

Achieving Well-being Together

Student Counselling, Health & Well-being
Annual Report 2020-2021

YORK 





Well-being is Imperative

Student Counselling, Health & Well-being (SCHW), provides a range of essential mental health & well-being services to the York University Community in order to optimize the quality of the scholarly and communal life of the university. Our primary aim is to help students realize, develop, and fulfill their personal potential in order to maximally benefit from their university experience and manage the challenges of university life.

How does Mental Health relate to Well-being?

Mental health is not just the absence of mental illness, much like how physical health is not only about the absence of physical illness. Mental Health exists on a continuum and contributes to holistic well-being.

“Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes [their] own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to [their] community”

– World Health Organization

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Words from the Director

Over the past two years, many of my workdays felt like a mirror image of the last, making it hard to pinpoint specific accomplishments. The compiling of the annual report has provided a welcome opportunity to reflect on the progress of the previous year.

Despite the challenges brought by the pandemic, Student Counselling, Health & Well-being embraced times of change, reimagined our identity, and expanded our vision to encompass a holistic approach to well-being. We successfully implemented a hybrid service model that balances both staff and student needs, broadened the previous Mental Health Strategy to a Well-being Strategy, and demonstrated our commitment to trauma-responsive care. We are excited to share the details of these initiatives on the following pages.

I am honoured to be part of a staff team that continues to prioritize responsiveness to students while finding time and energy to care for one another. I also want to thank the leadership teams in our department, Division, and across the university for the hard work, and often long hours, that were dedicated to ensuring staff, faculty, and students were supported through changes in learning and working environments.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the resilience demonstrated by York students. I can only imagine what life has been like for you these past few years, and yet everywhere I look on campus I see the results of your innovation, creativity, and compassion. You inspire us to renew and sustain our commitment to achieving well-being together.

Sincerely,



Lori Walls, PhD C. Psych
Director, Student Counselling, Health & Well-being



Well-being

OBJECTIVES:

Research indicates that well-being is a necessary pre-condition to learning and working successfully. Therefore, SCHW has made a commitment to better understand the unique health and well-being needs of York University students through two surveys.

Alignment with the University Academic Plan:

- From Access to Success
- Working in Partnership
- Living Well Together

Alignment with the Division of Students Strategic Plan:

- Reinforce Our Foundation
- Invest in Our People
- Impact the Student Journey
- Create Our Future

HEALTH & WELLNESS STUDENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

May 2021 to August 2021

The student population at York University continues to increase in size, diversity and complexity of care needs. The objective of the [Health & Wellness Student Needs Assessment Survey](#) was to better understand the opinions and perceptions about access and availability to onsite medical primary care services on campus.

The survey identified the following:

Students were more likely to seek treatment off campus due to lack of services on campus

36% of students rated their mental health as poor or fair

60% of students would like to see more primary care services offered on campus

78% of students report issues with the accessibility, affordability, or availability of healthcare services on campus

CANADIAN CAMPUS WELLBEING SURVEY

February to March 2022

The [Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey](#)¹ is an assessment tool developed for Canadian post-secondary institutions to better assess health and wellbeing on campuses, identify priorities for intervention, and increase capacity to link research with policy and practice.

The student survey covers nine areas of focus:

- Mental health assets
- Mental health deficits
- Student experience
- Health service utilization
- Physical health/health behaviours
- Academic achievement
- Substance use
- Food security
- Sexual health behaviour

¹ The CCWS is coordinated by the University of British Columbia (UBC) and will replace the previously used American based National College Health Assessment Survey

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

OBJECTIVES:

To implement a three-tiered approach to EDI at SCHW. This approach attempts to examine existing strategies, and implement new strategies, at the departmental, staffing, and student levels.

Alignment with the University Academic Plan:

- From Access to Success

Alignment with the Division of Students Strategic Plan:

- Invest in Our People
- Impact the Student Journey

DEPARTMENTAL ACCREDITATION

2022-2025

The [Sanctuary Implementation Project](#) will provide trauma-responsive practice across all program operations using a 36-month roll out process which will build internal capacity and increase sustainability of practice:

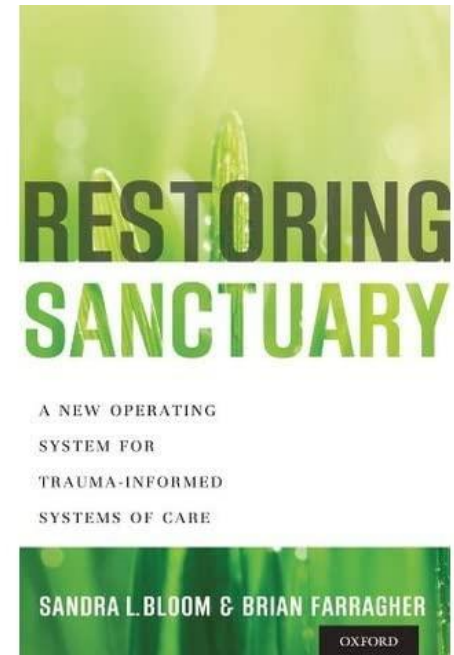
Year 1: Engaging staff through training in trauma-responsive tools & building organizational culture

Year 2: Utilizing guiding standards to embed a trauma-responsive culture & expand tools for staff, practicum students and clients

Year 3: Completing a self-evaluation of practice followed by an external evaluation by peer reviewers

The Sanctuary Model offers seven values for organizations to commit to:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| ➤ Nonviolence | ➤ Democracy |
| ➤ Emotional Intelligence | ➤ Open Communication |
| ➤ Inquiry & Social Learning | ➤ Social Responsibility |
| | ➤ Growth & Change |



SCHW staff have been provided with the “Restoring Sanctuary” book which outlines the theoretical philosophies which form the underpinnings of the model as well as a set of practical tools, known as the Sanctuary Tool Kit.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

LEARNING & UNLEARNING

SCHW is committed to developing knowledge and practice that is grounded in Anti-Oppressive Practices. This commitment stems from the understanding that equity-seeking and equity-deserving student groups experience harm from white supremacist societal structures which also create barriers to accessing services. Over the last year, SCHW has participated in several trainings grounded in Anti-Oppressive Practices in an effort to reimagine services that are accessible to all students. A summary of learnings and takeaways are captured below:

Anti-Oppressive Clinical Practice Training | August 2020

With Tenniel Brown, M.S.W., R.S.W.

- › There is a need for ongoing conversation to address anti-oppressive practice
- › Anti-oppressive practice involves a balance between individual and collective responsibility
- › Clear expectations, independent reflection, and smaller groups are vital for creating safe spaces
- › We must model safety and cultural humility not just with students, but with each other as colleagues



Tenniel Brown

Creating Safe and Affirming Spaces for BIPOC Trans Students | May 2021

With Tye Kenny, M.S.W., R.S.W., and Dr. June Lam M.D., FRCPC

- › Deepening our own understanding of identity and culture enables us to be more effective in our work with students
- › The importance of using inclusive language, reflecting on power, privilege, & personal biases
- › Student-centered service providers should have knowledge of resources that support the BIPOC and trans community
- › Students must have a sense of agency and choice in their treatment



Tye Kenny



Dr. June Lam



Through the SCHW External Consultation Fund, counsellors on staff are provided with up to \$500 per year to seek clinical consultation with a content knowledge expert from equity seeking groups in order to be more effective when it comes to working with York's diverse student population.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

SCHW continues to partner with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to provide psychological assessments to students seeking diagnostic clarification in the areas of anxiety, depression and attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorders so that all students may thrive on campus. Students referred for service through this partnership are assessed by an SCHW psychologist and receive a report and next steps plan on how their needs may impact their academic studies. SCHW psychologists work closely with SAS to consult on the academic accommodations and support.

45+ Students have been served through this partnership to date

Student feedback indicates that...

- ✘ Attending an assessment at SCHW is faster/more accessible than attending an assessment in the community
- ✘ They have a clearer understanding about how their mental health status impacts their academic studies
- ✘ The counsellor conducting the assessment created a safe space for them to speak about their concerns
- ✘ They have a clearer understanding of the different treatment options available to them

To learn more about how SCHW is supporting students through Equity, Diversity & Inclusion initiatives, see pages [15](#) and [16](#).



In May of 2021, SAS awarded the SCHW assessment team with a Certificate of Recognition for their integral role in the Assessment Partnership, openness to consultation, and responsiveness to supporting the academic access and inclusion of students.

Service Excellence

OBJECTIVES:

SCHW is and will be continuing to enhance service excellence through several initiatives.

Alignment with the University Academic Plan:

- 21st Century Learning

Alignment with the Division of Students Strategic Plan:

- Create Our Future

MITIGATING BLIND SPOTS

Service excellence will be achieved by obtaining feedback on our work from the perspectives of both students who are accessing our services and those who are not.

Through departmental data, data from the Canadian Campus Well-being Survey, and data from the [Student Equity and Diversity Census](#), we will gain further insight into how our services should be framed, presented, and evaluated. This will help SCHW remove barriers students encounter when accessing health-related services:

- Stigma and fear of judgement
- Thinking that one's problem isn't big enough to warrant accessing support
- Feeling misunderstood when it comes to one's cultural experiences
- Fear of opening up and how to put oneself back together
- Concerns over confidentiality
- Being seen as broken or weak
- Past negative experience with healthcare providers
- Avoidance due to fear of story re-telling

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY PORTAL

The virtual portal will enable students to access customized mental health and well-being information and services on demand and provide a virtual concierge to guide and triage student services.

