



TORONTO
DROP-IN
NETWORK

WELLNESS CONFERENCE 2025



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DROP-IN
NETWORK

Thursday, November 27th
8:45am - 4:00pm

*Many thanks to our community
partners & presenters*



HOST LOCATION

*St James Cathedral Drop-In
(Snell Hall)
65 Church St.*

Photography credit to **Sage Whitworth**,
Internal Communications Officer at TNG

*This conference was made possible by our generous sponsor
City of Toronto, Shelter & Support Services*





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Who We Are

The Toronto Drop-In Network is an active coalition of drop-in centres throughout the City of Toronto that work with people who are homeless, marginally housed, or socially isolated.

Our Network includes drop-ins of all sizes, and with a diversity of philosophies that serve men, women, transgender and non-binary adults, youth, and seniors.

TDIN associate membership includes organizations that provide outreach and other allied services to people who are homeless, marginally housed, or socially isolated.

Our Vision

To work toward a socially-just Toronto which is safe, healthy, and inclusive.

Our Mission

To enhance the capacity of Toronto's network of drop-in centres to improve the quality of life of people who participate in their services.



THE TDIN TEAM



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STARTING IN A GOOD WAY: OPENING & CLOSING CEREMONY

Cat Criger, also known as *The Talking Cat*, is an Indigenous Traditional Teacher, Knowledge Keeper and Philosopher. He is from the Cayuga Nation, Turtle Clan, as well as having German and English ancestry. Cat was taught traditional ceremonies, teachings, circles, counselling, healing and plant medicines, Indigenous philosophies and pedagogies by an Anishnawbe Elder and uses these gifts to help all people. Cat has worked as an Elder and advisor for many organizations and is retired from the University of Toronto. He remains active as a guest speaker, lecturer and consultant in curriculum development, cultural competency and Indigenous perspectives of wellness.



In addition to conducting our opening and closing ceremonies, Cat was available throughout the day to provide conference participants with emotional and spiritual support as needed.

Cat also connected with Bea, who led our Land Acknowledgement, and our Emcee, Katrin prior to opening the conference to exchange gifts of tobacco and ground our hearts, minds and bodies in support of a day of co-learning and knowledge exchange.

QUOTES

from participants



“The land acknowledgement was one of the most impactful ones I’ve experienced, and realigned my perspective on the work we contribute to the community being part of our duties and responsibilities to the treaties of the land we occupy. This in conjunction with Cat’s opening ceremonies did a beautiful job of aligning everyone with the fact that we must first care and provide balance for ourselves to be able to provide it for others.”





OPENING REMARKS

“The TDIN Wellness Conference is about being in community. It’s about creating space to recharge, to learn, and to build habits that support a healthier, more balanced life—both inside and outside the workplace. It is a time to pause, to reconnect, and to invest in our collective well-being. Because we know wellness isn’t a solo journey, it thrives in community. It grows when we support one another, when we normalize rest, and when we value the whole person behind the job title.”

Melanie Joy
Executive Lead, TDIN



“I am living proof of how much drop-ins save lives, give community support, friendships, peer opportunities, and programming that enriches lives. 12 years ago, when I experienced homelessness there were very few options for me and on a wintery Sunday morning, I found myself in a drop-in that saved my life. From being a participant to being a peer worker and now a permanent paid worker at another drop-in, I am proof that success and quality of life is possible.”

Katrin Clouse
TDIN Steering Committee
& Conference Emcee



SPEAKERS & FACILITATORS

Opening & Closing Ceremony

Cat “The Talking Cat” Criger, Indigenous Elder & Educator

Emcee

Katrin Clouse, TDIN Steering Committee

Keynote Speakers

Mia Benight, *Stabilizing Well-Being on the Front Line*

Youness Robert-Tahiri, *How Humour Can Act As a Powerful Form of Resilience*

Group Activities

Stiva Sinanan, *Get Ready to Move: Turn Up The Energy*

Maura Breebison, *Art Therapy*

Breakout Sessions

Brie Mulroney, TNG: *The Corner Drop-In, Boundaries, Time Management & Self-Care for Frontline Workers*

