they went through, I'd be in the same position...."

Many of us are fortunate enough to grow up in a "normal" environment, whereas a lot of these youth didn't have that luxury. Before you judge someone based on their looks, status, age, sexual orientation, colour, etc., first put yourself in their shoes and try to feel the pain they went through that brought them to their current situation.

We are not separate, we are all connected... So if one part of the whole is suffering, then we're all suffering.



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## BROWN BUTTER SALTED CARAMEL SAUCE

with YESS Chef Tiffany



Take some special time for yourself to make this homemade caramel sauce with YESS Chef Tiffany! It's a perfect topping for apples slices and berries, or ice cream and pastry!

**Follow along with Tiffany in the video! >**



# BENT ARROW TRADITIONAL HEALING SOCIETY

It takes all of us working together to create spaces where we can all heal together and thrive together. We talked to Sherry Fowler, Community Engagement Coordinator at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, about how they create these spaces for the community.

## Tell us about your organization.

Bent Arrow is committed to building on the strengths of Indigenous children, youth and families to enable them to walk proudly in two worlds both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous world.

Although Bent Arrow's programs have Indigenous base to them, we welcome people of all races and backgrounds.

Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society has been serving Indigenous children, youth, and families in Edmonton and area since 1994.

The founders believed strongly that keeping culture at the centre was crucial and that this important work was best done in partnership.

Bent Arrow provides programming and services for all ages from pre-natal to seniors ensuring that we look at all programming to ensure we are providing a holistic perspective encompassing the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical wellbeing of all participants.

## How does your organization bring focus to mental health?

When looking at an individual's mental health it is done from a holistic standpoint ensuring we look at the whole person and what needs are not being met. A person who is struggling in one area may be struggling in all. Mental health supports may include but are not limited to: connection to community and culture through phone calls, video chats, social distance meetings, or meeting face-to-face (in a safe way) with an Elder.

We also offer onsite therapy/counselling sessions for participants of the programs offered at Bent Arrow.

## What is one thing you would like the community to know about young people and mental health?

When we look at mental health just remember you are never alone. Many people struggle in silence, don't be one of them. There are people out there who can help; you just have to let them. You are stronger than you think and braver than most, keep on being strong and talk to someone.



# MEET DON & ELAINE GEAKE

Don and Elaine Geake have been giving to YESS annually for over 20 years, but their story with YESS begins long before that. Get to know these incredible members of our community and how they have taken action on their lifelong beliefs to help those who need it.

*I [was born] two days prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Even though growing up during WWII and early post-war time wasn't always easy for our family, my three brothers and I were made aware of the need to help others less fortunate. This philosophy is one that my wife Elaine and I passed on to our children who have continued this practice in both career choices and daily life.*

*I focused my high school courses on a career in engineering, but in Grade 12 I felt an urge toward a "helping" occupation. I enrolled in education instead and worked with the Edmonton Public Schools for 34 years as both teacher and principal.*

*My first contact with YESS came in the mid-1980's when I was principal at Mill Creek Elementary School. At Christmas, the school community would donate [gifts] of non-perishable food items which were given to YESS.*

*As an educator, I recognized the importance of providing children with a sound base in a safe and encouraging environment for a*

*happy and fulfilling life. In addition to meeting their basic needs for food and shelter, it is also necessary for mental and emotional support.*

*My wife and I have continued to contribute to YESS because it plays an important role in supporting youth in crisis with not only the necessities of life, but also in achieving mental and emotional stability.*

*A big thank you to the staff at YESS for their dedication in providing their clients with hope, healing and safety as well as educational and occupational opportunities.*

*By Don Geake*

Don's work with students demonstrates the importance of engaging young people in their community. YESS values working with schools to empower students to support their community and practice leadership. We continue to help with this in the online teaching and virtual worlds, as well as in-person.

If your school is interested in learning more about YESS and our work, please contact us at [giving@yess.org](mailto:giving@yess.org) or call **780.468.7070**.

## YESS is a proud partner of the United Way!

Do Local Good at: [myunitedway.ca](http://myunitedway.ca)