Timeline of Activities

Nov. 2021:

SCHW participated in [UNHack with Lassonde](#) where the project proposal was shared with over 400 students for feedback

Dec. 2021:

A proposal is submitted to divisional and institutional Technology Governance Committees for review to ensure alignment with institutional goals and enterprise architecture

Jan. 2022:

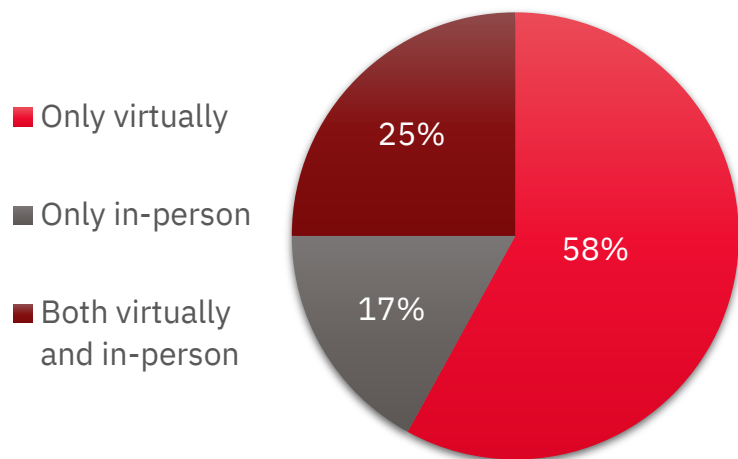
MBA students are consulted on the project in partnership with the Schulich School of Business with hopes for project execution during the summer of 2022

Service Excellence

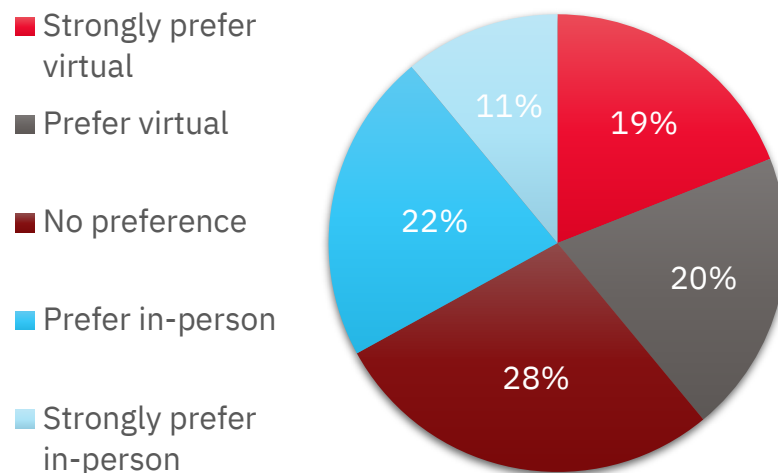
HYBRID SERVICE DELIVERY

During the return to campus in fall 2021, SCHW transitioned to a hybrid model of service delivery informed by research and connections to the Division of Student's strategic plan. Data collected through student feedback² will be used to benchmark future iterations to service delivery and are shared below.

How have you met with a counsellor before?



Do you have a preference for how you would like to meet a counsellor?



² Student Feedback to Meeting with a Counsellor at SCHW, September to October 2021, n=167

Service Excellence

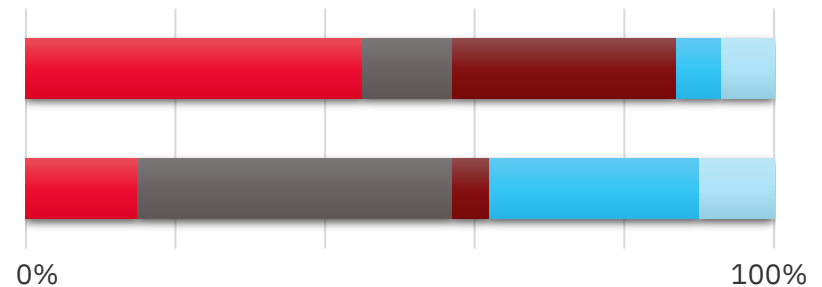
Benefits & Drawbacks to Virtual/In-person Counselling

Legend: ■ Virtually ■ In-person ■ Neither ■ Both ■ I don't know

CONFIDENTIALITY

I'm afraid someone will see/overhear me if I meet with a counsellor...

I feel like it is more private to meet with a counsellor...



