

Up Your Life guide helps residents navigate their way through life?

COVID-19 has changed our lives in many ways. People are experiencing isolation, anxiety, depression and loneliness, and all manner of challenges that have only been exacerbated by the present circumstances.

Many individuals don't know where to turn, but York Support Services Network (YSSN) is stepping up to the plate to help residents of York Region, as well as South Simcoe, navigate through such challenges as food insecurity, shelter and housing support, and sourcing clothing and furniture through Up Your Life.

Up Your Life is a recently revised and refreshed guide that compiles more than 400 community resource listings, tips, personal stories of struggle and resilience to help residents in need.

The Up Your Life Guide, previously known as York Region on a Limited Budget, was originally inspired by a group of individuals who wondered how they could eat and live better, but do so inexpensively. First published in 1997, it is a guide that has evolved with the times.

A lot of people are experiencing challenges around isolation, anxiety, depression and loneliness, says Jumol Royes of YSSN. All these mental health issues are really being exacerbated because of the virus and the measures being put in place to help stop the spread. We have seen [the York Region lockdown] as a little bit of a blessing in disguise in that we hope this guide will be a gift to the community offering community resources and listings that will help them cope not just through lockdown and through COVID, but through any challenges they might encounter on their life's journey.

We have been working very hard and diligently behind the scenes to update the guide and make sure all of the listings are up to date in terms of services that have changed because of COVID. We really wanted to make sure we're getting it out to the community and that it got into the hands of people who need it most in these vulnerable communities.

Due to the global pandemic, many local services and community agencies have shifted their programs and offerings from in-person delivery to virtual and online platforms. These pivots are reflected in the updated guide, as are new icons to help readers navigate which programs are still operating in person versus through a screen.

We work in tandem and in partnership with service providers, as well as a peer committee of people with lived experience with mental health and addictions to vet and approve all the resources that are listed in the guide, says Royes. We added some new sections focused on youth, newcomers, people who are survivors of abuse, new mothers, seniors, LGBTQ people, First Nations Communities those are sections we were hearing from the community that additional resources were needed to address those specific communities and areas, so we were able to add those to the guide.

The Up Your Life Guide is now available to order from UpHub.ca free of charge and both printed and digital forms.

Wherever you are on the journey, whatever you're going through, you can pick up this guide, open it up and be able to find tools and resources that can help you move forward, says Royes. It is a community-owned guide. It was created by and for the community, so the community's input and feedback on it has been invaluable in this process.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter