



**COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:
YOUTH PERSPECTIVES
ON MENTAL HEALTH
FOR ENGLISH-SPEAKERS
ACROSS QUÉBEC**

Community Liaisons Program



Periodical

Third Edition

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: Content Warning

ABOUT Y4Y

Y4Y Québec is a non-profit organisation committed to addressing the issues facing English-speaking youth (ages 16-30) across Québec.

Y4Y Québec is quickly becoming a credible force in the community; establishing an Advisory Board made up of qualified individuals with a track-record in the nonprofit world; publishing multiple policy documents concerning the situation of English-speaking youth throughout the province; holding outreach events that strengthen community at the local level; bringing information to important stakeholders from the corporate sector and in government; empowering leadership locally through a growing regional ambassador program, and having fun while doing so!



@Y4YQuebec



y4yquebec.org

COMMUNITY LIAISONS PROGRAM

This zine is a feature of the Community Liaisons Program. Funded by Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN), the Community Liaisons Program functions as an ear to the ground for Y4Y Québec to hear from a diverse variety of regions about what matters to youth, about their communities, and how we can better support their mental health.

This program is unique because it reaches a variety of regions, including the Bas-Saint-Laurent, the Laurentians, the Mauricie, Québec City, and of course, Montréal. Community Liaisons publish two blog posts per month about mental health, their communities, and their experiences as English-speakers. Sharing these stories allows us to connect to the broader community of English-speaking Québécois. Community Liaisons also host two events in their communities, one artistic and one outdoors, to provide an opportunity for community members to connect while doing activities that are positive for their well-being. Part of liaising of course includes the French-speaking majority. Our Community Liaisons conduct outreach to Francophone community organisations and attend Francophone events.

Finally, Community Liaisons will leave a lasting legacy of their work by installing a community exchange box (for example, a Little Free Library or a Community Pantry). As an outcome, community members in various regions of Québec will feel more connected to the French majority, and to other English-speakers, which will improve the collective well-being.

Funded by:



FOREWORD

Welcome to the third edition of Community Connections, the Community Liaison Program periodical. Our previous editions have celebrated the hard-working Community Liaisons across the province, publishing some of the wonderful blog posts they've been writing for Y4Y. The blogs cover mental health and wellness, the writers' communities, and their experiences as English speakers in Québec. To read all the blog posts, check out our blog at www.y4yquebec.org/y4ys-blog.

In this edition, the writers have chosen to write personal stories about their own mental health journeys. They invite you into the experiences of English-speaking youth in Québec through their stories. As our authors have bravely chosen to get personal with you, I would like to note that the content of a couple of the pieces in this edition might not be for all readers. Keep Calm and Read On and How Knitting Saved My Life have content warnings attached. Check the table of contents to see which pages to skip, if needed.

At Y4Y Québec, we believe that when youth are empowered to speak up about their experiences and the issues that matter to them, they connect to the broader community of English speakers. When we as a community listen to youth, we also know how to support them better. As such, this project reflects our commitment to deepening the connection between youth and their communities by highlighting youth voices.

I want to applaud the Community Liaisons for their vulnerability in this edition and the hard work done to bring all these periodicals to fruition. As the Community Liaison lead, I have collaborated closely with everyone over the past several months. I can attest to their involvement in their communities and dedication to their work with Y4Y Québec.

I hope that you find a point of connection with one of our authors in this periodical. After this one, we will have one last periodical to share with you all, so stay tuned for more excellent writing. Enjoy this edition of our work!

Chloe Merritt,
Community Liaison Lead

PLEASE HOLD WHILE WE CONNECT YOU TO MONTRÉAL'S CHINATOWN

By Chloe Merritt

📍 Montréal, QC

Coming off the back of an extended winter break in Vancouver, I'm already making plans to visit Québec's first T&T. T&T is a popular Asian grocery chain that originated in Vancouver, but has since been bought by Loblaws, and now has locations across the country. I was raised in Vancouver and grew up doing weekly shopping at T&T and other big Asian grocery stores, stores where the produce section is filled with bok choy, gai lan, winter melon and persimmons. The shelves are full of soy sauces from all over Asia, the bakery section has egg tarts and milk bread, and somewhere in the store, there's a tiny section with Western foods – peanut butter, pasta sauce, mayo, and cereal.

