

## New partnership brings Indigenous practices to mental health programs



A new partnership between Aurora-based Your Support Services Network (YSSN) and Anishnabeg Outreach (AO) is set to bring Indigenous knowledge and approaches to local mental healthcare services.

The pilot partnership was announced at YSSN's Edward Street headquarters on Friday, becoming the first organization in York Region to partner with AO on 'AO Nest', a self-guided system that offers 'culturally appropriate support for Indigenous peoples while offering valuable skills and resources to everyone in our community,' according to YSSN Executive Director Kimberly Thorn.

'Today marks the beginning of a collaboration that will not only enhance our understanding of different approaches to support mental health, but will also elevate Indigenous expertise and leadership in this area of our service delivery,' said Thorn at Friday's launch. 'We recognize that mental health is deeply interconnected with culture, tradition and community. Indigenous communities have long been stewards of wisdom and resilience. This expertise, shaped by generations of lived experience and cultural heritage is invaluable. We're committed to listening, learning, and working together alongside Stephen (Stephen Jackson, CEO of Anishnabeg Outreach) and our other Anishnabeg Outreach colleagues on AO Nest to augment our mental health services.'

'By integrating Indigenous knowledge and practices, we can create holistic approaches that truly resonate with those we serve, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. As we move forward, let's celebrate that this partnership is built on mutual respect and trust. Together we can address the mental health challenges faced by our communities, dismantle stigma and promote healing that acknowledges Indigenous ways of knowing.'

'Open hearts and minds ready to make a lasting impact.'

Anishnabeg Outreach provides Indigenous people with access to culturally appropriate services and strives to support individuals with direction and assistance to overcome barriers, including cultural training, employment supports, tutoring and healing. AO Nest is a self-guided software system that people can use on their own, with support, or in a group. It helps people set personal goals it also provides the tools to begin working on goals. Stronger mental and emotional health gives people the confidence and courage to move forward in their lives.

'Our collaboration with YSSN extends beyond the AO Nest pilot,' said Jackson. 'It represents a model for how partnerships can contribute to Reconciliation and address complex issues like homelessness, addiction and suicide.'

Just prior to the launch, Jackson noted, 'Without healing there will never be reconciliation.'

?We built a tool that is literally self-directed ? people can solve their own problems. Part of our philosophy is you can't help someone heal until you yourself are healed.?

As part of the new partnership, Friday's announcement also included a rededication ? of YSSN's largest meeting room with the name ?Giigdoowgamig,? which means ?meeting place? in Anishinaabemowin.

Attending the event was Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leah Taylor Roy, who hailed the partnership between AO and YSSN as a step in the right direction.

?What I realize more and more as I work in government is we can provide funding, we can provide leadership, but the work that is being done on the ground by organizations such as yours is so encouraging ? to see the collaboration between groups working together to address the needs of our youth in a culturally appropriate way, in a way that addresses the needs of everyone.?

For more information about Your Support Services Network and the important work they do, visit [yssn.ca](http://yssn.ca).

**By Brock Weir**