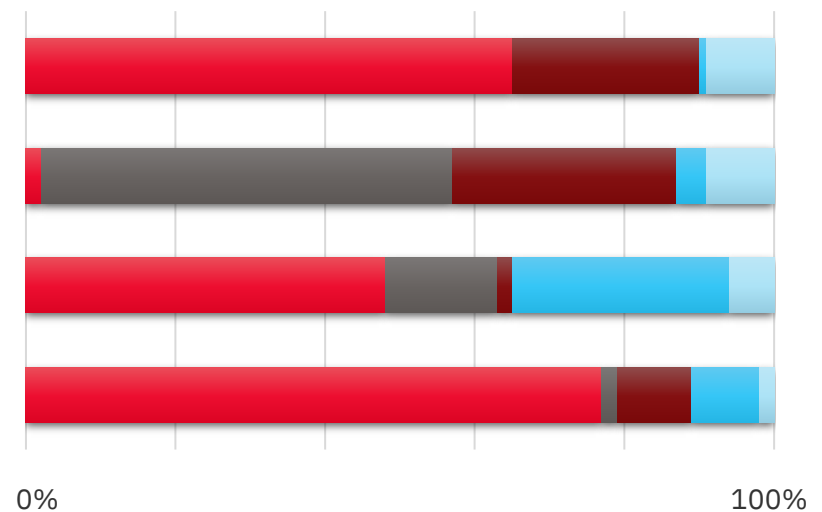
ACCESS

I am worried about technology issues (e.g. stable internet) if I meet with a counsellor...

Transportation/the commute could be a barrier for me if I meet with a counsellor...

It's easier for me to attend a counselling session...

It saves me time to meet with a counsellor...

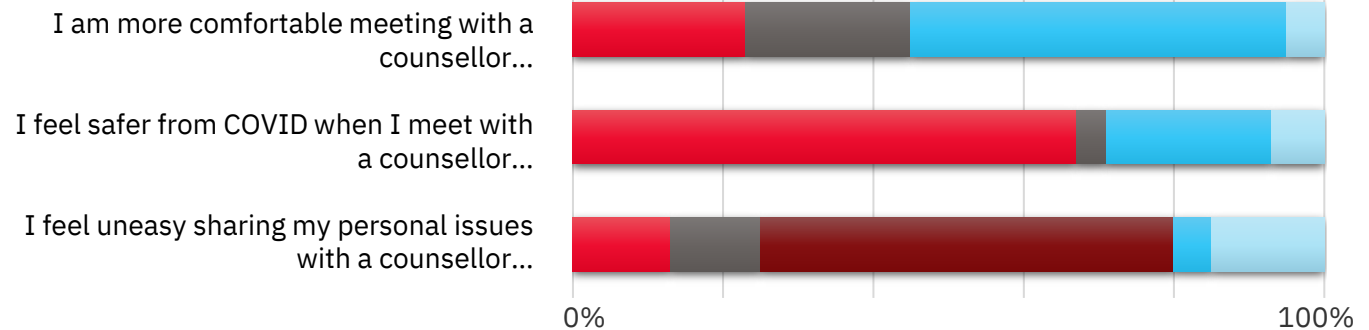


Service Excellence

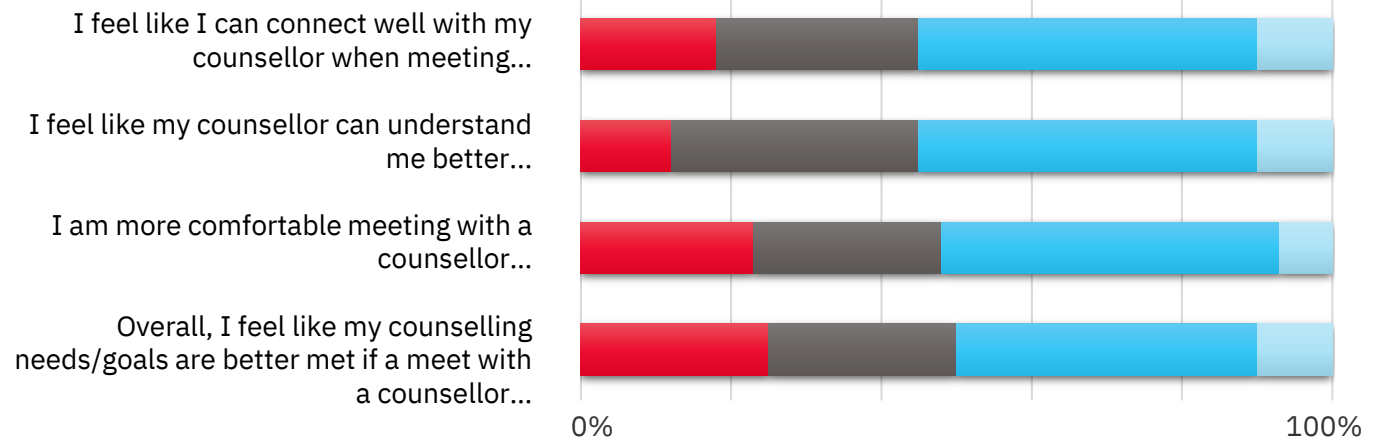
Benefits & Drawbacks to Virtual/In-person Counselling (cont'd)

Legend: ■ Virtually ■ In-person ■ Neither ■ Both ■ I don't know

SAFETY



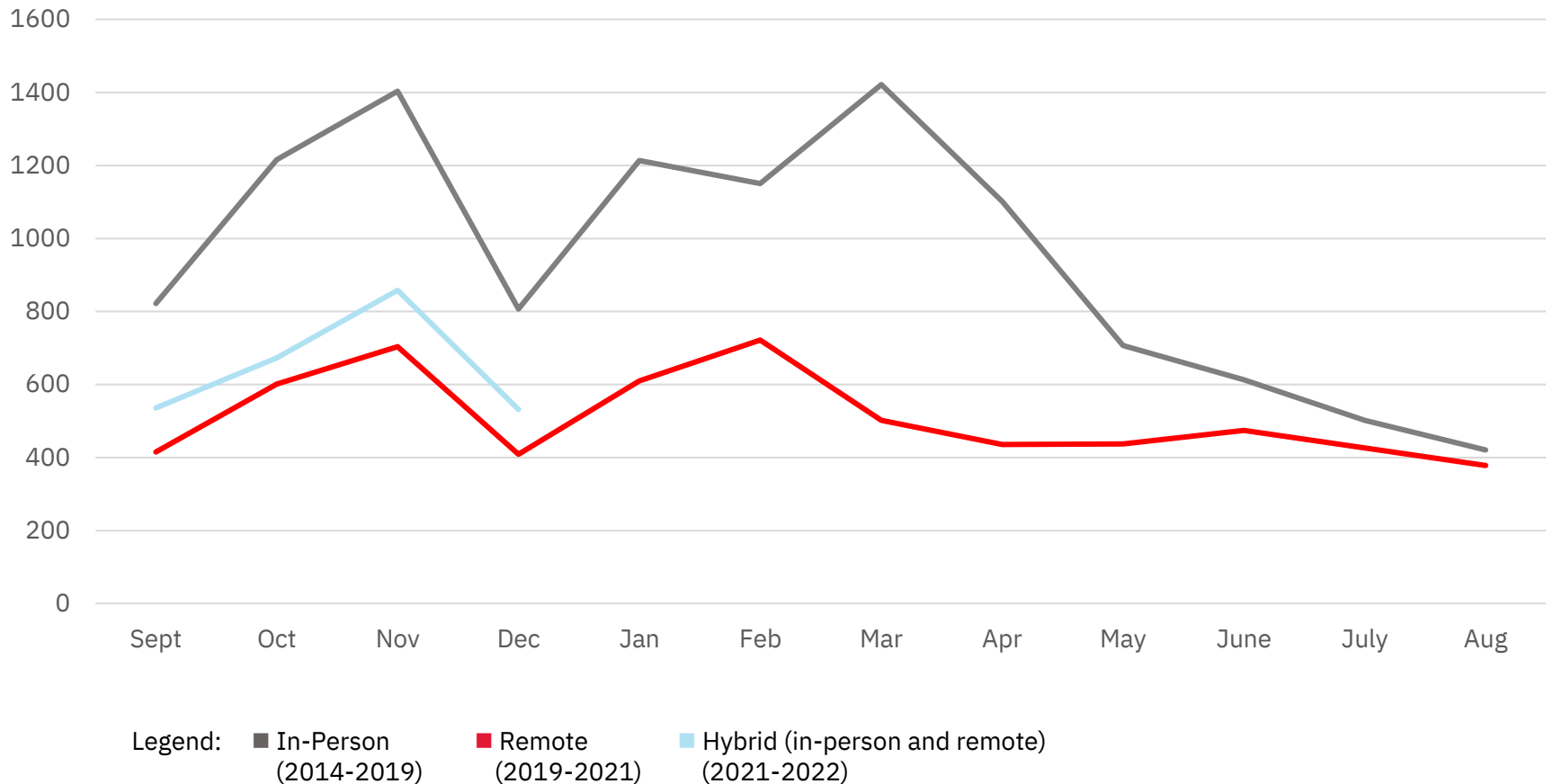
RAPPORT



Service Excellence

SERVICE DEMAND: YEAR-OVER YEAR COMPARISON

SCHW- Demand for Booked Appointments- Average



Service Excellence

COUNSELLOR PREFERENCES

During 2021, every student who called into SCHW to book a counselling session was asked if they had a preference to meet with a counsellor of a particular identity.

10% of clients expressed a preference for meeting with a counsellor of a particular identity between April to October 2021 (n=212).

