

Your Support Services Network marks quarter-century of crisis support close to home



In an ideal world, they would have put themselves out of business, but as long as there's a need, Your Support Services Network will be there to help.

Last week, Your Support Services Network (YSSN) celebrated a significant milestone as they commemorated 25 years of crisis support close to home.

Since the organization brought in crisis supports in 1999, YSSN Executive Director Kim Thorn estimates the organization has supported 200,000 people across various crisis programs. But the impact goes beyond 200,000 individuals ? it impacts every person in their orbit.

?In a world where the need for crisis services remain ever-present, it's essential to recognize the unwavering commitment of those who are available 24/7 ready to listen, ready to help, and ready to provide hope,? said Thorn, addressing staff, clients and dignitaries at an anniversary reception held at their Edward Street headquarters on November 12. ?These are the people who embody our vision of an equal life for all, a life rooted in community, relationships and wellbeing. As we reflect on the journey of the past quarter-century, it's important to acknowledge that we have worked hand-in-hand with a wide range of community partners to ensure that our services are meeting the diverse needs of people in our community. Our work continues to focus on connecting people not only to immediate crisis supports, but also to a broader network of services that work together to uplift and empower. Today's an opportunity for us to honour the dedication of those who have devoted themselves to supporting others in their most vulnerable moments and to acknowledge the profound impact that we have made on over 200,000 individuals who have connected with our crisis supports.?

The first iteration of YSSN's crisis supports was their 310-COPE line.

Thorn began her work with YSSN as a case worker supporting youth and recalled one individual she worked with, whom she described as ?highly risk-tolerant? and ?often made choices that put her in high-risk situations.? Thorn considered the youth ?highly vulnerable? and found she would often go missing for days at a time.

?As much as I am a professional, it's hard not to worry about a 17-year-old girl on the streets,? she says. ?When she would re-emerge and I would retrieve her from places I considered quite dangerous as an adult, we would talk about what we could do differently the next time. We would debrief. She would tell me about the fact she wanted to reach out sooner, but she felt fear ? fear

of disappointing the people around her. She talked about shame and not wanting to necessarily deal with the adults in her life and the repercussions of her decisions.?

Bringing her to meet a crisis worker with 310-COPE, Thorn recalls the girl was connected with ?an empathetic worker who had no judgement and talked to her about some of the things she could do once she was in a situation where she felt she couldn't reach out to the adults in her life.?

They formed a wellness plan for her and while there was another instance of her going missing, it was for two days, as opposed to four or five, and she independently reached out to 310-COPE to be ?reconnected back to her natural support network.?

YSSN has gone from strength to strength since they laid the foundations of crisis support with 310-COPE. The next milestone took place in 2001 when YSSN partnered with Kinark Child and Family Services to provide after-hours support for young people in York Region, and four years later enhanced services by collaborating with York Regional Police on mobile crisis support teams. By 2015, this service expanded to include York Region Paramedics and, by 2017, partnerships with South Simcoe Police and the Nottawasaga OPP to ?ensure people in crisis had immediate access to specialize local crisis supports? in all the communities YSSN serves.

Further enhancements, this time a support initiative for individuals with developmental disabilities, was founded in collaboration with first responders; and in 2002, they launched the Safe Bed program with funding from Ontario Health.

This service provides short-term stay options for people in crisis, along with peer support and resources from the Krasman Centre and Addiction Services Central Ontario as needed.

Around the same time, they expanded their work with York Regional police to re-route calls for mental health support from the 911 system back to ?appropriate community services.?

Most recently, and in a particular point of pride, YSSN was one of 39 organizations to help launch 9-8-8, the nation-wide suicide crisis helpline.

?These milestones represent just a few of the many ways YSSN's crisis response services have grown and adapted over the years,? said Thorn. ?Each step has been made possible through the incredible partnerships we have built with local police, paramedics, and community organizations. Together, we have created a network of support for those in crisis, ensuring that health is always just a phone call or a text away.

?As we look to the future our vision remains clear: we strive for a world where the need for crisis support is diminished. That's the goal that we have ? a safety net and supports available in the community where we don't have people who need to call a crisis line. However, until that day comes, we will continue to be there for the community. We remain committed to being available, responsive and ready to provide the critical support individuals need when they face the most challenging moments of their lives.?

By Brock Weir