



Workplace Mental Health in Canada's Nonprofit Sector: It's Time for a Check Up

Mary Barroll: Welcome to Charity Village Connects, I'm your host Mary Barroll.

(SFX: Hummingbird flying and tone)

Mary Barroll: That's the sound of a hummingbird pollinating our world and making it a better place. The hummingbird is Charity Village's logo, because we strive, like the industrious hummingbird to make connections across the non-profit sector and help make positive change. Over this series of podcasts, we'll explore topics that are vital to the non-profit sector in Canada. Topics like diversity, equity and inclusion, mental health in the workplace, the gap in female representation in leadership and many other subjects crucial to the sector. We'll offer insight that will help you make sense of your life as a non-profit professional, make connections to help navigate challenges and support your organization to deliver on its mission.

Transition music

Mary: In this episode...

(news clips – workplace mental health)

BNN "Workplace burnout" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcWX_XpEUHo

In: (3:45) "We're seeing more people...all exhausted." Out: (3:59)

CTV <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYgDkDNslus>

In: (0:13) "The hashtag quiet quitting...outside office hours." Out: (0:30)

CBC news <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTjd4myV7BQ>

In: (0:06) "When burnout set in...make the change." Out: (0:28)

Mary Barroll: When many COVID-19 restrictions began being lifted last year, any hopes of a return to "normalcy" – that is, our pre-pandemic lives – were met with stark warnings from experts that the post-pandemic world could be disrupted permanently. A vivid illustration of this sobering assessment, perhaps, is the ongoing issue of workplace mental health. Fatigue, burnout, anxiety and depression continue to plague workers in almost every industry, including the non-profit sector. Trends like "quiet quitting" and the "Great Resignation" have resulted from many short-staffed organizations placing an



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even greater burden on already-stretched employees. And the hopes for a brighter, less stressful future of work-from-home or hybrid workplaces have come up against the uncertainties of whether organizations will make these options permanent or not. To be clear, workplace mental health is not a new issue in the nonprofit sector, but the pandemic has highlighted growing cracks that were already forming pre-pandemic. One year after we first covered this issue on CharityVillage Connects, we are back with a wellness check up on the sector. How are non-profits faring today, what's changed since last year, and, perhaps most importantly, what practical steps can sector leaders implement right now to better support the mental health and wellbeing of their staff and volunteers?

Paula Allen: When we have any kind of crisis like we did over the pandemic, your priorities become a lot clearer. What is important becomes a lot clearer. And people realized, I think, their vulnerability in terms of their mental health and wellbeing. So people are looking at employers in terms of, you know, is this a place where I'm going to have harm?

Caroline Kealey: I think, realistically, everyone has experienced such profound trauma and turbulence caused by the disorientation of the pandemic that this has caused us to be basically bathing in anxiety. And you get this sense that we're in a fight flight or freeze mode, which of course is very much transferring into the workplace.

Steve Lurie: I'd say that we are in a similar space. Uh, I think to some degree some of the issues that we encountered during COVID may have actually gotten worse. We hear anecdotally of many workplaces, particularly in the health and social care sectors, who are really struggling around retention of staff and avoiding burnout.

Rensia Melles: So there's a lot of these myths that are being shattered, but that's really disrupted the relationship with managers, their ability to kind of control their employees and have that as a community of work. So they're kind of falling back a lot on the disciplinary thing.



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Dr. Luke Schneider: Historically there has been a bit of a stigma around saying, I'm struggling. I need help. If leadership can show up and say, this is an issue, there's nothing wrong with getting help.

Transition music

Don Shafer: Last December, the TELUS Health Mental Health Index found that the mental health of working Canadians had improved modestly, and yet remained at a level only slightly higher than the most challenging period of the pandemic. The monthly report, formerly known as the Lifeworks Mental Health Index, discovered that 32% of Canadians have a high mental health risk, while 43% have a moderate mental health risk. The Maritime provinces recorded the lowest mental health score while Manitoba had the highest. Newfoundland and Labrador saw a 2.3-point improvement in mental health following three months of declines. The Index also noted that Canadian workers consider many factors when choosing an employer, with well-being at the forefront. More specifically, 34% of Canadians indicate that health and well-being benefits and services are the most important factor when choosing an employer. In addition to flexibility and types of work, Canadians also cited an organization's reputation for positive workplace culture, diversity and inclusion, and socially conscious practices as the most important factors when choosing an employer.

Mary Barroll: We begin our second workplace mental health checkup with Paula Allen, Global Leader, Research and Total Wellbeing and a Senior Vice-President with TELUS Health, publishers of the Mental Health Index you just heard about. Telus Health provides support to organizations in the form of financial and counseling services, and by helping people transition back to work after they've been away due to illness or injury. Their key service, however, is supporting mental health. I asked Paula Allen if we're in a different space than we were a year ago, when this podcast first tackled the issue of workplace mental health in the nonprofit sector.

