

HARM REDUCTION CONFERENCE 2023

THRIVING TOGETHER: Building Stronger
Helper Communities



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2023
Italian Cultural Centre
Thunder Bay, Ontario



Presented by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit with
the support of the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy



HARM REDUCTION CONFERENCE 2023

THRIVING **Building Stronger** TOGETHER: **Helper Communities**

All sessions are EST

Wednesday, October 25

07:00 pm - 09:00 pm	Cracked Up: The Darrell Hammond Story	Facilitated Q&A with Director Michelle Esrick
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Thursday, October 26

08:30 am - 09:00 am	Opening Remarks & Land Acknowledgement	Dr. Janet DeMille, Medical Officer of Health & CEO, Thunder Bay District Health Unit Ron Kanutski, MC
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09:00 am - 10:30 am	The Awkwardness of Grief	Tara McGuire, Author
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10:30 am - 10:45 am	Break	
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10:45 am - 12:15 pm	Understanding a Compassionate Practice That Allows us to Care Without Hurting You or the Ones You Care For	Shawn Fisk, CAPSA
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12:15 pm - 01:00 pm	Lunch	
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01:00 pm - 02:15 pm	Normalizing Asking for Help Panel & Q&A	Sharon Bak, Boots on the Ground Jeff Elvish, Thunder Bay Police Lindsay Martin, Elizabeth Fry Society NWO, Jennifer Roukkula, Ontario Provincial Police
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02:15 pm - 02:30 pm	Break	
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02:30 pm - 04:00 pm	Self-Care and Collective Care: Lessons Learned from the Swampland of the Soul	Yvette Perreault, Good Grief Care Consultants
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04:00 pm - 04:30 pm	Wrap-up & Closing Remarks	Cynthia Olsen, City of Thunder Bay Kandace Belanger, Thunder Bay District Health Unit MC Ron Kanutski
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Session Summaries, Speaker and Panelist Bios

Session summaries are presented in chronological order based on the agenda. The summaries are followed by an alphabetical listing of speaker biographies and panelist biographies, respectively.

Master of Ceremonies **RON KANUTSKI**

Ron Kanutski is a registered social worker and mental health, addictions and cultural workshop facilitator and trainer with 31 years of experience in the helping profession. He has been sober and drug free for over 3 decades. For the past 22 years, Ron has been a consultant, educator and presenter of Anishnawbe cultural and traditions for events related to addictions, mental health and wellness. He has been married for 24 years and is a caregiver, father and support to 25 children and youth. .





The Awkwardness of Grief

Thurs. Oct. 26

9 - 10:30 am

TARA MCGUIRE
Author

"Holden After & Before -
Love Letter for a Son
Lost to Overdose"

When Tara McGuire's twenty-one-year-old son Holden died of an overdose in 2015, she had zero experience with close death. She was wildly unprepared for the cataclysmic blows to her psyche, her body, her relationships, and her life. Nobody around her seemed to know what to do either. Everyone was heartbroken, shocked, overwhelmed, and confused. Her family, friends, and even doctors and therapists stumbled around in the dark, trying to help, sometimes successfully, while often making uncomfortable and painful mistakes.

Through trial and error, Tara has learned many valuable truths about the intricacies of sudden and deep sorrow and how to best care for the multiple layers of herself, her family, and the community around her. Loss is inevitable. Everyone dies. Why aren't we, as a society, more prepared? Tara will share her personal story and some of the most impactful healing tools she has collected during eight long years of missing her son.



Understanding a Compassionate Practice That Allows us to Care Without Hurting You or the Ones You Care For

Thurs. Oct. 26

10:45 am - 12:15 pm

SHAWN FISK

Community Addictions Peer
Support Association (CAPSA)



Grounding ourselves and our work in a compassionate practice. Caring is the feeling that brings us to the work and a compassionate practice is the skill to keep us healthy doing it. This presentation will examine the challenges and the many lessons learned to date. The presentation will also provide some practical tools to build skills and resilience. The foundation of the presentation is set in its starting point: "That right up until now we have all done the best we could do, and we only wish to learn from our and others' experiences, not judge them, our ourselves.



Session Summaries



SHARON BAK
Boots on the Ground



Normalizing Asking for Help - Panel and Q&A

Thurs. Oct. 26
1 pm - 2:15 pm

Normalizing asking for help among professionals in caring professions is essential as it promotes worker well-being, ensures quality care for clients or patients, and helps prevent burnout.

In this panel discussion, we will explore the importance of destigmatizing help-seeking behaviours and creating a supportive culture of care within the workplace.



CONST. JEFF ELVISH
Thunder Bay Police Service



LINDSAY MARTIN
Elizabeth Fry Society NWO



JENNIFER ROUKKULA
Ontario Provincial Police





Self Care & Collective Care: Lessons Learned from the Swampland of the Soul

Thurs. Oct. 26

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

YVETTE PERREAULT

Good Grief Care Consultants



Holding steady in our work – and in our lives – reflects both individual and collective resilience. This session will look at the ways grief and traumatic loss are inherent in our work and for some of us, in our lives these days. We will look at how loss manifests in this work- from the deaths of people, to uncertainties in our practices given current socio-political climates. We will reflect on the practice of creating personal emotional and psychological harm reduction strategies to sustain our well-being.