I've often lamented the lack of Chinese culture in Montréal. There's no place that does good dim sum, there's no T&T, and so on. I think what I truly miss, though, is the connection to my family and cultural heritage that feels so easy in Vancouver. Of course, it is. My Popo and GongGong live only a 2 minute walk away and I often return home with some of my favourite foods—lo bak go, cheung fun, and congee. My brother, my mom, and my aunt have universally agreed on the best dim sum,

and I never visit home without spending a Sunday morning at Western Lake. I visited my cousin in Victoria, and we laughed about how we forgot to take showers the day before Chinese New Year and ended up with greasy hair (since it's bad luck to wash your hair on New Year's).

When I complain about Montréal, I'm talking about how much I miss my family. How I miss



(Photo credit: Frank Zhang)

my mom arguing with my Popo in Cantonese. When I say I love T&T, I mean that I love how my mom doesn't leave without something for my grandparents—an orchid, mandarin oranges, nian gao. I miss how my brother invites me out to a Hong Kong café for milk tea and noodles. I miss getting together with friends over bubble tea and shaved ice. Food isn't the only part of Chinese culture, but as a third generation Canadian that doesn't speak Cantonese, it's one of the ways I connect to my culture when I miss home. I may not remember the name of a dish, but meals I've shared with my family are seared in my memory.

My experience reflects recent research indicating the importance of culture for the positive development of First Nations youth. Culture has important impacts on mental health and cultural connection can ease the stress of adapting to a new culture, combat isolation, offer community support networks, and combat isolation (whose harms are self-evident after the pandemic).

“When I flew into Montréal, I didn't know that many Chinese railroad workers had also moved to Québec from BC in the late 19th century.”

What I didn't know before sitting down to write, was that Montréal has a rich Chinese history as well. When I flew into Montréal, I didn't know that many Chinese railroad workers had also moved to Québec from BC in the late 19th century. When I complained about how small Chinatown was, I didn't know that the Hydro Québec and the Desjardins buildings downtown expropriated historic parts of Chinatown. I didn't know that a growing Chinatown declined after Chinese people were effectively excluded from immigrating to Canada in 1923. I didn't know about how the cultural centre was impacted by World War II, and religious and clan divisions within the Chinese Canadian community. I didn't know that after 1986, investors from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China developed areas outside of Chinatown, creating cultural centres in Brossard and St. Catherine's Ouest.

I loved looking through historic photos of Montréal's Chinatown. I love one of the parade on V-J Day in 1945. I recognize a circular cutting board that looks just like my GongGong's and I laughed when I saw the kids miserable in Chinese school (I guess some things don't change). I hope I can also share something new about Montréal's history and Chinese community to you.



(Photo credit: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, 1966)



(Photo credit: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, 1966)



(Photo credit: Conrad Poirier, March 3, 1940)

"So, Montréal. Consider this my formal apology for ragging on your lack of Chinese culture."

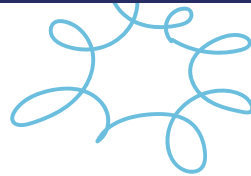
So, Montréal. Consider this my formal apology for ragging on your lack of Chinese culture. It's not that you have no culture, but that I was feeling isolated from my own. So, I still have plans to check out the biggest T&T in the country. I'm excited to stock up on all my favourites with my roommate. At the same time, I'm making plans to call my grandparents. I'm reminding myself to finish that show so I can text my brother about it and wish my friend good luck for her exchange semester in Italy. And yes, I have a new appreciation for Montréal's Chinese community. After all, I'm part of it now.



(Photo credit: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, 1966)

RECOVERING FROM BEING OVERWHELMED

By Flora Janos



📍 Québec City , QC

Life seldom works out exactly as I planned. Circumstances change, and mistakes can be made too. A sudden change of circumstances is very overwhelming to me. The uncertainty feels paralyzing. There are unhealthy ways that I used in the past to deal with being overwhelmed, such as procrastination or even giving up on tasks. Even today, these harmful coping mechanisms are present in my mind when I am very overwhelmed. However, I try not to give in to my old habits. Instead, I follow a method that personally helped me recover from being overwhelmed.

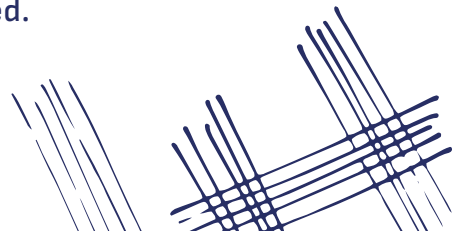


(Photo credit: Christian Erfurt)

The first thing I do is recognise that I am overwhelmed, allowing myself to feel my feelings. Denying my feelings of being overwhelmed leads me to avoid what makes me overwhelmed. Therefore, avoiding feelings doesn't seem to fix the problem but instead enables me to procrastinate an overwhelming task. Talking to friends and family about my challenges helps a lot. Voicing my challenges can be validating. It makes me feel like I am not alone. Validating my feelings also makes it easier to take the first step to recovering from being overwhelmed.

“Voicing my challenges can be validating in and of itself. It makes me feel like I am not alone”.

Once I've faced my feelings, I let my nervous system calm down. I do this by allowing myself some time to relax before figuring out how to manage the change and uncertainty that overwhelmed me in the first place. This is important because it allows me to tackle the challenge I'm facing with a clear and rational mind once I feel calm and grounded.

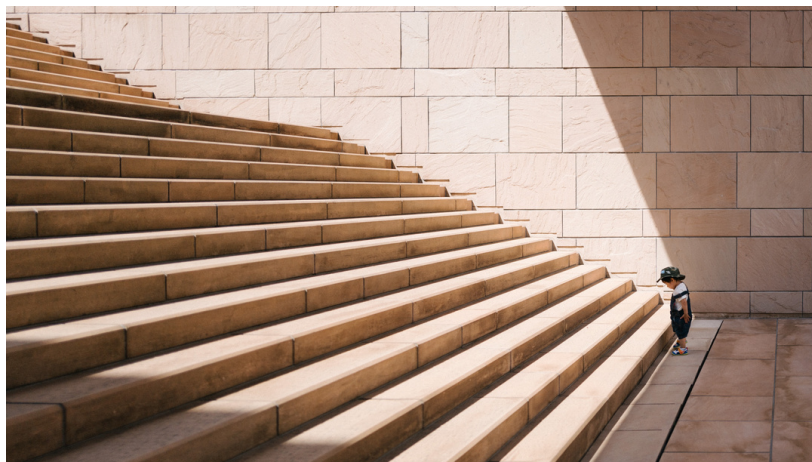


When I calm down, I start to focus on prioritising tasks. Prioritising helps me break down the challenge one step at a time, making it less intimidating. Then, I start to brainstorm solutions. The more possibilities, the more confident I feel about doing the tasks. An overwhelmed state can make me think that overcoming a challenge is impossible, but a calm and solution-focused mind can find many ways to overcome a challenge. Once choosing the seemingly best solution, making the first step toward a solution usually puts me back on track, and I feel empowered to tackle the challenge I'm facing.

“Although I cannot stop myself from being overwhelmed when I face sudden change or face a new challenge, I can learn to recover from being overwhelmed”.

Although I cannot stop being overwhelmed when I face a sudden change or a new challenge, I can learn to recover from being overwhelmed. The feelings of being overwhelmed don't get less intense, but I can bounce back faster now.

It is also essential to ask for help when feeling overwhelmed. This is hard for me as I don't like to ask for help. I prefer to handle my problems alone. However, when I ask for help, challenges resolve faster and easier. It is truly a paradox: I am afraid to ask, but I cannot name a time when I've ever regretted asking for help.



(Photo credit: Jukan Tateisi)

Although I have a current method, I am open to evolving my coping skills in the future. I hope that sharing my experience with you helps if you feel overwhelmed. You are not alone. I wish you the best in tackling the challenges you face in your life. I am rooting for you!

HOW KNITTING SAVED MY LIFE

By Anonymous Community Liaison

Q???, QC

Content Warning !

Mentions of self-harm & suicide

I learned how to knit when I was in Grade 8, I was about 12 or 13 years old, and it changed my life. I first learned to knit at a crafting club at school, it was a few other students from my grade and one teacher supervisor. We would stay after school, and at first, we just learned the basics, the knit and the purl stitch. Later on, we made snoopy washcloths and attempted mittens. Only one of us got a thumb done, and it wasn't even me.

After my initial learning, I stopped knitting for almost a year. During this time, I started high school. I was a young Queer person in a rural conservative town, so clearly, I had a lot of angst, and this is when my depression started. I began to feel the impacts of being queer in a small town, the stares, the fear, and the invasion of privacy from others. I began to self-harm and consider suicide. The combination of high school and being Queer, became too much, and not knowing where or who I could go to, I turned to my friends, who were also coping in the same way. Over time we began to learn much healthier and safer coping mechanisms, such as knitting.



(Photo credit: Marina Ermakova)

"Over time we began to learn much healthier and safer coping mechanisms, such as knitting."



I used knitting as a way to distract myself from my thoughts of self-harm. This worked for years. I had an old project I started when I first started knitting. I had gotten the idea that I was going to knit an infinity scarf, as they were all the rage in 2014. I convinced my mother to buy me one skein of yarn, which I was convinced was enough to knit an entire scarf. It was, in fact, not. When I first started this project, I likely only finished about 20ish rows, then it sat in my closet for a year or so. When I figured out I needed a way to distract my hands, the knitting made perfect sense. So, I began knitting again, and eventually, I finished that skein of yarn. My scarf was nowhere near finished, but somehow, I had this crazy idea- I was going to knit a blanket with no pattern.

At this point, I'd stopped self-harming, and focused on knitting. I was still grappling with my Queer identity, but at this point, I knew I was just a few years from leaving, from graduating. I developed a blanket pattern I still use today, six years later. I knit 17 blankets in my senior year of high school for my friends and teachers. I knitted. All. The. Time. During lunch, after school, into the night, and even during class at times. My record is one blanket in one week. I didn't do any of my homework during that week, nor did I get enough sleep, but it was worth it to make a handmade Christmas gift for someone who deserved it.

" I love the idea that each centimetre of yarn is touched by me, that each part of the yarn is knitted with care."



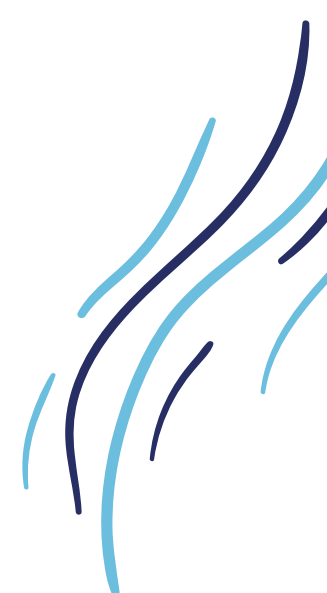
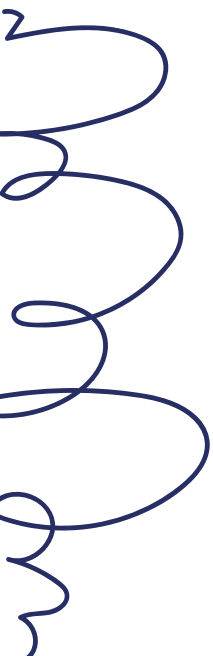
(Photo credit: Victoria Bilsborough)

Since high school, I've taken a few breaks from knitting to focus on my studies, but I've always found my way back to it. Knitting gives me a sense of comfort and accomplishment when I can see my project growing and when I've finally cast off and woven in all my ends. I used to take my knitting everywhere with me, and still do. Road trips, parties, gatherings, school, you name it, there is a good chance I've got my current knitting project in my bag. It keeps me going, thinking about finishing my

current projects or bonding over current projects with friends. I love the idea that each centimetre of yarn is touched by me, that each part of the yarn is knitted with care.

Knitting has helped me slow down, to remember that not everything is go go go, that not everything needs to be as fast as possible and that there is beauty in slowing down and taking

your time to put care into what you are doing. It also helped me through a really tough time in my life. It helped me stop self harming and distract my hands and brain from suicide. I can say without a doubt that knitting saved my life, and without it, life would not be as beautiful.



KEEP CALM AND READ ON

By Savannah Leroux

📍 Nicolet, QC

Content Warning !

Mentions of emotional abuse

Reading has always been my favourite hobby, but only recently did I figure out why—and it's not something you'd really expect. My mom started teaching me the alphabet and reading pretty early, and even though no one in my family is a reader, I developed an obsession. As a kid, when my mom would ground me, or take anything away, I would tell her it was ok since I deserved it. Only once did she threaten to take away my books, but oh my gosh, the fit I threw. It was my first major tantrum in years; I was around ten years old at the time. Not a normal response for someone in grade five, I would say... Fortunately, I had too many books for it to be a reasonable punishment, so I probably just lost TV privileges for a week.