A summary of expressed preferences is displayed below:

	Female	Male	Gender N/A	Total
Gender	148	4	-	152
Racialized	19	1	8	28
Specified Race	2 (Arab/Muslim) 1 (Black) 3 (South Asian)	-	3 (Black) 1 (Muslim) 2 (South Asian)	12
LGBTQ2S+	4	-	16	20
Other	-	-	-	-
Total	177	5	30	212

TOP PRESENTING ISSUES

While the top five presenting issues pre and post-pandemic have not experienced significant change, some of the root causes of these issues have changed:



Anxiety

E.g., Health of self and loved ones, concerns about academic/career future



Depression

E.g., Isolation, lack of connection/community, lack of structure, uncertain prospects, COVID fatigue, burnout



Interpersonal Relationships

E.g., Returning to family home, isolated from family, domestic violence, loss of friends due to isolation



Academics

E.g., Concern of the impact of remote learning on future success, difficulty concentrating, burnout from change & uncertainty, not getting the experience paid for



Grief

E.g., Loss of dreams, death, breakdown of relationships, loss of celebrations with loved ones

Service Excellence

VIRTUAL GROUPS

Groups provide students with safe, positive, and reaffirming spaces to access support through community. All groups are facilitated by SCHW counsellors. Members are encouraged to contribute to group norms and topics discussed are student-driven according to need. Since the start of the pandemic, group offerings have increased to support students struggling with isolation. Benefits of groups are as follows:

- Groups help students to feel a sense of inclusion and belonging, to know they are not alone
- Groups enable students to gain awareness of behaviours and coping strategies from others who may have similar concerns
- Groups support connection on campus and provide students with an avenue to make new friends

Don Support Group

A solution-focused group for Dons to offer mutual support and share how their work impacts their mental health.

Grief & Loss Support Group

A group for students to do the hard work of grieving their losses with reassurance from others in a hopeful atmosphere.

Process Groups

A group to help students process their thoughts/emotions and learn from/provide feedback to their peers.

Survivor's Support Group³

A group for students to express and process sexual violence and normalize healing from trauma in collective spaces with support and resources.

³ In partnership with The Centre for Sexual Violence Response, Support & Education. Male and female groups are available.

Trauma-informed Yoga Group

A calm space where students can heal through breathwork, gentle movements, and increased body awareness. Trauma informed yoga is guided by principles such as: cultivating safety, simplicity and choice making.



Participants of SCHW groups have stated that attending a group has contributed to a positive change in their life

Service Excellence

SUPPORTING BIPOC STUDENTS

Racialized Students Support Group

A safe space facilitated by racialized counsellors for BIPOC students to reflect on their identities, build community, process and heal from racial trauma.

BIPOC Wellness Series: Racial Trauma, Resilience, & Healing

Staff, students, and community members (e.g., mental health professionals serving racialized communities) will be invited to attend SCHW's first annual BIPOC Conference in October 2022. The event will involve internal and external speakers and aims to build a legacy for York University grounded in the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusivity. The event will help post-secondary BIPOC students navigate their academic careers and beyond, and provide insight into the innovative ways BIPOC Communities have taken care of themselves.

Consultation with BIPOC students in 2021 indicated interest in the following topics:

- Racial trauma and healing
- Scholarships, bursaries, and financial security for BIPOC post-secondary students
- Managing microaggressions
- Self-care within BIPOC Communities
- How to be a White ally
- Indigenous perspectives on mental health
- Imposter syndrome and self-doubt within BIPOC students and professionals in academia and employment



Service Excellence

SUPPORTING LGBTQ2S+ STUDENTS

Safe spaces for support and the celebration of identity have been created for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Two-Spirit, plus (LGBTQ2S+) students and community members on campus. A summary of groups (facilitated by SCHW counsellors who identify as part of the queer community) and events are provided below.

Gay Men's Support Group

A safe space to discuss issues related to the gay/queer men community.

LGBTQ2S+ Support Group

A group where stories can be shared, support given, and connections made. SCHW partnered with TBLGAY for the first meeting of fall 2021.

Trans & Non-binary Support Group

Supporting trans, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and questioning folxs to navigate gender in a relaxed and safe space, facilitated by [Jay Jonah](#) M.S.W., R.S.W., a trans-masculine social worker.



January 2021 | Bell Let's Talk Week

A workshop/safe Space for queer varsity athletes to connect and share their experiences.

In partnership with Athletics & Recreation

March 2021 | Guys into Guys – Sex, Safety, and Strategy Workshop

Facilitated by [Daniel Pugh](#) M.S.W., R.S.W., a space for male-identifying students to discuss how to navigate healthy relationships online during COVID-19.

In partnership with The Centre for Sexual Violence Response, Support & Education

March 2021 | Annual Transgathering

A choose-your-own-adventure style workshop, where students were empowered to select what trans/non-binary related topic facilitated Jay Jonah would discuss.

In partnership with The Centre for Sexual Violence Response, Support & Education

June 2021 | PRIDE Month

Several events were held during PRIDE month: A workshop inviting LGBTQ2S+ students to build self-care kits to promote physical and emotional safety and a panel discussion to celebrate the accomplishments of queer community members.

In partnership with The Centre for Sexual Violence Response, Support & Education and SEXGEN

November 2021 | Trans Awareness Week

A body positive workshop facilitated by Jay Jonah to support trans & non-binary students with having open conversations about accepting our bodies.

Health Education & Promotion

OBJECTIVES:

Improve collaboration and accessibility to health promotion education and activities across and with teams at York University.