Paula Allen: We're in a slightly different space. If we even roll back to when we started this pandemic, which was a big impact on our collective mental health, uh, right at the very beginning, we had a lot of crisis. I mean, everything was disrupted, uh, change on a constant basis, uh, a lot of fear, a lot of risk. And what we found is that people moved to a higher level of risk. So those who were in a very difficult place actually went into crisis. People who had moderate mental health risks moved into a high-risk



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category. Um, that was really what we saw. And that has continued, you know, you don't just move into a high-risk place and immediately flip out, particularly since we have been going through ongoing strain, and then we started to see, uh, a lot of unhealthy coping behaviors.

So, for example, we are four times more likely to have people in the working population engage in risky drinking behavior. Right now, we're past the worst of the pandemic. We're not completely out yet, um, but we're on edge. After over two years of this upheaval, people are a little bit more sensitive to stress. We see more anger, we see a little bit more cynicism. We're definitely not back to the way we were, the way we were wasn't perfect, but we're still in a very compromised place.

Mary Barroll: In its most recent index, published last December, Telus Health reported some important insights regarding mental health and diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace. I asked Paula Allen about these findings, and what they could mean for non-profit sector employers.

Paula Allen: One thing is absolutely certain, is that there is significant overlap between diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. And, uh, a mentally healthy environment, the words, inclusion, equity, belonging, are all things that impact mental health. And, and what we find is that certain groups, racialized groups, certain ethnic groups, people, uh, with various, sexual orientations, their mental health is actually lower in terms of the score overall. So it doesn't mean that people aren't functioning and doing their job, but they're doing so with burden. A lot of our mental health and wellbeing is impacted by our environment. So we wanted to really understand that environment. We asked questions of the entire population, and we found that, um, people in different diverse groups had more negative experiences, including people who have identified disabilities. So more likely to be overlooked, more likely to be interrupted, the things that actually add strain and, and diminish you. So that was some insight into what's happening in the workplace, conscious or unconscious. And really we validated the correlation with people's mental health.

Mary Barroll: Also published last December was an article by Caroline Kealey, an internationally recognized expert in change leadership and communications. In the piece, she focuses on organizations struggling with the disruptions of a three-year-long pandemic, especially when it comes to cutting



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through the noise of the attention economy. Caroline calls this struggle one of the paradoxes of our times, which perhaps explains the somewhat colourful title she gave her article.

Caroline Kealey: This is a piece called WTF Is Going On, which seemed to have gone viral because many people seem to relate to just the weirdness in the air that I was trying to put my finger on. So I started off exactly as you indicate talking about paradox because it struck me as so intriguing that on the one hand, for example, people would say that they're exhausted, and yet we're having trouble sleeping in record numbers. Folks are really craving, connection, wanna go out. But on the other hand, when you get social gatherings, you notice people are quick to wanna go home and go back to our safe cocoons. On the one hand, travel and concerts are hitting record numbers, but on the other hand, many people feel concerned and unsafe about going back to the workplace. And so I just thought it was an interesting way to try to frame some of the ambiguity and turbulence we're all experiencing.

Mary Barroll: In that same article, Caroline Kealey writes about three specific challenges -- psychological, social and technological -- that are disproportionately impacting both our home and work lives.

Caroline Kealey: I'm certainly not a mental health practitioner, but I am, uh, a practitioner working in organizational change and leadership and communication. So that's sort of the lens that I look at some of these things on. And yes, I'd identify three main buckets of challenges that we're facing. So the first is psychological. I think realistically, everyone has experienced such profound trauma and turbulence caused by the disorientation of the pandemic that this has caused us to be basically bathing in anxiety. And you get this sense that we're in a fight flight or freeze mode, which of course is very much transferring into the workplace where you've got stressed out, fatigued, overloaded people bumping up against each other in all kinds of ways, which we're seeing experiencing in, uh, issues like burnout and, uh, organizational conflict socially by extension. We've also got this, this feeling of being unmoored, and we've sort of lost the basic parameters and guideposts in our life when you think about it, even basic things like what is a school?

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What is a church? What is work? All of these things have sort of vaporized and are being reimagined in ways that we haven't yet quite caught up to socially. I think the technological aspect is quite interesting, and if anything becomes an accelerator of the first two, uh, which is that we are in what has often been called the hyperactive hive mind. It's the most information saturated era in the history of mankind. And again, our brains have just not adapted to this onslaught and bombardment of information. And so we have a feeling that a red dot on our phone is commanding our attention constantly.

People are having difficulty concentrating and really doing the kind of deep work that many of us crave in terms of having a satisfying experience, uh, at work, particularly, uh, among our not-for-profit clients who have a real sense of purpose and mission in the work that they're doing, and yet find that they're just struggling to do what their heart wants them to be able to do. Uh, which I think is really explained at that sort of psychological social and technology aspect as opposed to being an individual failing.

