

Letter 8: YRT2_Y4.F.23

Dear Mental Health Professionals,

My purposes of writing to you is to inform you of factors that are important to consider when supporting and working with children and youth to support their mental health and wellbeing. Identifying as a youth myself, my approach to this question will be based on personal experiences within the system and experiences shared by my peers in what they consider significant in meeting their mental health needs. Working with and for youth entails giving youth voices significance when considering how to best service them. Involving youth in this process ensures efficiency and success in the delivery of the service and allows youth to feel empowered knowing they hold autonomy in how they wish to be treated. Working collaboratively in this capacity is beneficial for all parties involved so I hope that you give this letter (and similar initiatives) the consideration it deserves.

Professionals are widely considered experts in their fields with years of formal academic studies and field work under their belt ensuring competency in their line of work. The age group youth are characterized under are vulnerable and transformative life years. Life years where youth are coming of age, learning values and priorities, unlearning societal normative behaviours that no longer serve them, and healing through traumas of the past. This change requires patience and compassion from oneself but also others. When professionals fail to recognize youth's development in their personal journey and expect them to carry knowledge of the world they are still navigating through, it makes youth feel unaccepted as they are and creates sentiments of unworthiness and inadequacy. An acknowledgement of the unique challenges youth face today and patience in helping them grow forms trust between professionals and youth, and equips youth with the confidence needed to continue on their journey of self development and discovery. Acceptance and patience in professional treatment can be strengthened by more formal training in youth (biological and social) development, current world trends, and intense sensitivity training.

Professionals are also inadequately skilled in cultural diversity. Lack of cross-cultural knowledge and how that impacts the numerous diverse identities youth hold creates a space for misunderstanding and non-impactful service delivery. This gap in professional training could be rectified by a more thorough academic focus on cultural identity as relating to nationality, ethnicity, and religion. The understanding that youth come from versatile backgrounds that inform their identities and experiences, and knowledge of these diverse cultures allows professionals to be more equipped to offer meaningful services and youth to feel fulfilled in the services they receive.

Lack of collaboration across care sectors in offering supplemental care is another area where the service sector fails youth. When newly navigating professional services, youth are often unaware of all the services available to them. Further, locating one service such as counselling often appears to adequately fulfill their care needs. Such views prevent youth from seeking supplemental services that they could benefit from outside of

counselling. When professionals fail to collaborate on a systems level and youth are unaware of the supplemental services that exist for them, youth are left unsupported outside the one service they have sought out themselves (counselling). By collaborating more actively on a systems level, youth can be referred to supplemental services (e.g., psychiatrists, social services, community groups) to fill their unmet needs in counselling. Having this collaboration of care across services creates a balance of responsibility in care and ensures that youth are not falling through the gaps in one system as they have a community of support services at their dispense.

Sincerely,