Alignment with the University Academic Plan:

- Knowledge for the Future
- From Access to Success
- Advancing Global Engagement
- Working in Partnership
- Living Well Together

Alignment with the Division of Students Strategic Plan:

- Reinforce Our Foundation
- Invest in Our People
- Impact the Student Journey

ABOUT HEALTH EDUCATION & PROMOTION

Health Education & Promotion is a peer-led program that offers a range of services that includes training programs, workshops, and peer-to-peer consulting. The objective is to create proactive approaches to mental health, well-being, and harm reduction on campus by providing tailored workshops on physical health, nutrition, sleep, sexual health, alcohol, cannabis.

40+ Virtual peer-led and professional-led online workshops were held between August 30 to December 6, 2021⁴ on topics such as:

- Mental Health
- Nutrition
- Self-Care
- Physical Health & Sleep
- Sexual Health/Relationships
- Healthier Coping Strategies

880+ Students registered for Health Ed. Workshops with a 55% attendance rate

⁴ While registration numbers remained the same, workshops experienced a decrease in attendance between fall 2020 (average 25 people per session) to winter 2021 (average 13 people per session)



Health Education & Promotion

CUSTOMIZED PROGRAMS

Health Education & Promotion collaborates with campus partners to offer niche programs to their student populations. Through 2020-2021, we received over 30 requests from community members:

- Atkinson Mature & Part-Time Students (4 programs)
- Athletic & Recreation Services
- Founders College
- Learning Commons – Nellie Library
- Learning Commons : Learning Skills
- McLaughlin College
- Osgoode OSCP (counselling services)
- Ready Set YU & Black Excellence (Be YU)
- Registrat Services
- SCLD – Frosh programming for 6 Colleges
- SCLD – Parent Orientations Programs
- York International



DIGITAL PROGRAMMING

Digital programming takes place through social media networks such as Instagram live events on the [Student Life YU page](#).

11 stories created with over
7000 views per term

19 post with over
4000 likes

A new partnership was created with Athletics & Recreation to cross-promote health education events.



Creating Safe & Sustainable Spaces

SCHW is committed to creating spaces that prioritize safety and sustainability. In accordance with these priorities, the physical space includes plants, art pieces, and signage indicating support for marginalized student populations. Sustainability means creating relationships with human and nonhuman entities that center sharing, growth, and connection. Initiatives to promote welcoming and inclusive spaces in partnership with facilities, local artists, and community members include the following:

Visual indicators around the department:

- An affirmation of positive space on our front doors (see right)
- “No hate here” signage
- [Patrick Lightheart](#), a Toronto artist was commissioned to create a mural to bring new life into the reception area. The mural includes images representative of the diversity of York’s student population and the Division of Students’ values for courage, connection, and empathy (see back cover of report)



Patrick Lightheart

“After seeing the mural, I was left with how the artist was able to give space to so many images and messages without sacrificing the representation of any one of them. The experience was kind of calming for me – because I think that is what we strive to do every day at SCHW, and the mural left me not only feeling that it is indeed possible but how beautiful it is when we do.”

- Dr. Karen Hardtke, Counsellor & Counselling Supervisor, SCHW

Creating Safe & Sustainable Spaces

Sustainability Initiatives:

- Working with Residence Life Coordinators to plant flowers around campus to create welcoming green spaces - funded through the mental health grant.
- Working with the Student Sustainability Group to plant 200 trees along Pond Road
- Successful transition to a paper-less system through Owl Practice
- SCHW's Director was connected to Las Nubes Campus through the sustainability group at York University, and visited the campus during the summer of 2021 to provide an overview of Keepme.Safe services ([see page 22](#)) for students studying abroad and received a presentation on the environmental initiatives and research occurring at the campus

We hope these additions will welcome campus community members and guests back to campus in the coming months!



Residence Life Coordinators and finished planter boxes



York University's Las Nubes campus in Costa Rica

Collaborations & Partnerships

SCHW continues to work with on-campus and off-campus partners to promote student mental health and well-being. A sample of initiatives are shared below.

ON-CAMPUS COLLABORATION

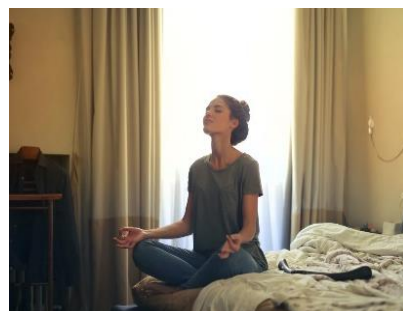
UniVenture Study

SCHW provides in-kind support to our colleagues in the Faculty of Health to promote a [study on the expansion of an evidence-based program to an online format for university students](#). The study was promoted to first and second-year students to help collect feedback on an intervention: Addressing drinking and substance misuse pilot screener.



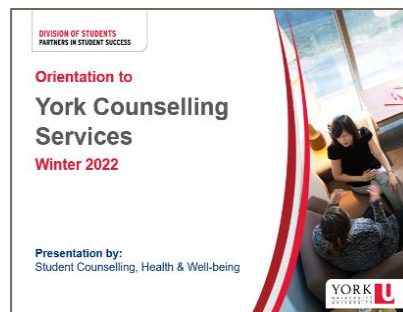
Mindful Meditation

Ongoing meditation sessions are facilitated by an SCHW counsellor for the Atkinson Centre for Mature and Part-time Students (ACMAPS) to support mature and part-time students at York University. These sessions help students to de-stress, decrease loneliness and increase positivity.



Introduction to Services:

This presentation provides an overview of counselling services on campus, SCHW's service delivery model, an introduction to the continuum of mental health, common concerns/symptoms of students, and how to refer a student, friend, or peer for support. The presentation is offered to faculty, staff, and students.



Student Initiative Fund

SCHW offers the [Mental Health and Wellness Student Initiative Fund](#) to support student groups on campus with developing innovative and inclusive student-led initiatives that promote well-being. Through the fund, students can apply for up to \$1000 in project funding.



Collaborations & Partnerships

Keepme.SAFE

SCHW continues to partner with York International to offer students free, 24/7 access to counselling and mental health supports through KeepMeSafe. Topics addressed through supports include managing stress due to financial challenges, dealing with feeling lonely or homesick, facing tensions at home, harbouring suicidal tendencies, adjusting to life in Canada, and more.

KeepMeSafe offers online resources and supports as well as a phone line to connect students to a mental health professional in their local region.



Modules on Test Anxiety

In partnership with colleagues from the Faculty of Science, modules were created to normalize the experience of academic stress. The modules covered topics such as test anxiety and its impact on students, mindfulness, and breathing.

100+ Students completed the module and short reflection.

An example of a student reflection is provided below:

"The way that Jim Salmon described stress changed my view on what my brain is telling me when I am feeling stressed."



Workshops

SCHW staff facilitate a variety of mental health and well-being workshops throughout the year based on the needs of the campus community:

- Meditation for consent week
- York International Coffee Chat
- Masculinity and Consent- Consent week
- Annual Academic Advisors' Conference
- Workshops for various student groups
- Training for Dons
- New Faculty Orientation
- LA&PS: Fundamentals of Learning

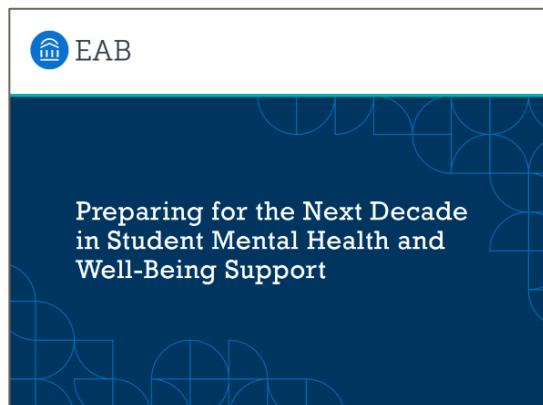


Collaborations & Partnerships

OFF-CAMPUS COLLABORATION

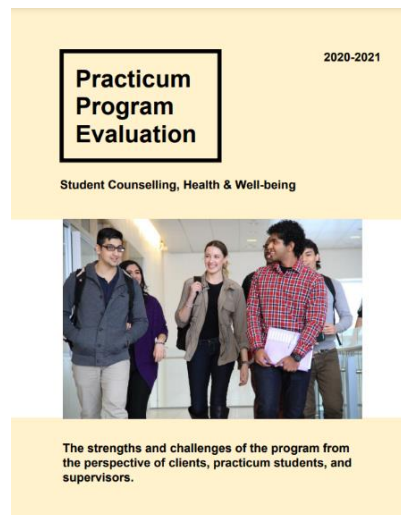
Data & Innovation in Service Delivery

SCHW has contributed to the work of the [Educational Advisory Board](#) through consultation on how data insights drive and inform strategies in student services and are used to garner support for systems change. The report will be leveraged to engage community stakeholders on developing trends, innovative tactics, and actionable strategies for leaders in higher education to consider as they think about bolstering campus mental health support across the next decade.



Sharing Evaluations & Frameworks

The evaluation of SCHW's 2020-2021 Counselling Practicum Program has been shared with the [Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#) to support evaluation capacity-building in other higher educational institutions. This program enables graduate students to bridge theory with practice, further their clinical expertise, and work towards the completion of their academic programs.



Contributions at Provincial Committees

SCHW has made contributions to the [Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee \(DVDRC\)](#), a group that assists in the review of domestic homicides that occur in the province and forms recommendations to ensure similar tragedies do not occur in the future. Recommendations from the DVDRC help to inform York community members on identifying risks, providing support to survivors, and intervening with those who encounter abuse in their intimate relationships.





Mural by Toronto artist Patrick Lightheart