Transition music

(News clips from early 2022 – impact of pandemic)

CBC: <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2012086851548>

In: (0:18) "It's kind of like a...when the pandemic began." Out: (0:39)

Fox <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTufVLu460I>

In: (0:09) "after two years of dealing with...often goes unmanaged." Out: (0:29)

Global News <https://globalnews.ca/video/8403781/workplace-mental-health/>

In: (00:28) "we really need...humanity around us." Out: (00:32)

Don Shafer: After COVID-19 hit Canada in early 2020, it quickly became clear that the nonprofit sector was in a particularly vulnerable position. Major in-person fundraising events all but disappeared, and donors' attention was drawn away from charitable activities by one gloomy headline after another. And whereas private sector companies had the resources to pivot in this dramatically changed landscape, many non-profits found themselves hampered by their lack of investment in new technologies. By the second full year of the pandemic, when this podcast first checked in on mental health in the sector, the challenges had expanded to include the chronic mental health issues nonprofit professionals were facing. Words like burnout, isolation and depression were top of mind, and many sector workers joined



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their colleagues from other industries in heading to the exits as part of what became known as the Great Resignation.

Mary Barroll: To capture a more detailed picture of what's changed – and what hasn't -- since we last explored workplace mental health, I reconnected with a guest who appeared on our podcast one year ago. Steve Lurie is the former Executive Director of the Canadian Mental Health Association's Toronto Branch. I was curious to know if he thought we are in a different mental health space than we were a year ago.

Steve Lurie: I'd say that we are in a similar space. Uh, I think to some degree some of the issues that we encountered during COVID may have actually gotten worse. We hear anecdotally of many workplaces, particularly in the health and social care sectors who are really struggling around retention of staff and avoiding burnout. I think that's offset by the convenience factor that people have learned and benefited, uh, by being able to provide some services virtually. But I think the sector is still struggling, um, to provide the services they did pre pandemic, uh, and adjust to new ways of working.

I think what happened is that the workplaces are actually struggling even more because it's a triple threat. You've got the flu rates, they're starting to tail off now, but that plus COVID. And then, anecdotally, I've heard that, um, particularly people working with seniors in the long-term care sector, there's a lot of COVID infection going around. So, I think, um, people's reserves have been challenged because, um, when COVID hit initially three years ago, I remember, um, being parts of teleconferences with colleagues saying, well, it's only gonna last 12 weeks.

I don't want to, uh, depress your listeners, but it may be with us according to epidemiologists for many, many years to come. So not 12 weeks, maybe 12 years. And so the issue is how do you adjust to that? And I think the many workplaces have struggled because if, if they were short of staff, um, last year, let's say now, they might even be shorter, more short staffed.

And then the question is, h where do you find the time to do sort of the team building exercise, the resilience piece that fosters workplace because you actually have more pressure to keep staff on the road providing services? I think people are now more conscious of what are some of the things they need to do.



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I remember reviewing some of the material from last year, and many of the things we've talked about, in this podcast in last year's are still factors, the recruitment piece is, is a continuing challenge, keeping people present in the workplace. We knew prior to COVID that presenteeism was, was an issue, uh, in the workplace because people were worried about things like aging relatives, uh, uh, their kids, uh, the status of their personal relationships.

And that often took away from their ability to focus. So if anything, I suspect, uh, things have, gotten tougher, and then the question is, uh, I think more people are probably in the space of saying, well, when is this going to end?

Mary Barroll: An aspect of mental health Steve Lurie and I discussed one year ago was “radical acceptance,” a distress tolerance skill based on accepting life on its own terms, and not fighting what you cannot change, or choose not to change. For our return conversation, I asked him to revisit “radical acceptance,” and talk about how individuals and organizations can foster this skill within the workplace.

Steve Lurie: The psychologist who developed this approach said, there are things that you just have to recognize you can't change them. And so how do you deal with it? And so this, I think, needs to be a conversation that we have about understanding, like, we now live in an era where for the foreseeable future, for every fall and winter and even in the good weather seasons, there is gonna be the risk of COVID and other respiratory illness that have the potential, uh, to, uh, decimate a workforce. So it's one thing to say, geez, I wish this was over, but it's another thing to say, look, this is the environment we're living in.

The notion behind radical acceptance is understanding there are just things beyond your control. So then it's the question of, okay, what are the things my organization can do to keep staff safe? So vaccinations, masks, you know, and obviously mask mandates are contentious.

So even if organizations don't want to mandate that stuff, even saying, Hey, staff, you should consider this, we will continue to make connections and give you time off if you, uh, need to go get your COVID vaccinations or your flu shots, or we'll organize clinics, uh, there will always be a supply of PPE and masks for you, and we would encourage you to do what you need to do to keep yourself safe. That, I



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think, creates some space for people to say, well, hey, my employer cares about my physical health and my mental health due to the stress of living in a COVID environment. There are instrumental things they are doing. Um, I mean, the other thing too, and we saw evidence of this during COVID, is, you know, flexibility about, um, uh, time off to take care of ill family members and things like that.

Transition

(news items – mental health in the workplace)

Global news: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59OVXotZ5uA>

In: (0:33) As cases of COVID...resilient among us." Out: (0:47)

Global News: <https://globalnews.ca/video/rd/72043372-42b0-11ea-b781-0242ac110003/?iwsourc=c>

In: (0:00) "We are getting a sense of...personal well-being." Out: (00:17)

Don Shafer: Citing a recent study of workers conducted across 10 countries, Forbes notes that 69% of people surveyed said their managers had the greatest impact on their mental health. That's more than the impact of their primary healthcare professional or therapist. The study also found that large numbers of workers are affected by stress, with 43% of employees reporting they are exhausted, and 78% saying stress is negatively impacting their performance at work. The Forbes article also highlights several key areas that workplace leadership should focus on, including managing their own workload, recognizing their personal impact on others' wellbeing, and reminding team members about how their contributions are valued and make a difference to the organization's vision and mission.

Mary Barroll: With reports of workplace stress and burnout dominating the news, are organizations adopting new ways of managing workplace mental health – such as embracing hybrid, flexible work hours or work-from-home options -- or is leadership falling back on pre-pandemic solutions that weren't even effective back then? I put this question to another guest who first appeared on our podcast one year ago, Rensia Melles. She's the founder of Integral Workplace Health, and a certified Psychological Health and Safety advisor with over 20 years of experience managing and designing international employee support programs to fortune500 employers and nonprofit organizations..

Rensia Melles: We see that in the news, right? Where we see like, oh, CEO so and so has ordered everybody back to the office and this, that, and so, yeah. So I think what's happening, and this is what



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people do when there's disruption, they try and go back to what they know and what was previously working for them. So what you find is that a lot of organizations are trying to go back to disciplinary authoritarian way of, do it our way. This is what we need, and you're beholden to us and must do it the way that we want you to do it. Um, even though a lot of the myths are being shattered, it's being proven, people are equally productive at home as they are in the workplace, and in many cases actually more productive.

So there's a lot of these myths that are being shattered, but that's really disrupted the relationship with managers, their ability to kind of control their employees and have that as a community of work. So they're kind of falling back a lot on the disciplinary thing. And when you're talking about new solutions, it's not new solutions, Mary, it's new opportunities to put in solutions that were always there, you know, engagement, what brings people engagement, soft skills care, listening and involving people, giving them autonomy, giving them respect, taking care of them, having their back. These are not new ideas. Um, and that has really come to the foreground. And so we're, in my mind, we're really at an amazing tipping point, in crossroads where, because everything has been so disrupted and we really don't have, um, a mold yet, we can create the mold. And if you've got a good employer and a creative employer, they can create a new mold for how the workplace, you know, relates to its employees.

Mary Barroll: In terms of employee wellbeing, Rensia Melles says there is no returning to “normal” for management. No path back to doing things the way they used to be done. And employers who try to return to the “old ways” do so at their peril.

Rensia Melles: It's understandable because this is what people do. They always go back to what they know and what they thought worked before. So I think when organizations think that they can go back to the way it was, that's where they're making a big mistake. They're trying to put a square peg into a round hole. And I think they're gonna have to understand, I think hustle culture is declining. It's coming to its end. That concept that was certainly in North America, that, like, always on culture with the work from home, uh, that has really changed. And the pandemic has really brought people to a point of reevaluating what's important in my life. What is balance? What do I need in my life, and what do I want from my employer?



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And so if they think they can go back to the way things were, it's to their own peril. The other thing is that the last word is not said. Even what we decide now, you know, what works for this moment in time that is gonna evolve, that is also there is no existing best practice. So they're developing good practice, an emergent practice to deal with these change workplace relations, new employees and everything else that's going on in society because the workplace is not just dealing with this issue around hybrid workplace.

They're also dealing with the recession, they're dealing with environmental issues. They're dealing with so many other things that are relevant to their employees that it's quite complicated and complex situation. And so they need to be aware of the fact and be creative with understanding that what they do today may not work tomorrow and that it may change and evolve because we don't really know how it's gonna work out if we do all hybrid or all work from home. We don't really know what the next step is.

Brief music transition

Mary Barroll: Even the best employers and well intentioned of managers often fail to provide the support required for a psychologically safe workplace, because they simply miss the signs when employees might be struggling or in crisis. Recognizing the signs of exposure to workplace stress and anxiety is something that Dr. Luke Schneider knows well. He is a registered psychologist and Clinical Research Associate at PSPNET, a provider of mental health and wellbeing resources and support for public safety personnel and first responders. His clients experience what he calls a “confluence” of challenges that put their well-being at risk.

