



FEBRUARY 2021

YESS NEWSLETTER

MESSAGE FROM MARGO



We need the most love when we are being our most unlovable.

Whether you are a fan of Erma Bombeck, or TV's Lucifer Morningstar, this quote never loses its impact, in my opinion.

This February, our focus is **empathy and understanding**—the response needed most when we see others (*and ourselves*) displaying dysregulated, problematic, risky, or even disrespectful behaviour. If we can remember that hurt people *hurt people*, that substance use is *comfort-seeking and escape* from often very adverse experiences, and that desperation, crisis, and lack of control in one's situation can lead to decisions based out of fear and survival, we can focus more on root cause and less on symptoms.

We talk a lot in our sector, in our government, and in our community, about prevention. By focusing on (and in many cases even condemning) the symptoms of community breakdown, poverty, and adverse experiences we *prevent* prevention. Life is very hard for young adults facing crises and home instability—life is very hard for all of us at the moment. What we need now, more than ever, is **empathy and understanding—for ourselves and for each other**. We are stronger together and we heal...together.

I hope you enjoy this month's newsletter content, where we feature YESS navigators, Natalie and Dupe, our volunteers from Dutch Delicious, share the special impact of in memoriam gifts, and highlight the incredible work done at the Africa Centre and Alberta Black Therapists Network Counselling Program.

– Margo

MEET THE NAVIGATORS!

Within YESS Programs is an incredible team we refer to as our navigators. As navigators, Natalie Morgan and Dupe Adedeji help connect youth and families to resources within YESS and our community. Get to know Natalie and Dupe and why they are so passionate about their work with youth!

Tell us a bit about yourselves!

Natalie Morgan: I have been in my role with YESS for almost four years, but I have been in the community service field for over 13 years, having worked under the umbrella of Homeward Trust with affiliated agencies such as Capital Region Housing, Bill Reese YMCA, and now YESS. My educational background is within radio broadcasting. I always tell people this field of work found me and I am happy it did.

I remained with the YMCA until I got pregnant with my son and took some years to be a stay-at-home mom until I decided to re-enter the social services field in 2017 with YESS. The rest is history!

Dupe Adedeji: I studied Psychology at the University of Guelph and graduated at the end of 2014. I moved to Edmonton in early 2015 when I became employed at YESS. It was my first professional work experience and I was excited to work in the human services field and apply some of my educational background to my job. I started my role as a resource centre staff and then became a client navigator until I left to work at another agency in 2017. I returned in 2019 when the position of a second client navigator opened up at YESS!

Describe the role of "navigator" and how this work is part of walking beside youth on their journeys towards healing and appropriate community integration.

NM: In this role, I speak with youth and parents/guardians about how YESS can support them all, whether it be shelter at the Nexus Overnight Shelter, group home placement, education, addiction and mental health referral supports, employment referral to our **Youth Education and Employment Program**, or family reunification.

DA: As a navigator, we support youth by empowering them to make the best decisions for themselves. We often walk alongside youth on their journeys from start to finish. This can be in the form of us providing resources in order for the youth to make the best-informed decision, calling or texting to check in on where they're at with their goal plan, driving them to get identification, coaching them prior to speaking with a potential landlord, or supporting them by accompanying them to meetings that they're anxious to have.

NM: In this role we walk alongside them through parts of their lives which can be triggering and painful to the youth, but we remind them of how strong they are and how far they have come on their

own. We take no credit in how far a youth has come because it is their own endurance, motivation, and inner strength which allows them to reach their goal.

DA: As a majority of our youth don't have dependable supports in their personal lives, we as navigators often fill in that gap and gradually step back as they become more confident in their journey towards independence and community integration.

NM: I say we are their coach and cheerleader all in one, cheering for them and reminding them to refocus when they get off course. I feel that knowing we won't give up on them, even when they do, is a key component to walking along side our youth and integrating them back into the community.