Amy Muli & Dana Kirkcaldy, *Breakaway, Sound Bath*

Dillon Dodson, Toronto Humane Society, *Canine Connection*



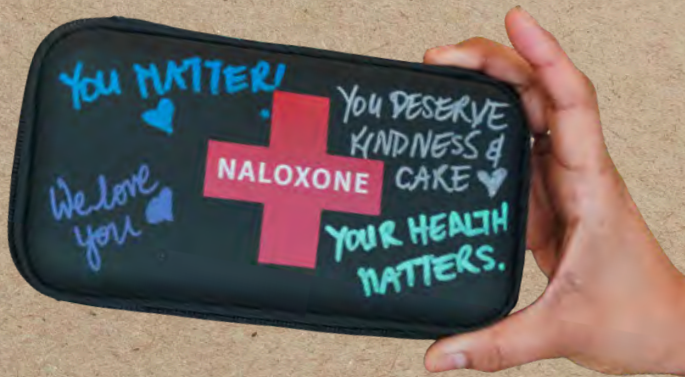


ACTIVITIES: TIP JAR & NALOXONE KITS

Participants were invited to take a moment to pause, reflect, and share what supports their own wellness. Our Tip Jar Activity served as a self-guided invitation to write down simple tips, practices, or reminders that help improve mental health and overall well-being. These could be strategies that people use to ground themselves during stressful moments, ways to recharge after a long day, or small habits that help maintain balance.

Throughout the day, participants added tips into the jar and explored what others had shared. Together, we built a collective bank of wisdom—practical, compassionate ideas that we can all draw from to support ourselves and each other in this work.

Naloxone Kits, generously donated by one of our drop-in member organizations, were available alongside art supplies for participants to decorate and keep as a token of collective community care.



"I like that they provided naloxone kits for everyone"

"The tip jar was a good opportunity to encourage people to potentially move to different tables or connect with people from different organizations."



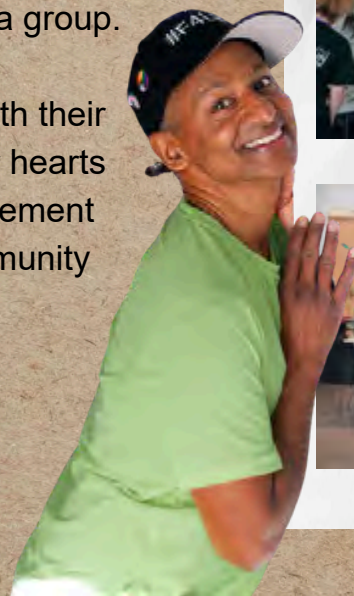


GET READY TO MOVE: TURN UP THE ENERGY

Stiva Sinanan is a highly successful fitness professional and was named one of Canada's Top fitness instructors in 2025. He uses his personal journey and platforms to inspire and uplift others, empowering them to become stronger, more confident versions of themselves. His fitness philosophy is based on the belief that movement should be accessible to all, regardless of background or ability. He is dedicated to creating an inclusive environment where individuals of all shapes, sizes, and fitness levels feel welcome and supported in their journeys.

During this activity, participants engaged in full body movement designed to be accessible for all body types and mobility levels. Participants warmed up, danced, laughed, and cooled down their bodies as a group.

This activity invited everyone to connect with their bodies, expand their minds, and open their hearts to new and creative ways of exploring movement as a means of healing, self-care, and community connection.



MOVEMENT





ART THERAPY

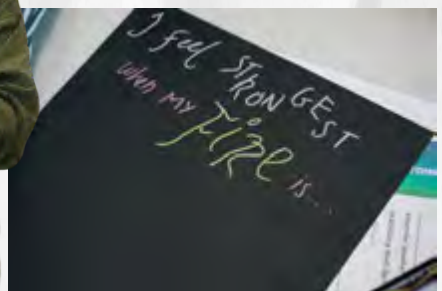
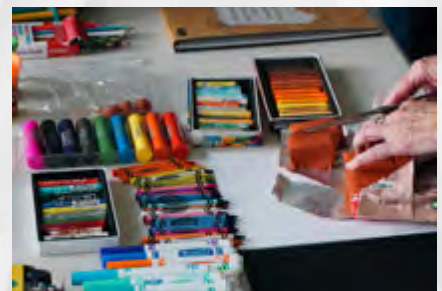
Maura Breebison is a Registered Nurse and Expressive Arts Psychotherapist who believes that both emotional and physical stress can be gently released through creative, tactile engagement and mindful movement. The approach may include the calming, flowing movements of Qigong or the grounding, tension-releasing experience of shaping clay or fabric.