Dr. Luke Schneider: It's a bit of a long list. The nature of their job, the helping nature that they do comes with very real risks, and they often manifest as depression and anxiety, post-traumatic stress and that sort of thing, because of the nature of the work, all of that has now been compounded because of the pandemic, which now has seen, uh, some of these emergency departments become overrun. That means there's more calls to our paramedic services, more calls for policing agents as well. And so I think there's really a confluence of factors that have now come together that have really increased the potential risk of, uh, mental health injury amongst our public safety personnel indicating that we really



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need to step up the type of services that are available to these members given the important work that they do.

PSPNET is, is really quite, uh, interesting. What we're talking about here is something called ICBT or Internet Delivered Cognitive Behavior Therapy. And so to unpack that term a little bit, uh, what it involves is taking your traditional therapy paradigm and kind of flipping it around a little bit. So instead of a person having to take time out of their day to attend a face-to-face session, to talk with a health professional about their mental health, instead, we've included all of the skills that are evidence-based in a very engageable, uh, website where people will go in and they will teach themselves those skills.

Mary Barroll: With many non-profit professionals involved in challenging and sometimes traumatic frontline work, Dr. Schneider sees a parallel with what public safety personnel face on the job.

Dr. Luke Schneider: There might be some differences in terms of the-nature of the work, but I think overall, stress is stress. And when we're feeling very overwhelmed, we're feeling short staffed. We're dealing with people that are now more ill than they were before, perhaps waiting a bit longer to present to their emergency room or longer to pick up the phone and call for help. It just adds an extra layer of complexity and stress, uh, to people working in these sectors. And also speaking of charity, there's also a lot of our frontline members as well that do volunteer peer support within fire organizations, volunteer, ground search and rescue. And these people are doing very, very important work, but are also exposed to some very potentially traumatic situations that again, will compound stress and indicate the need for some more service and help.

Mary Barroll: Depression, stress, anxiety and other related conditions can present themselves in different ways, depending on the person. But there are often common elements that professionals like Dr. Schneider can recognize.

Dr. Luke Schneider: It really is kind of an individual factor, but there usually is a couple of different ways that they'll present. One way of presenting would be sort of on a cognitive level where people will start to have maybe some self doubts about their job, um, some self doubts about how they can cope with the demands of their workplace. And so those can give rise to what we would call distorted or maladaptive or unhelpful thoughts. And if we buy into those thoughts, they have a really, really big



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impact on our mood and how we're feeling. On the other hand, there's also the behavioral aspect of things. When people start to buy into anxious thoughts or depressive thoughts, they then might start doing things that are maybe helpful in the short term, but aren't very helpful in the long term.

And what I'm thinking here is avoidance, uh, avoiding reaching out to friends, spending less time with family, spending less time engaging in hobbies that are helpful to them. And so that's usually how these things will present, and it really is quite, uh, individualistic in terms of what's more prominent in how it's presenting. But all this to say that there really is an acute need for people to have better mental health awareness. And so in terms of that follow up or that second piece to your question, when should people, uh, be reaching out for help? I think it's, as soon as they start noticing these things, I'm more stressed than usual. I'm having more anxiety symptoms. I'm really struggling with thoughts about my competence or my ability to cope that I never used to struggle with before. Uh, something's changed in terms of what I'm doing. I'm my wife or, or my husband or my children are saying I'm not spending as much time with them. These are all sort of subtle indicators that, uh, mental health, um, supports might be required in this case.

Transition music

News clip

CNBC

<https://www.cnb.com/2021/09/23/the-future-of-work-is-here-employee-burnout-needs-to-go.html>

In: (00:40) "But the 15 minute meeting...It's so simple." Out: (00:56)

Don Shafer: After two full years of the pandemic, a 2022 YMCA Workwell study found that 65% of respondents said their workload had been a significant source of stress in the previous three months. Put in the context of a 200-person organization, that would represent 130 employees. "Unmanageable workloads are not a new phenomenon," the Workwell report stated, "but workload challenges have certainly hit new heights since the start of the pandemic." According to the YMCA, this was happening for two key reasons. First, the high rate of employee turnover in many organizations has led to staff being asked to keep hitting the same aggressive targets as before, only with fewer team members. The second reason is simple exhaustion. Workers are taking on more responsibilities at the same time as



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their capacity to deliver has been dwindling. In literal terms, people are being asked to do more with less; that is, fewer people with less energy are performing jobs at a lower capacity.

Mary Barroll: The YMCA Workwell study was released in 2022, the same year Charity Village Connects first explored the issue of workplace mental health. One year later, it appears that not much has changed – or has it? Have we turned a corner in addressing what many are calling the Burnout Epidemic? And if so, what wellness trends or techniques are pointing the way forward in such an unsettled landscape? Here are each of our guests with their thoughts on what signs of employee burnout or exhaustion non-profit leaders should be looking for – and what can be done to address it. This is Paula Allen, Senior Vice-President with TELUS Health.

Paula Allen: We are at a point right now in our population health where we are more sensitive to stress. We have been through a lot. We are still in a point of upheaval. We have additional stressors, economic stressors that are on top of us. The population is more on edge. So I think it's important to recognize that because you might be on edge and you don't recognize it. So how you communicate might be more harsh, might be more negative. You might have a little bit more cynicism when something comes to you. And you have to, you have to be aware that that's a possibility.

So you can stop yourself and understand how your words might be impacting someone else. And from the other side, you might have someone who's responding to you in a way that takes you aback. And the last thing you wanna do is to escalate that. Just recognize that we're all un under stress. And, and then take a beat. Take a few minutes. Remember that we have to be intentional in terms of supporting each other so people don't feel that lack of connection, because we've lost it a little bit. So I, I think just that recognition is important for our interactions. So that's the trend. That's where we are right now. And I hope to come back and speak to you another time and say, well, no, we're in a better place.

Um, the other thing is that there is, you know, much heightened awareness of the business impact of mental health. This is not new. It's just the awareness is greater. Everything that I am talking to you and to business leaders about, and you're sharing with your audience, is not only for the benefit of the individual, it's definitely for the benefit of the individual, but it correlates with productivity. It not only



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correlates with retention, uh, but it correlates with innovation, with creativity, uh, with collaboration, with discretionary effort, with all the things that make a difference in whether you're successful or not, whether you're a for-profit or a not pro for-profit organization. When people have the undue burden of anxiety, fear, lack of safety, lack of a pathway to get support if they need it on a personal level, that is putting undue strain on their brain that therefore cannot, even with the best of their intentions, allow them to be their full and most productive selves at work. This is one of the reasons why CEOs are talking about workplace mental health, like I've never seen them talk about it before. Uh, we are in a people powered economy, and we have to take care of our people and even investors are looking at the behavior of organizations and making decisions on where they'll invest based on their people strategy in terms of health.

Mary Barroll: For a change communications expert like Caroline Kealey, empathy plays a role in supporting employees still being impacted by the lingering fallout from the pandemic, anxiety about inflation, and fears of a recession. But in uncertain times, minimizing that uncertainty is equally important.

Caroline Kealey:

I think you've got exactly the right idea is it is about empathy, but in many respects, it's also a question of balancing accountability with empathy. And I think that's where a lot of leaders struggle, that they have been reluctant to set out guidelines and expectations because they fear a backlash and they don't want to say something that people won't like. And of course, this is what we're very much experiencing with conversations around return to the office. But, ultimately clarity is kind and people are craving clarity. And so what we're finding among our practices, those organizations that have had the guts and the discipline to figure out what are the rules of engagement, which could be many different things. Some clients have gone totally digital by default. Others are mandatory in, in-office, and most are somewhere in between that that immediately drops down the level of chaos and turbulence in organizations.

The other piece around this is the sense of agency, because change communication is ultimately very much about respect, and people need to have a sense of agency. So it's totally appropriate that people



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can say, okay, this employer has gone, for example, totally remote. I don't like that. I enjoyed the community in the office. So I retain a sense of agency that perhaps this is no longer where I want to work. And the converse is also true among the other end of the spectrum. So I really encourage organizations to minimize this period of uncertainty because we know that humans do best with good news. They do badly with bad news, but they do worst of all with no news at all. And this period of protracted uncertainty is, I think, causing a lot of harm.

Mary Barroll: Caroline Kealey believes that some workplace mental health issues begin right at the start, during the onboarding process, while others are allowed to fester due to the often isolated ways in which remote or hybrid employees work and the failure to build community within an organization.

Caroline Kealey:

One of the main areas that I think organizations are getting wrong is onboarding. And what we find is that the, uh, patterns of disengagement and mental health difficulty tends to be exacerbated by those employees that were onboarded during the pandemic. And I've seen, frankly, lots of heartbreaking stories of extremely talented people that are excited about a new job, but they're plunked in their living rooms. They have no sense of connection, nobody's checking in on them, and they really don't know how this machine works. And so this is a terrible thing because race horses need to race, people want to do their best work. We find this especially in purpose-driven organizations in the not-for-profit sector. Uh, and then it's paralyzing, it's demoralizing, uh, and it really causes tremendous, uh, pain when we look at people that don't have appropriate support.

So I think in terms of what organizations are doing wrong, a big ticket item is onboarding. The other is the sense of community. And I really think that community should be used as the instrument of change. When we think about it, humans crave connection and community. We're hardwired for this, and yet we tend to be in a very siloed, fragmented way of operating that's really missing the mark in terms of a sense of community. So a simple example would be you see organizations invest a lot in town hall meetings, often online, which are organized in the old school fashion of a bunch of executives talking at their staff, which is totally a missed opportunity for exactly what employees need and crave, not just at the head level, but at the heart. And so just simple shifts like having on reps for conversation, having



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that sense of community, whether it's the employer or whether it's a particular department or a particular project community that I think is the most exciting instrument for change that is probably especially relevant in the not-for-profit sector.