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

DA: One thing I wish the community knew about YESS youth is that they can be very resilient. Despite major challenges faced by our youth specifically with homelessness, they are still able to find and access resources that would meet their needs. Some of our youth are homeless and sleep at the shelter, but still find ways to continue schooling because education is important to them, or still make it in to work and important meetings. I am glad to be able to support

youth on their journeys to success despite the difficult realities they face.

NM: One thing I wish the community knew about our youth is how amazing they are as young people and how, for the most part, they are just like any typical teenager. They are trying to figure out who they are, what they want, what their purpose in life is. The only difference is they do it with no family, regular hugs, or positive words of affirmation. They are blindly navigating this crazy world and they are doing it wonderfully. I am proud of them every day.



Natalie Morgan



Dupe Adedeji

BREAKING BARRIERS IN MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

In January, **Africa Centre** and **The Alberta Black Therapist Network** launched their new counselling program! This program not only provides free counselling services, but is also part of breaking down barriers and stigma that still surround accessing mental health supports.

We talked to Noreen Sibanda, Executive Director of The Alberta Black Therapist Network, about this new program and its impact on the community.

Tell us about the new counselling program in collaboration with The Africa Centre.

The clinic is funded by the United Way and a collaboration between Africa Centre and The Alberta Black Therapist Network (ABTN). We are proud to offer free counselling support to the African descent community through licensed therapists who have a cultural understanding and offer trauma and healing centered approaches. Our services provide formal, 50-minute, one-to-one counselling sessions in the form of short-term intervention, utilizing solution-focused therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy. The services are available over a secure video platform and can be accessed as an individual, group, or couple. We also had secured a donation from Ikea to furnish an office space that we look forward to utilizing when restrictions are lifted.

Why is now an important time for this resource to be available?

We have seen a rise in the need for mental health resources because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and now more than ever people need professional support. Unfortunately, despite this desperate need, the barriers to



Photo courtesy of Noreen Sibanda

accessing support (cost, long waiting times, stigma), still exist. This service allows people who are struggling with their mental health to connect and not have to worry about costs, as most people cannot afford to access therapeutic support. It allows our community to access services from the organizations that they already know, at no cost and from individuals that share similar lived experiences.

What is something you wish the community knew about youth mental health?

I believe mental health needs to be a part of our overall wellness. Supports services need to include healing, otherwise we are merely treating the symptoms which leads to an overuse of services.

AFRICA CENTRE
AFRICA CENTRE'S MENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT PRESENTS
COUNSELLING PROGRAM
FREE COUNSELLING SESSIONS PROVIDED BY ALBERTA BLACK THERAPISTS NETWORK
A safe space for the African descent community to receive professional support. Counselling includes but is not limited to: Individual, Family, Couple, Youth.
Book your session at: www.africacentre.ca/mentalhealth

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: DUTCH DELICIOUS

The team from Dutch Delicious started volunteering with us in the summer 2019. About once a month they would lend their hands to helping in the kitchen or doing some much-needed outdoor work at our buildings. For their annual “For the Love of Opa” event in 2019, Dutch Delicious selected YESS as their charity of choice, donating 50% of the event day’s sales which came to over \$3000.

When the pandemic interrupted their volunteering schedule, the Dutch Delicious team was still eager to help with outdoor work in the summer, following all necessary health protocols.

“I am just so proud of all the work and service to our community that Siebe and his staff have done for YESS,” says Volunteer Programs Officer, Violet Malbeuf. “I feel even though they are a small group they really achieved so much and always exceeded my expectations, so willing to help.”

Tell us about your organization and how you came to volunteer at YESS.

My first interaction with YESS was at the Ice on Whyte festival. Beside the booth we had as bakery was a coffee stand that was run by volunteers of YESS. A kind older gentleman helped to serve coffee and we chatted regularly, and he even ended up coming to the bakery as a regular customer. During this time we were working on the branding of our company and chose the line “Nourishing Community.” We thought it fitting to have this line connected to our company and the tasks we perform on a daily basis. One leader at the bakery said rightly one day: “Why don’t we really show our true colors and actually go out into the community to help out?” It was then that we met up with our friend and asked for contact details from YESS.