How does collective resilience emerge as we find ways to make-meaning of our experiences in this work- alone and in community? Intention for the session: to strengthen connections. This workshop will support individuals in connecting more deeply with themselves and with one another as we reflect on both stressors and resilience in the work.



Speaker Biographies



Shawn Fisk

Informed by lived, living, and professional expertise, Shawn is a passionate educator, clinician, facilitator, and public speaker. As a subject matter expert, who speaks from the service provider and living wisdom perspectives, Shawn provides guidance and training in systems stigma navigation, person-first language, Substance Use Health, mental health, self-determination, compassion and allyship.



Tara McGuire

Tara is a former broadcaster, now writer whose first book "Holden After & Before - Love Letter for a Son Lost to Overdose", a hybrid work in memoir and fiction exploring grief, motherhood, and the overdose crisis, was published by Arsenal Pulp Press in the fall of 2022. "Holden" became a non-fiction bestseller and was recognized by The Walrus as one of the favourite books of 2022, as chosen by other Canadian authors. Her essays have appeared or are forthcoming in Chatelaine, The Globe and Mail, Geist, Room, Montecristo, The Tye, CBC Radio and in the anthology Always With Me - Parents Talk about the Death of a Child. She holds an MFA from the University of British Columbia's School of Creative Writing and is a graduate of The Writers Studio at Simon Fraser University. Tara lives under the tall trees of North Vancouver, BC. Follow her on Insta: @TaraMcGuire and Twitter: @TaraJMcGuire



Yvette Perreault

Yvette is Team Lead for Good Grief Care Consultants, a diverse team that provides accessible, relevant traumatic grief supports to front line workers and their managers in the not-for-profit sector. (www.goodgriefcare.ca). She has decades of experience as both a community activist and counsellor in the HIV/AIDS sector during the years of ongoing deaths and community devastation. From there, she co-founded a provincial organization to mitigate the impact of these losses: the AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario.

Yvette comes with an educational background in death and dying studies, traumatology certification, management in the not-for-profit sector, as well as a degree in Leadership and Training. Author of "When Grief Comes to Work: Managing Grief and Loss in the Workplace"

Semi-retired now, Yvette works part time as the Traumatic Grief Specialist for the Enrichment Centre for Mental Health in Belleville and continues to support front line Harm Reduction workers in Ontario.



Panelist Biographies



Sharon Bak

Sharon lives in beautiful Northwestern Ontario, was raised in Pass Lake, and currently resides in the City of Thunder Bay. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and a diploma in Social Service Work. She has spent twenty years supporting individuals with various needs and their families in both the social work and emergency management fields. She is an avid volunteer with many local and provincial organizations that support those with mental health issues and other vulnerabilities.



In 2019 Sharon took on the volunteer role of Northwestern Operations Manager for Boots on the Ground, a 24/7 peer support service for first responders. In 2021 Sharon was recognized as a Champion of Mental Health by the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment. One of Sharon's many passions is her work to promote education and awareness regarding mental illness and thereby remove the stigma and misunderstanding that often surrounds it. For over forty years she has waged a personal battle to overcome the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Complex PTSD, Major Depressive Disorder, Anxiety, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. During her career in social services, Sharon also witnessed the effects of trauma with the many clients she supported on their paths to overcome issues such as addiction, homelessness, abuse, and violence.



Jeff Elvish

I have been with the City of Thunder Bay Police since June 14, 1993. I just finished my 30th year in June of this year. I have worked in uniform patrol for most of my career, but have also been a K9 handler, Emergency Task Unit member, a detective in Criminal Investigations, and since January of 2023 the Peer Support Coordinator. In 2018, I was diagnosed with PTSD, as well as alcohol abuse disorder after being actively suicidal and spending 2 weeks in adult mental health. Eight weeks in the Homewood Health Science Centre in Guelph put me on a road to wellness. With my incredible wife Laura by my side, and sometimes behind to catch me, I navigate through the bumps in the road ahead. It's not always easy, and I sometimes stumble and fall, but I pick myself up, as we move ahead.



My passion is to use my experience so that nobody follows the same path I took. I bring that passion to my Peer Support Role, and let people know that sometimes, it's ok to not be ok. And more importantly, to ask for help.



Panelist Biographies



Lindsay Martin

Lindsay Martin (They/Them/Its) is the Current President of CEFSO (Council of Elizabeth Fry Society of Ontario) and The Executive Director and Systemic Advocate of Elizabeth Fry Society of Northwestern Ontario. They have been working in the homelessness sector for 16 years and supporting individuals in the criminal justice sector for over 8 years.

As a provincial and regional spokesperson they have been working on solutions to address systemic barriers for women and gender diverse individuals with the ultimate goal of inclusion, equity and decarceration. They are passionate about being a Disrupter, Systems Changer and Advocate to help create initiatives that strengthen the true meaning of community.



Jennifer Roukkula

Jennifer (she/her) is a Mental Health Clinician with the OPP Healthy Workplace Team providing support to OPP members, auxiliaries, retirees and their families. Prior to this, Jennifer was employed by the Ministry of the Solicitor General for 22 years working as a front line social worker providing support, counselling and programming to men, women and youth in custody. She took on many different roles including as a CISM Team Regional Lead, Crisis Negotiator, Mediator, and Regional Recruiter. As an active Union member, she was involved in human rights, accommodation and equity work.

healthy workplace team

In her outside work life, Jenn is an aspiring potter and enjoys time pattering around in the kitchen and the yard with her partner.

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