Music: underneath news clips below

News clips: first responders and work stress

Global news

<https://www.msn.com/en-ca/video/nrobloxews/nova-scotia-paramedic-speaks-out-about-working-conditions/vi-AA16F8XI>

In: (0:18) "I've gone in with my...difficult to handle." (0:43)

CBC News: <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2051490883852>

In: (0:01) "We expect these officers...it's a real challenge." Out (0:23)

Mary Barroll: Steve Lurie, co-chair of the Toronto Police Service Mental Health and Addictions Advisory Panel, knows first-hand the devastating effects of unrelenting stress in the workplace. I asked him what resources are available to non-profit employers and individuals to promote better workplace mental health and wellbeing.

Steve Lurie: There is the Not Myself Today, which is notmyselftoday.ca that's a, a really good resource. Um, there's material about the psychological safety standard and toolkits, both the standard itself and toolkits on, the Mental Health Commission website, um, for those employers who, have at least-a bit of money to sort of get a professional assessment of, uh, what they might need to do and what's possible. The CMHA Ontario Division, uh, operates a program called Mental Health Works, and they will come in and do an assessment of the workplace. And so this is the kind of thing where, at the community level, potentially organizations could come together and then maybe they could work out an arrangement with CMHA Ontario, where a group of employers could be assessed, and then you could develop a community of practice at the local level in terms of sharing resources.



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And then again, if you just put workforce mental health, plug it into, uh, a search engine, Google would take you to many, many sites, and you can look at, you know, what's going on both locally and internationally. So there are resources out there. I think the issue for people is identifying that this is something I need to deal with as a leader. I need to make the time to sort of consider, uh, what's going on. And that should involve consultation, uh, with staff, uh, about what their preferences would be. And then you try and figure out something that's workable for the organization.

Mary Barroll: Introduced in 2013, the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, sometimes just called “the standard,” is a set of voluntary guidelines, tools and resources intended to help organizations promote mental health and prevent psychological harm at work. Said to be the first of its kind in the world, the standard has seen uptake from coast to coast to coast in Canada, internationally, and across organizations of all sectors and sizes. For Integral Workplace Health founder Rensia Melles, the standard, although first launched 10 years ago, still resonates in our current, pandemic-disrupted world.

Rensia Melles: I love that you asked that Mary <laugh>. Cause you know, I love the Standard. I think it is phenomenal and it really, it's everywhere. How can it not come into play in this whole thing? Because what I'm seeing is that, when I say bargaining positions versus interests and needs, these are the things that have always played in terms of engagement and productivity, all those factors that are covered in the National Standard, respect in the workplace, support in the workplace care autonomy, having their tools to do what you need to do, clarity and understanding about what your tasks are. All of these pieces that are described in the, in the psychological health and safety standard, all these elements, these are the things that people have always wanted and that have always been right in front of our nose in terms of what do you need to do to create engagement and to have people be productive. So how can it not be part of it? It is underlying to me it is the solution.

Mary Barroll: So what does Rensia Melles suggest as a starting point for organizations looking to integrate the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety into their own workplace mental health strategies?



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Rensia Melles: Okay, so there's different ways that they can do it. If it's actually an organizational position where the organization from the top down has made this decision, then they need to start with, like for instance, in Canada, going to the guarding mines at work. Guarding Minds at Work is a phenomenal resource that gives a survey that they can do, kinda like a pre-survey that allows 'em to see what is their readiness for change. And then there's a survey that they can put out with their employees to kind of see where do we sit, how are we doing on these different elements? There's 13 aspects of psychological health and safety. You don't need to address all of them all at once, but it will give them a handle to decide, okay, here's where our friction points are.

Here are things that we can start working towards because it's not a one day thing. So, um, my suggestion is first look at where am I, what am I doing? Am I ready to change? Um, and then making the commitment to move forward, not, like overnight, making the commitment to say, okay, you know, this is our plan over time, this is where we're where we wanna go, this is how we monitor where we're going. And they can do that with an outside person with a third party that manages and consults with them on that. Or they can do it internally. A lot of, um, regions and municipalities have people internally in their HR department that are responsible for psychological health and safety and that will do that monitoring and keeping an eye on that and, doing the survey because it's not the same as a satisfaction survey. This is really about those 13 elements that are really actually quite concrete and can be operationalized in the workplace around, respect in the workplace, what does diversity in the workplace look like? So that's, I think where they really wanna start by looking at that.