Why did you choose to volunteer at YESS and how do you see your impact as a volunteer?

Although we started because of our connection through a customer, we are blessed to make a difference for YESS as an organization as a whole. Originally we signed up with the kitchen to be helpful in the food area, since we do food as well. Learning that our tasks are not about us but ultimately about the youth you serve, we decided to be blessed as long as we could do anything to minimize the wish list of the organization as a whole. So painting railings, pulling weeds, shoveling snow all helps to have your staff take better care of the youth. In this way we see the youth better served because we could take care of the little things for you.

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

We as a company really wish that people knew more about the trauma of these youth. With that we can see how much good the organization does as a whole to heal, nourish, and prevent the youth from pain points and danger.



*Dutch Delicious team volunteering at our Whyte Ave building.
Photo from September 2019*

THE POWERFUL IMPACT OF MEMORIAL GIVING

Reflecting on our adolescence invariably evokes intense emotions and memories for each of us. While we remember the positive influences and protective supports that helped us navigate our adolescence, we also acknowledge how difficult it must be to navigate adolescence without these influences and supports.



Bernedette Butler

Bernedette Butler is proud to share some thoughts both as a caring professional and a grateful, loving daughter. Bernedette knows that adolescents experience positive change when passionate donors honour and emulate the kindness, love, and grounding that helped shape their own lives.

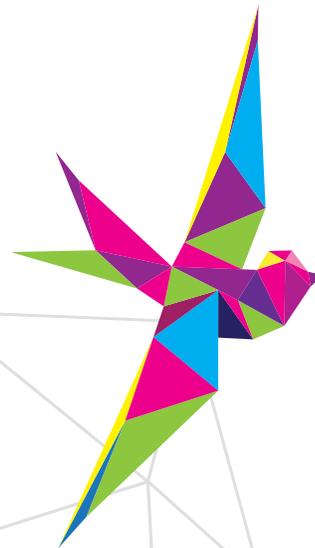
I am co-owner of Lokken College which works closely with government agencies to support people over 18 years old who experience barriers to employment. Many of our students' employment barriers were caused by struggles during their youth. These struggles often cost them opportunities that others take for granted. I choose to support YESS because it provides youth who experience these challenges a hope for a better tomorrow. YESS builds resilience in traumatized youth by providing shelter and necessary individual and community supports. Resilient youth grow into adults who are better able to use their skills and strengths to meet the challenges and expectations of their future.

Today, when COVID-19 creates uncertainty for everyone, we must remember that the youth who rely on YESS's services need us more than ever to provide support, caring, and hope. This is why I decided to give my support in memory of my mother. There are many ways to remember those we lost, but a donation to YESS best reflected my mother's love for children and her hope for a bright future for us all. YESS, like my mother, understands that, by helping youth make that difficult transition from childhood to adulthood, we are creating a better future for them and our communities. We are giving them hope, offering support and showing that we care.

In memoriam or "in memory" donations give profound meaning to the person and anniversary that you would like to honor, while making an important difference in a child's life. We in turn thank and pay tribute to your generosity by ensuring that your gift helps vulnerable youth in our community and province every day.

The gift that you make today – no matter how big or how small – will help YESS sustain, strengthen and grow our programs as we provide life-changing supports in real time to youth suffering trauma and experiencing homelessness in Edmonton.

Thank you for your thoughtfulness and generosity by choosing to support the work of YESS through In Memory Gifts. To make a donation in memory or in honor of someone special, or to celebrate an important occasion, visit [YESS.org/donate](https://www.yess.org/donate) or contact our Development Office at 780-468-7070. We'd be delighted to speak with you.



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