Maura offers a supportive and non-judgmental space where art is never critiqued, only encouraged. For anyone who wished to connect individually, Maura offered everyone at the conference with the opportunity for one-on-one conversations after the workshop or at a later time, at no additional cost.

Participants were invited to explore freely with provided materials such as paint, pastels, and markers - choosing what feels right in the moment. Participants expressed themselves through poetry and storytelling, integrating words with visual art and sharing with the larger group.



CREATIVE EXPRESSION





KEY STABILIZING WELL-BEING ON THE FRONT LINE

Mia Benight is an experienced crisis intervention and case management professional focused on dignified, client-centered responses to mental health, substance use, disability, and homelessness. Working across Toronto and Ontario, she combines program implementation experience and lived expertise to advance restorative, culturally responsive care aligned with provincial crisis-intervention and prevention standards.

Stabilizing Well-Being on the Front Line (while staying connected) is a grounded, general talk drawn from Mia's clinical practice and lived experience. It spotlights the link between worker well-being and staying connected to our purpose as frontline providers. Highlighting our inherent strength and collective well-being. Through this engaging conversation, participants were invited to reflect on their own lived experiences and places where they intersect and show up in their work on the frontline.

INVITATION to REFLECT





HOW HUMOUR CAN ACT AS A POWERFUL FORM OF RESILIENCE

Youness Robert-Tahiri is an award-winning psychology researcher and comedian who turned his lived experience of childhood adversity and homelessness into the foundation for HaHaHelps — a comedy-based mental health program designed to build resilience among youth facing adversity.

Drawing from his own journey through homelessness and recovery, Youness explores how humour can act as a powerful form of resilience for frontline shelter and drop-in workers facing compassion fatigue and burnout. Through personal stories, practical tools, and (hopefully) laughter, this session invited participants to reframe humour as a survival strategy - one that is aimed at supporting staff to stay human in an often inhumane system.



QUOTES

“It was informative. I loved Youness' presentation.”



“Loved Youness' address. Having powerful speakers with lived experience also share how to relieve stress when supporting others is powerful. We need to be connected to provide support and want to be there for our community, but learning how to defend from and cope with trauma transfer is powerful.”



BREAKOUT SESSIONS

The conference featured three breakout sessions that were all lead by TDIN members. **Amy Muli & Dana Kirkcaldy** from **Breakaway Drop-In** facilitated a sound bath, **Brie Mulroney** from **The Neighbourhood Group's Corner Drop-In** facilitated a discussion on Boundaries, Time Management & Self-Care for Frontline Workers; and one of TDIN's Associate members, **Toronto Humane Society**, facilitated **Canine Connection** sessions.

During the day, **Dillon Dodson**, Director of Social Work at the **Toronto Humane Society**, was called away for an urgent community response for encampment support. Dillon's team was able to swiftly reorganize their session with us while also providing urgent community care support to unhoused people to find shelter for their animals. This speaks deeply to the greater community coordination that the TDIN network fosters. Our network, both drop-ins and associate members, work tirelessly to foster a socially-just Toronto which is safe, healthy, and inclusive for all.

These breakout sessions, facilitated by frontline workers for frontline workers, provided space for conversations and practical responses to daily work issues and concerns, that participants expressed (in post event survey responses):

"Grief therapy";

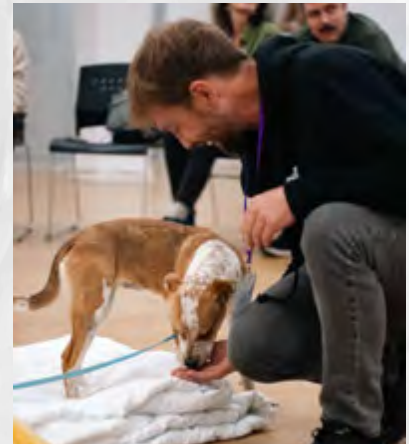
"how to handle violent clients";

"staff understanding connection with values/beliefs and social justice, supports on social work versus caring (like you don't have to be a social worker to care or support people)".