Mary Barroll: As a specialist in the assessment and treatment of a variety of anxiety disorders, including posttraumatic stress disorder, Dr. Luke Schneider takes the view that removing the stigma around seeking help is an important first step toward creating better workplace mental health. He also points to some helpful resources that are linked to on our own website, charityvillage.com

Dr. Luke Schneider: Historically there has been a bit of a stigma around saying, I'm struggling. I need help. If leadership can show up and say, this is an issue, there's nothing wrong with getting help. Uh, possibly even leaders engaging with some of these materials themselves so they have a better idea of what this treatment, uh, might look like, that can really go, um, a long way. And so to that end, in addition to PSPNET on our super website, we also have resources that people can go to, uh, for



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example, how to support a colleague could be really helpful, to get some very, um, quick tips and what to look for, how to start that conversation with people. And then once the time is right, actually encouraging those members to go out and engage with something like PSPNET to address their mental health.

Mary Barroll: Just a note that, at this point, PSPnet.ca is only accessible to frontline public safety personnel and first responders, although plans are underway to make similar resources accessible to workers from other fields.

Dr. Luke Schneider: So we're trying to expand PSP net across the country. There are also plans to look at something that that is geared towards the general population and work is kind of underway to expand that as well. So a little bit of time on our end to sort of make sure that that happens coast to coast. But in the meantime, in terms of other resources, one of the good things, if there is a good thing that came out of the pandemic is, uh, Wellness Together Canada is a website that was created, again with a partnership with the federal government to make sure that people have access to, um, telephone counseling and resources as well. And that is available to the general public across the, uh, the country.

Mary Barroll: For additional resources available now for the nonprofit sector, you check out the 10 Part-Mental Health and Psychological Safety at Work, Master Certificate Program on charityvillage.com. The elearning Program was developed by leading psychologists and mental health professionals, so you know you are receiving the most up to date and clinically sound information available today. The interactive modules explain the many aspects related to workplace mental health and clinicians provide clear guidance on how to optimally address these delicate and complex issues within a work setting.

And now for some final thoughts on our check-up on workplace mental health in the nonprofit sector, here's Paula Allen again.

Paula Allen: When we have any kind of crisis like we did over the pandemic, your priorities become a lot clearer. What is important becomes a lot clearer. And people realized, I think, their vulnerability in terms of their mental health and wellbeing. We all have vulnerability. If you're human, you do, uh, but sometimes it's not at the forefront of our awareness. So protecting yourself, enhancing your wellbeing



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has become very important. So people are looking at employers in terms of, you know, is this a place where I'm going to have harm?

We're in an evolving society, pandemic or no pandemic. Uh, we are trying different things in terms of support for people's wellbeing, and we're doing things that sometimes don't support people's mental health and wellbeing.

I do think it's important for employers not to just go with the flavor of the month or the news report, but really spend some time, talk to some professionals, talk to your employee assistance provider, and really start foundationally in terms of how you build your cu culture, and also how you provide services and make sure that you hear the voice of your employees while doing so.

Mary Barroll: In a December 2022 article, global analytics firm Gallup reported that 76% of employees experience workplace burnout at some time or another. Think about that: statistically speaking, three out of four of the workplace colleagues you encounter each day have probably experienced burnout and exhaustion on the job.

But Gallup suggests we look beyond statistics and picture the actual faces of your struggling co-workers or team members. They are more than just employees; they are also parents and friends, each with their own unique identities, needs and challenges. Taken as a whole, their individual struggles can impact all aspects of an organization, including through lower productivity, higher turnover and absenteeism, and higher health benefit costs.

In terms of solutions, the article is emphatic that managers should have regular and authentic conversations with their team members about burnout. It goes on to suggest that as part of your check-in conversations – that is, those one-on-one meetings where employees and managers review successes, performance obstacles and priorities -- consider adding burnout and fatigue as a topic of discussion.

We hope our look at workplace mental health will spark conversations within your own organizations as non-profit leaders continue to come to terms with the evolving realities of post-pandemic workplaces.



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I'd like to thank our guests for joining us and sharing their valuable insights. Be sure to visit our website for more information on the resources mentioned in this episode and for show notes on this and other topics. You'll also find videos of our conversations with guests in their entirety. Charity Village is proud to be the Canadian source for non-profit news, employment services, crowdfunding, e-learning, HR resources and tools, and so much more. Visit us today at charityvillage.com.

On the next Charity Village Connects podcast:

A 2020 public opinion poll revealed a 6% decline in trust for the non-profit and charity sector. And according to data from another survey, only 50% of Canadians have trust in leaders of NFPs and charities. That's down from 72% in 2009, when they last asked Canadians about this topic. With nonprofit leadership increasingly under the microscope when it comes to public trust -- particularly in light of recent high-profile controversies surrounding organizations such as Hockey Canada and WE Charity -- and as the sector grapples with a lack of diversity at the leadership level, we ask, is it time for a leadership refresh?

Nonprofit Leadership in Canada: It's all about trust – next time on Charity Village Connects.

I'm Mary Barroll. Thanks for listening.



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