Why was I so obsessed with reading? Well, it provided a means of escape from my home life. I definitely didn't have the best childhood, but it wasn't the worst, either. Simply put [\[and trigger warning here\]](#), my step dad emotionally abused us to make himself feel better about repeatedly leaving us to do drugs and "be with" girls who just became adults... I only learned the second part when I was in high school, which may have been worse since I was about the same age as them. So, since I couldn't



(Photo credit: Siora Photography)

escape it, I would deep dive into books, mostly fantasy. When I mean deep dive, I mean that you had to poke me for me to notice someone was talking to me. This is called escapism, which basically means that I looked for distraction and relief in my books where I could pretend things weren't happening and simply pretend.

"Why was I so obsessed with reading? Well, it provided a means of escape from my home life."

After I graduated, I was able to finally get in to talk to a good therapist who specialized in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) therapy to process my suppressed memories and actually heal. Funny thing was, after completing my sessions, I stopped reading so much. I didn't understand it for the longest time until I watched a reel about two years ago, and someone pointed out that I used reading as my escapism since it was the best coping technique I had available. This was something I kind of knew but finally had someone put into words for me. My reading was highest while my stepdad was with us and dropped when he left us when I was about 16. I had blamed my lack of reading on school; I was just too busy with my future to read all the time anymore.



(Photo credit: Kari Shea)

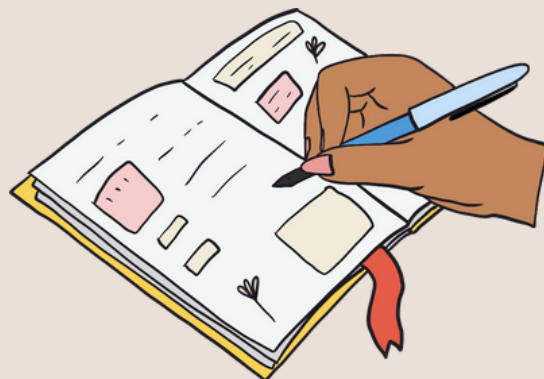
I am now almost 25 years old and back to reading a bunch, but this time, it's purely for enjoyment. I still read a lot (23 books so far this year!), and it's no longer to escape my reality. Reading used to be my protection from the outside world; now, it's my ideal way to pass the time, and I no longer assume the character's personality to avoid dealing with myself. I like who I am, who I became, and who I am growing up to be. Trauma is trauma, no need to compare, we just need to heal from it. Therapy with the right person and support can help you work through it all. While I try not to regret my life choices, I do regret not seeking support sooner. My choices made me who I am today, and hopefully, someone else can connect with some of these feelings, too, no matter the hobby that protects you from your situation. Therapy is not a bad word, so let's just keep calm and read on.

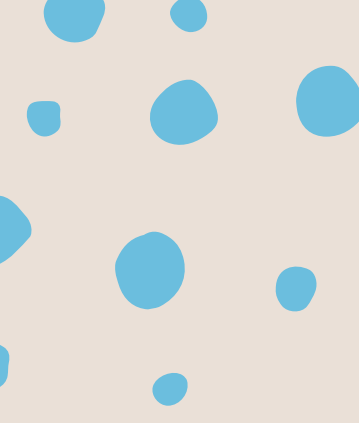
Got 10 minutes for self-reflection?



Try these prompts!

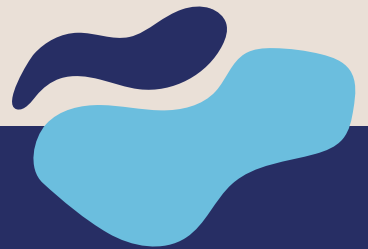
- 1. What is your favourite form of self-care?**
- 2. What are three things about yourself you want people to know?**
- 3. One thing that I'm holding on to that I'd like to let go of is...**





**Navigating the mental health system can be difficult,
to say the least.**

**We've compiled a list of free mental health and self-care
resources to help you out wherever you are, whatever you need.**



**Check out our English-language mental
health resources in Québec!**