QUOTES

from participants

"DOGS!!!!"!



"The canine connection, it made me realize how much I miss it, and how important it is for grounding."





VENUE & CATERING

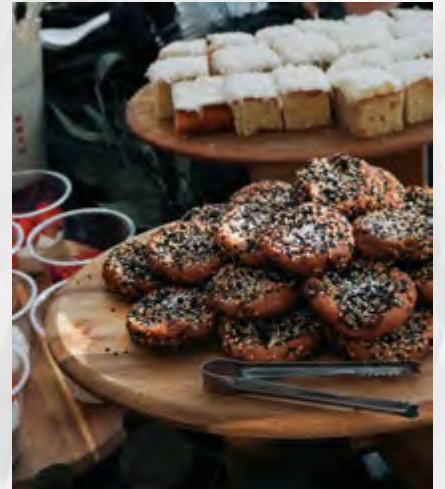
The TDIN Wellness Conference was hosted by the **St. James Cathedral Drop-In**, an avid TDIN member. We spent a beautiful day in their Snell Hall event venue and shared a light breakfast to start our time together.

Chau Toronto catered our event and provided us with delicious, culturally and dietarily responsive lunch and snacks.

We had two incredible volunteers from the service industry who reached out to us and wanted to be a part of TDIN's community work in any way that they could. This generosity speaks volumes to the far reach of our work that extends beyond the drop-in community.



NOURISHMENT





FINANCIAL REPORTING

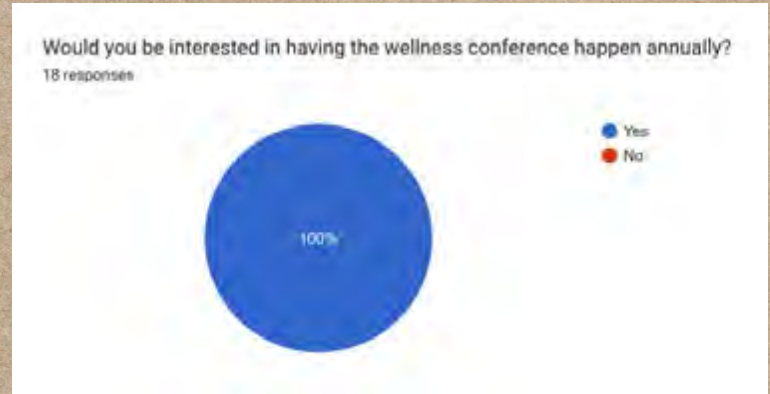
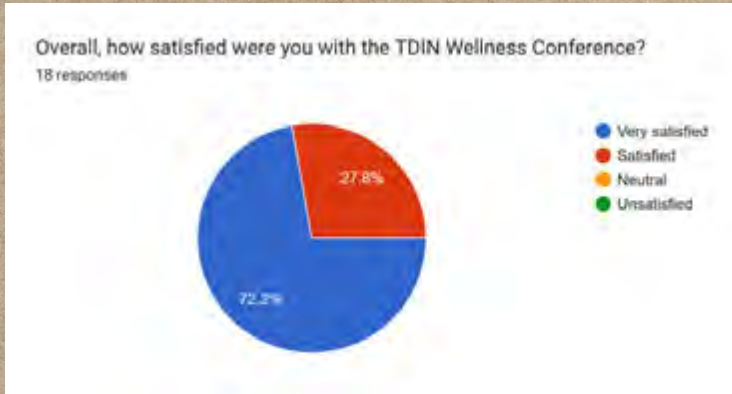
TDIN is grateful to **Michelle, Trecia, Brad** and their team at the City of Toronto, for creating this funding opportunity to support drop-in front-line worker wellness.

Below is a breakdown of the Project Expenditures for the Toronto Drop-In Network's 2025 Wellness Conference.

TORONTO SHELTER AND SUPPORT SERVICES		
Project Expenditures		
Project Name:	Project Number:	
Toronto Drop-In Network Staff Wellness Conference		
EXPENDITURES		
PROJECT EXPENSES	DESCRIPTION	TOTAL
Food & Beverage	Breakfast, Lunch, Snack, Coffee & Tea	3,481
Venue	St. James Cathedral Event Space	1,000
Honoraria	Staffing Support (Dillon, Kat, Joey, Brooke)	1,706
Key Note Speakers	Mia Benight & Youness Robert-Tahiri	1,000
Group Activity Facilitators	Body Movement & Art Therapy	700
Opening & Closing Ceremonies	Cat Criger, Indigenous Elder	800
Supplies/Materials	Printing, Art Supplies, Banner, Attendee Giveaway, Door Prizes	3,296
Transportation	Uber x2	53
	PROJECT EXPENSES TOTAL	12,036
Please submit Project Expenditures and suitable backup documentation no later than December 31, 2025.		



POST EVENT EVALUATION SURVEY



We used feedback from last year's conference to inform the intentional design of the conference this year. The top three highlights for people were the collective movement, use of humour, and the opening/closing ceremony. We'd like to measure our success by sharing the feedback we received from the conference participants this year, in their own voices:

WHAT DID YOU LIKE THE MOST ABOUT THE CONFERENCE?

"Feeling part of the Drop-In network community and addressing common issues we face. I learned so many things that I can immediately put into practice. Also, I especially enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere throughout the conference."

"Well organized"

"Hearing individuals share their stories"

"TDIN did a great job at the conference, continue to offer diverse activities"

"This conference was so thoughtfully curated and I am so grateful for the care put together for TDIN workers. Thank you."

"TDIN is such a great resource. Thank you for all that you do!!"

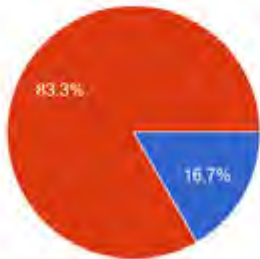
"Great event! It was a great experience with a variety of individuals from various lived experiences."



POST EVENT EVALUATION SURVEY

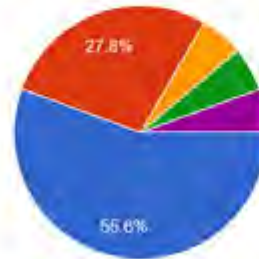
Have you attended a TDIN conference before?

18 responses



What is your current role?

18 responses



- Frontline worker (e.g. Drop-in worker, Peer Worker, Case Manager, Housing Worker, Relief/On-Call Staff)
- Management (e.g. Senior Leadership, Manager, Program Coordinator, Supervisor)
- Frontline worker (e.g. Drop-in worker, Peer Worker, Case Manager / Housing Worker, Relief/On-Call Staff)
- I spend a lot of weekly time with service users and de-escalating incidents in the community
- Trainee

WHAT COULD TDIN DO TO IMPROVE FUTURE CONFERENCES?

“More networking/mingling”

“Some more structured opportunities for networking.”

WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORTS OR RESOURCES WOULD BETTER SUPPORT YOUR WELLNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUR FRONTLINE ROLE?

“Maybe having bi-monthly or quarterly sessions for frontline staff to connect and discuss mental wellness and share info with each other regarding mental wellness”

“Better skills and strategies to support break times and quiet time (including away for other team members/staff). Unplugging from the job and work phone more intentionally.”

“Fair Compensation and Benefits”

“Continue to offer therapeutic activities such as canine connection and sound baths”

“Wellness rooms, or spaces designed for decompression.”

“Availability of a psychotherapist”

“1 on 1 counselling with an individual who is knowledgeable on being a drop-in worker or working frontline”



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the City of Toronto, Shelter & Support Services for providing the funding that made this conference possible.

We continue to work with the City of Toronto and our network member organizations toward our shared goal of a socially-just Toronto which is safe, healthy and inclusive for all.



We would also like to acknowledge the partner organizations that contributed their knowledge, passion and expertise to ensure that conference participants enjoyed a day of wellness and appreciation for the critically important work they do.



CONNECTION

