

# *Sheena's Place* ANNUAL REPORT 2023



**SHEENA'S PLACE**  
Support for eating disorders

**JOHN CHOI**



**EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR**

## **LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The National Initiative for Eating Disorders reports that 2.7 million Canadians (translating to over one million Ontarians) are affected by eating disorders, but only about 10% of these individuals receive appropriate treatment. This gap is alarming given the severity of the consequences of untreated eating disorders. Eating disorders can lead to significant physical health impairments, including damage to one's heart, digestive system, bones, and weakened immune system. The mental health implications of untreated eating disorders are equally concerning. Deaths resulting from an eating disorder continue to outpace mortality rates of almost all other mental health disorders.

Eating disorders are treatable, and with early intervention, recovery is a realistic goal. At Sheena's Place, it is our mission to **provide accessible and timely support**. We're also working to provide more education to increase awareness and understanding of eating disorders, as misinformation and stigma surrounding eating disorders continue to be pervasive.

This past year, we focused on creating as many opportunities as we could for our participants to experience community. Through group programming, workshops, re-expanding Sheena's Camp to a two-day affair, and hosting events like the Breakfast Symposium and the launch of In Search Of: a BIPOC OP-ED.

The team continued the tradition of honouring the feedback and input we received by introducing numerous innovative programs. This report highlights participants' voices and shares some information about those programs.

We will continue to support participants in their journey to improve their relationships with their bodies, and work towards achieving our vision of a world where **every individual has an accepting relationship with their body**.



# OVERVIEW



## We Value

### COMMUNITY

Our strength lies in our collective efforts. At Sheena's Place, participants, facilitators, staff, volunteers, and donors come together to create positive impacts. Community ultimately benefits individuals psychologically, emotionally, and physically.

### COMPASSION

No one chooses to have an eating disorder. Every individual deserves compassion and the acknowledgement that their contexts matter; be it biological, social, economic, familial, or otherwise.

### INCLUSIVITY

Eating Disorders do not discriminate. And yet, barriers to accessing support are differentiated among different demographics and intersecting identities. We all benefit when everyone has access to our community.

### INNOVATION

We continuously seek new and effective ways of providing support for our participants. We will keep looking to different members of our community to contribute ideas and innovations for our programming.

### INTEGRITY

Trust is a key factor in all effective relationships. We consider ourselves accountable to our participants, our donors, and ourselves.

# OUR STORIES

## Support and community go hand in hand

Sheena's Place opened its doors in 1996, the culmination of a team effort that involved our founders, board and committee members, donors, facilitators, volunteers and staff. It was a community in the making. Now, almost three decades later, our life-saving programs continue to be provided, free of charge, to those in need – and our community is stronger than ever.

In 2023, Sheena's Place offered over 125 groups and workshops for over 1200 participants seeking support as they, or their loved ones, met the challenge of living with an eating disorder. Almost 40 different facilitators, representing disciplines including art therapy, dietetics, social work, psychotherapy, peer support, and others, continued to innovate and deliver exceptionally high-quality services to meet the needs of our community. Our participants often generously share with us how the programming has made a difference in their lives.



“

***This group dynamic created a space that felt extremely supportive, healing, and joyful that I looked forward to coming to each week. This group has been one of the highlights of my week this spring and made me feel less alone.***

—Participant from Spring 2023

”



## Nandini P (she/her)

### Participant

***“The shift from powerlessness to purpose has been incredible as it relates to being part of a community.”***

Nandini first heard of Sheena’s Place back in 2018, when a roommate thought she might have symptoms. At the time, she recalls being in complete denial about needing support. But in the fall of 2020, she heard we were starting a virtual BIPOC Support group, and this piqued her interest.

In BIPOC Support, folks have a safe space to discuss how race and culture can impact their relationships with food and their bodies.

Through regular group sessions, Nandini discovered she’d been struggling with disordered eating since childhood. With help from others in the group, she was able to begin unpacking the nuances of being in her body, and her identity, and how these contributed to her eating disorder experiences.

Nandini continues to attend our BIPOC Support group and hasn’t missed a day in the last four years. It’s where she feels most comfortable. Being part of a group that looks at intersectionality closely, honours her social location and all parts of her identity is important for her recovery. But she’s also stepped outside her comfort zone to try many other groups and workshops.

For example, with some encouragement from a facilitator, she has tried our virtual art therapy groups, where she discovered she doesn’t always need to use her voice to express herself. Rather, she can use various forms of art media for self-expression. Three seasons later, and she’s still coming to the group.

And, in our Big Time Body Liberation group, Nandini recalled it was the first time she’d critically thought about oppressive forces. This group helped her realize you can be **“fat and worthy, and that fat bodies are desirable.”** Having a community of folks who discuss their struggles, but who also routinely celebrate their fat bodies has had a significant, lasting and positive impact on her.

Nandini also pushed nerves aside to participate in one of our in-person drumming workshops. She fondly describes the experience:

**“To take myself out of the head and drop it below the neck, and to use the rest of my body in this somatic way where I don’t have to force mindfulness into the process...where it just happens naturally as a result of the body enjoying the process, has been eye-opening. I’d go to these drumming sessions every week if offered.”**

The Sheena’s Place community is strong, supportive and inclusive. And it is always here to help those in need.

**“The shift from powerlessness to purpose has been incredible as it relates to being part of a community,”** said Nandini. **“I could do some of the work on my own, but to maintain this new learning, I need a community.”**



## Lorraine Hewitt (she/her)

### Student/Group facilitator

***“...the empathy people have for each other, their ability to open up and share experiences and speak from their perspectives, yet still relate to others in ways that tangibly provide support. It was great to see!”***



Lorraine completed her Master of Social Work (MSW) program (University of Toronto) at Sheena's Place, beginning in the fall of 2023. Her many experiences at Sheena's Place included auditing groups and workshops, assisting facilitators, conducting research on eating disorders and sexuality, and culminated with developing and delivering a group and a workshop.

Lorraine observed that many participants at Sheena's Place had been living with their eating disorder for quite some time. Many had varied experiences with seeking support elsewhere, such as individual therapy, in-patient or outpatient treatment programs. She noted folks had lots to share about their own lived experiences.

**“The community is very knowledgeable, very curious, interested and actively engaged with their own healing and recovery,”** she said. **“And the empathy people have for each other, their ability to open up and share experiences and speak from their perspectives, yet still relate to others in ways that tangibly provide support. It was great to see!”**

For many folks with disordered eating, accessing pleasure can be challenging. Leveraging her many years of previous experience as a sex educator, Lorraine created and facilitated a workshop that focused on ways to foster pleasure in everyday life, with topics that included permission for pleasure, mindfulness, libido and sexual communication.

She's looking forward to returning to Sheena's Place to facilitate additional groups and workshops. **“It's wonderful that Sheena's Place encourages students to return and continue delivering content,”** says Lorraine. **“It's a great way to keep the community of facilitators fresh, diversity it, and bring new ideas into the organization.”**

# OUR REACH

In 2023, we...

offered **1600+** hours of therapeutic service;

served **1200+** unique group participants



## WHAT OUR PARTICIPANTS SAID



**95%**

said they would  
recommend this  
group/workshop to others



**91%**

said they felt connected  
to and/or supported by  
other group members



**91%**

said they gained  
new insights or  
knowledge



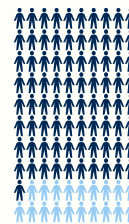
**86%**

said this group/workshop  
was supportive of their  
recovery journey



**84%**

said they learned  
new skills or  
coping strategies



**78%**

said this group/workshop  
increased their  
motivation for change



**97%**

said the facilitator(s)  
created a safe and  
respectful environment



**96%**

said the facilitator(s) had  
enough knowledge and  
expertise to run this  
group/workshop



**95%**

said overall found this  
group/workshop  
to be helpful

# WHAT OUR PARTICIPANTS SAID

“

“Connecting with people who understood me, accepted me and just felt like a safe home. [In groups,] I never felt I needed to be anything but myself.”

“Absolutely life transforming program. I can't speak highly enough about the information provided. All of the information was new to me and I have been totally transformed and healed in many moving and profound ways.”

“The source of community - being surrounded by a group of very supportive fellow trans people who have lived similar experiences to me, has been incredibly helpful.”

“The dynamic of the group and the content is very relevant to me. I always leave the group feeling positive and this specific group has allowed me to see art as an outlet for self-expression and self-discovery.”

“Talking to and being with others with eating disorders motivates me to get better.”

“[I appreciate] the chance to communicate with others with similar experiences and feel supported, the judgment-free zone, compassionate and knowledgeable facilitators. Overall, I found this experience to be extraordinarily helpful to navigating recovery and I am immensely grateful for the service and its accessibility.”

“I am extremely grateful for this group... after 22 years of trying desperately to find help for my daughter, this group has provided me with excellent resources and understanding.”

“[What I appreciate the most is] connecting with others that really understand. I don't currently have anywhere else to connect with people that deal with disability and chronic illness. The connection and understanding I get here has been a huge help to accepting myself and standing up for my needs.”

“Thank you for providing all the art materials, because access to that can be a barrier for some. I appreciated being in a group of people who understand and connect on shared lived experiences, yet also so unique and individual; it was inspiring.”

“I have sought out neuro-divergent and eating disorder groups before, but this is the first time I have ever seen the two linked together. Truly life changing. First time I have ever addressed my struggles in a full-body way. Not isolating one from the other. So, so grateful that this very niche group exists because traditional methods for neuro support and Ed often conflict, so this group has been incredibly helpful”

“Thanks again for holding this specifically BIPOC space. Very necessary and needed.”

“Finding other people who have similar experiences around gender and disordered eating is my favourite part. I've definitely made friends here!”

”



# SO WHAT HAPPENED LAST YEAR?

## Programming

Despite recent increased investments by the government in eating disorders treatment programs, there are still significant gaps in the system. Participants engage in Sheena's Place at all stages of recovery. Many individuals share that Sheena's Place helped increase their readiness to seek more formal treatment, and others are clear about the role our programs play in helping to allay concerns about relapsing. Every season's calendar features more than 30 programs providing opportunities for support, learning new ways to cope, artistic expression, safe movement, and learning about nutrition.

Some groups are mainstays in programming and have consistently been offered throughout Sheena's Place's history; groups like Adult Support, and Family, Friends, and Partners Support. Informed by participant input and emerging evidence, staff and facilitators worked together to include new offerings every season. In 2023, almost 20 new groups were introduced.

## Exploring DBT Through the Arts

Some groups combine popular and effective elements of existing groups. Exploring DBT Through the Arts supported participants in exploring and deepening their understanding of skills based on Dialectical Behavioural Therapy, through the process of artmaking. Group members increased their capacity to regulate challenging emotions, and engage in improved decision-making, without needing any previous experience or skills with art.

## Demographic-specific groups

Affinity-based groups serve two important functions. Groups like neurodivergent support and BIPOC support allow members who identify a certain way to access the space in a way with increased felt-safety. There is an improved likelihood that other members may have shared experiences. Demographic-specific groups also create space to explore and discuss issues that emerge from the intersection of the identity and having an eating disorder. In 2023, after being absent for many years, a men's group reappeared on the program calendar. Men & Masculinity Support Group topics included emotion regulation and navigating relationships.

## Transforming Trauma

The experience of trauma is among the many factors that may contribute to the emergence of an eating disorder. At its core, trauma creates a disconnect, and thus the new group Transforming Trauma invited participants to come together in creative community to co-create a space of possibility. This innovative group incorporated sensorimotor and narrative modalities to support an experiential, embodied and relational approach to healing.

# GROUP HIGHLIGHT

## BIPOC Art Advocacy Group: Making Zines

Back in 2022, then Program Manager, Alexandra Hanania wondered if she could replicate a successful project from a different setting, in which group participants used artwork to explore their challenging experiences. The artwork would then find a home in the form of a zine—a non-commercial, self-published art book—that could serve to tell these unique stories.

From this idea, the BIPOC Advocacy Group was developed and added to the winter calendar. Funded by Bell Let's Talk, this group was co-facilitated by Alexandra and Toronto Art Therapy Institute (TATI) students, Monique Yang and Magdalin Livingston. It empowered our BIPOC participants to use art as a medium to explore and express eating disorder experiences. The final product, a zine featuring writing and visual artworks, was reproduced in more than 100 copies, which are now being circulated within our community.

BIPOC folx are often underrepresented in eating disorder research and in the depictions of individuals with eating disorders. Existing research demonstrates that BIPOC folx are just as likely to be challenged with eating disorders, but far less likely to be diagnosed by medical professionals. Our intent behind this project was to help BIPOC folx with eating disorders feel more validated and less alone.

Through the creation of the zine, participants and facilitators hoped to raise awareness and advocate a more inclusive and diverse environment in the field of eating disorder support. Collectively, they came up with the name: In Search Of: BIPOC OP ED.



# OUTREACH

In recent years, eating disorders and related topics have been discussed more frequently in the mainstream media and on social media. Folks with large platforms have been open about their own personal experience with eating disorders. There has been pushback against topics that perpetuate diet culture (such as the promotion of Ozempic), as well as conversations around controversial healthcare practices as they relate to eating disorders such as the use of MAID.

Still, there is much work to be done when it comes to perceptions of what eating disorders are and who is impacted by them. We still see an adherence to certain stereotypes about who has eating disorders, which severely negatively impacts anyone who doesn't fit within that box. Some of those impacts include, a lack of support and understanding, being left out of conversations regarding eating disorders, or even not being believed about their eating disorder experience. That is why it is still so critical to continue to offer educational opportunities to as wide of an audience as possible.

## Outreach Statistics

Number of outreach attendees (live)

**850**

Number of recording views

**1326**

Trainings & workshops

**28**

Webinars

**3**



## Organizations we presented for/with

NEDIC

University of Toronto (Residence Life, FIFSW, Innis College, UTM)

Employment and Social Development Canada

The Canadian Press

George Brown College

Grief Centre

Sarah's Place

Bayfield Treatment Centre

Rosedale Heights School of the Arts

Western Technical School

Lumerate

Greenwood College School

Eating Disorder Research Lab – CHEO

Sheridan College

Ontario Public Service - Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing

Bishop Allen Academy

Let the Elephants Dance

Vancouver Coastal Health

Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health

TCDSB Social Workers

Ontario Medical Students Association



## Feedback from outreach presentations

98%

of outreach presentation respondents agreed that the facilitator(s) created a safe and respectful environment

98%

of outreach presentation respondents agreed that the facilitator(s) had sufficient knowledge and expertise to run the presentation

95%

of outreach presentation respondents would recommend the presentation to others like them

93%

of outreach presentation respondents agreed that the presentation was helpful

88%

of outreach presentation respondents agreed that the presentation helped them feel better equipped to identify disordered eating

## What people said about our outreach presentations

“You’re doing great, please continue what you do, it helps a lot of individuals who are suffering, and by just hearing that you’re not alone helps make you feel good. Thank you.”

**“I will definitely advise others about Sheena’s Place if the need arises. I also really enjoyed the guest speaker Amy, who was brave enough to discuss her personal challenges. Great presentation! Thank you.”**

“Great presentation and content. Thank you for sharing, it was very informative.”

**“I appreciate you offering something like this where you can have an interaction with the experts rather than just reading an article.”**

“The content and visuals were helpful and everything flowed really well. It was great to have a fellow colleague (OPSer) speak for keynote remarks. It was moving and so insightful.”

**“This was very informative and thought provoking session. Thank you so much and I look forward to taking a deeper dive into the resources to use in my own life and my practice with students.”**

“This is really valuable information and we need more education like that in post-secondary.”

**“A big thank you to Kaitlyn and MMAH for opening up this event to other ministries. I wish I knew about Sheena’s Place in my late teens and early 20’s. My life would have been so different and my views on food and diet culture would not be as tainted as they are. THANK YOU for this excellent presentation!”**

“Thank you for what you provide. I really like that Sheena’s Place has different workshops and they are not all related specifically to eating, e.g. meditation classes, journalling, or different classes to calm our nervous system.”

# EVENTS

## *Perspectives: A Breakfast Symposium*

☀ September 13, 2023

More than 50 guests gathered downtown Toronto to hear from our speakers, Saroya Tinker, Dr. Kyle Ganson, and Wendy Preskow, who shed light on the impacts of eating disorders and the immense value of community spaces like Sheena's Place. It was a morning full of meaningful conversations and appreciation.



## *Zine Launch Party In Search Of: BIPOC OP-ED*

☀ December 1, 2023



The community came together to celebrate the publication of the BIPOC advocacy zine. Facilitators, participants, and staff had the opportunity to appreciate the enlarged art prints and speak with the artists, who shared their creative process and their experience as BIPOC individuals navigating groups at Sheena's Place. As a part of our Expressive Art and BIPOC program, this event was organized to hold space for our participants to explore healing with authenticity and vulnerability.

# OUR VOLUNTEERS

The Sheena's Place team would like to express sincere gratitude to all our volunteers for their contribution to our various initiatives in 2023.

Adam Jesin  
Alistair Almeida  
Beth Adams  
Christina Politis  
Diana Hart  
Dr. Debra Katzman  
Emily Sternberg  
Gavin Swartzman  
Jennifer James  
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Shawn Heissler  
Shilpa Joshi  
Taylor Alves  
Tracy Britnell  
Trevor Lawson  
Victoria Bubulj

**Thank you for your  
dedication and generosity!**



# REVENUES & EXPENSES

## REVENUES

Donations and Fundraising (includes event)	\$506,087
Other	\$2,693
Capital Contributions	\$12,066
Total Revenue	\$520,846

## OPERATING EXPENSES

Personnel	\$620,602
Program	\$324,136
Occupancy & Maintenance	\$28,418
Administration	\$32,415
Fundraising (includes event)	\$23,854
Amortization	\$40,596
Total	\$1,070,021

Investment Income Gain	\$586,725
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Excess of revenue over expenses	\$37,550
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all your support*

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416-927-8900

87 Spadina Road  
Toronto, Ontario  
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info@sheenasplace.org

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