

It's your journey, it's your way? with newly-rebranded YSSN



Changing a single letter doesn't seem like the most drastic of moves, but, for the Aurora-based Your Support Services Network, it's a game-changer.

Your Support Services Network is a hub for developmental, mental health, and children's services that has been lending the community a hand as 'York Support Services Network' for more than 40 years. Its rebrand, replacing 'York' with 'Your' reflects the significant growth YSSN has seen over the last four decades, expanding well beyond York Region to South Simcoe, Peterborough, and beyond.

'The pandemic, like with so many others, made us look at our priorities and values,' explains YSSN Executive Director Kimberly Thorn. 'We recognized that maybe our name wasn't really reflective of who we were, so we took that to our staff, our board, people we supported, and it was really the people we supported in the past who gave us some really great insight.'

'They talked about the fact they absolutely viewed us as a network and that they felt very supported by us when they came to our door. We recognized that, you know what, maybe there isn't anything necessarily wrong with our name but as we talked it became abundantly clear to us that everyone came to us with a unique story and a unique journey. It really is about the people we support. That's why we're here, that's what brings our staff together. That is really the underlying foundation of everything that we do. It became clear to us that the 'Y' we were there was 'You.' It was about each individual person who came to us looking for support.'

The shift from 'York' to 'Your' was a natural progression, she added, to 'reaffirm our commitment to people when they come to us, they are getting supports that help them with the unique circumstances, that they have a unique journey.'

Going hand in hand with the YSSN rebrand was the development of a new Strategic Plan to guide the organization forward. Thorn says they wanted to think about 'who we were and also where we were going.'

Everything they do, she says, is based on the people they support and there was an 'obligation' on the part of the YSSN to 'really try to affect systems change on their behalf' as people were coming to them with 'unmet' needs, some of which were due to gaps in the system.

'One of the things we have committed to is being a transformational leader from a systems perspective; we want to collaborate with our partners to really look at how do we create systems change for people so that their needs are being met,' says Thorn. 'We also wanted to make sure that we connect people and help people navigate the service system. As the system changes, people sometimes need assistance in navigating those pathways, so we really want to ensure they're streamlined for people and that we can guide them along that journey as they seek services.'

'The other thing that we're committed to is really wanting to be more nimble and innovative. Times are changing and people's needs

are changing and we serve across the lifespan ? children to seniors ? and people have different needs and we want to meet them where they're at and look at where we can be innovative so we are meeting people's needs as best we can. We are a human service agency and people do the work with people. We also wanted to commit to our staff to make sure they were thriving and feeling empowered in the work that they do. Our commitment when we talk about 'You' it is about the people we support but it is also about the people doing the work and making sure they feel well-supported to do the extraordinary work that they do today.?

In recent years, service changes seen by the YSSN include becoming an intake for adults with developmental disabilities, serving York Region, Simcoe County, Durham Region, Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes, Peterborough, and Northumberland.

?They are seeking services where services are available. We really committed ourselves to making sure we're staying on top of changes in services so people are aware of anything new that may be beneficial to them, gathering that information and feeding it back to service agencies in those areas so they can develop services to meet the needs of people in their respective communities.

?From a mental health perspective, we serve South Simcoe as well. We have a crisis line that, no surprise, has seen a huge increase in the number of people calling us, particularly over the pandemic, and that hasn't changed. As much as the pandemic feels like it is over, people are still really seeking crisis support for a variety of reasons.?

They also recognize that people often need a break from their situations and recently made the decision to close their previous model of providing crisis beds from their centralized location in Newmarket, towards more targeted locations, particularly in South Simcoe ?so people in those communities could have the choice of staying in their community if they needed a break from their current situation, or they could come to York Region, again to provide people with choice and opportunity as we started to experience that increased need for crisis services.?

?We want to look at addressing unmet needs,? Thorn says. ?We know housing is an unmet need for people. We know that people accessing community services in lieu of hospital services? we have the mechanisms to track that. We want to see people directed to the right service at the right time, so throughout our partnerships we have police partnerships redirecting people away potentially from justice services to community services, reducing the risk of homelessness for people and having connections to supports and services in their communities [because] connections lead to people feeling like they matter.

?Having a meaningful life is something that grounds people, helps them feel that connection to community and knowing there are people out there who care about them is so integral to people's health and mental wellbeing. Can we create simplified pathways for people so it is easier for them to find services and they don't feel lost in the system? Can we create services that are responsive to people as needs change so that it isn't leading to a crisis situation, but it being more proactive and preventative?

?We encourage people to continue to reach out as they need support and certainly we want people to understand that while we may have changed our name slightly we're here to support them as best we can and we hope people feel they can still reach out to us. Our name may have changed a little bit, it does not change the services we offer.?

For more on Your Support Services Network and the resources they provide, visit yssn.ca.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter