



PORTAGE

Treating Addiction in
Youth Through a Trauma-
Informed Lens



SPEAKER INTRODUCTIONS

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PORTAGE'S ADOLESCENT PROGRAM

Substance abuse rehabilitation centre for adolescents with locations in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick

Services ages 14-21

Therapeutic Community Approach to treatment governed by a trauma-informed lens

In surveys of adolescents receiving treatment for substance abuse, more than 70% had a history of trauma exposure (Funk et al., 2003; Deykin & Buka, 1997).



PORTAGE'S CLIENTELE

A youth who enters treatment at Portage's adolescent programs often demonstrates the following characteristics:

Lost interest in school/work/hobbies, not attending regularly

Abusing drugs/alcohol heavily to cope

Experiencing mental health challenges

Alienated from family, and may no longer live at home

Sometimes involved in criminal activities

Vast majority of clients self-report trauma exposure in childhood or early adolescence



THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY APPROACH

Treatment approach based on:

Self-help

Mutual support

Peer-to-peer role-modelling

Reality therapy

Motivational interviewing



The community is the source of therapy

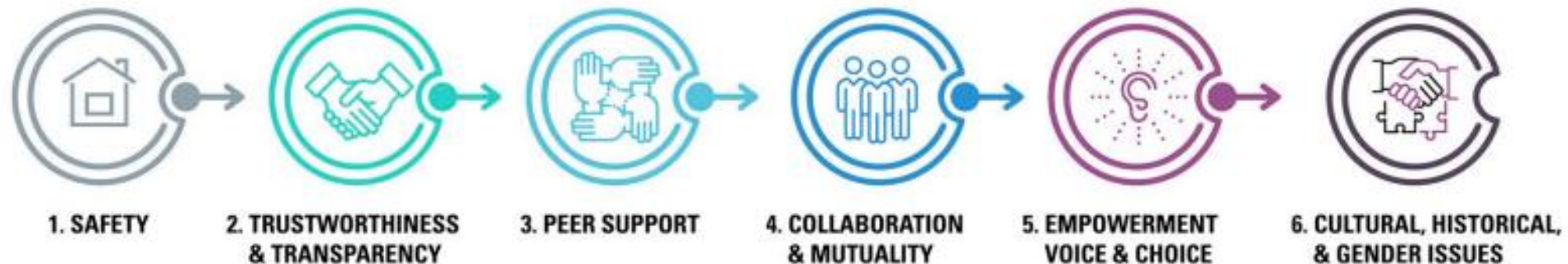
Residents are taught to shape their own values, develop a realistic perception of their lives, and build self-respect and self-confidence.

THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY APPROACH

Provides a safe environment for youth to identify, understand and alter how they respond as a result of their trauma and past experiences

Conducive to corrective emotional experience – no longer punished for expressing emotions or making mistakes, and supported unconditionally through behavioural/emotional challenges

Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) principles of trauma-informed care are embedded in Portage's approach.



SAFETY

Both physical and psychological safety of residents and staff members are prioritized above all else.

Prior to admission, a history is obtained to inform the care team so as to avoid triggers for re-traumatization (e.g., roommates, topics of conversation, approach for interventions).

Presence of safe spaces for clients to “take 5” and remove themselves from situations when overwhelmed or distressed.

Openness, respect, and confidentiality are maintained in daily meetings and groups to create a space to share openly and receive non-judgemental feedback from staff and peers

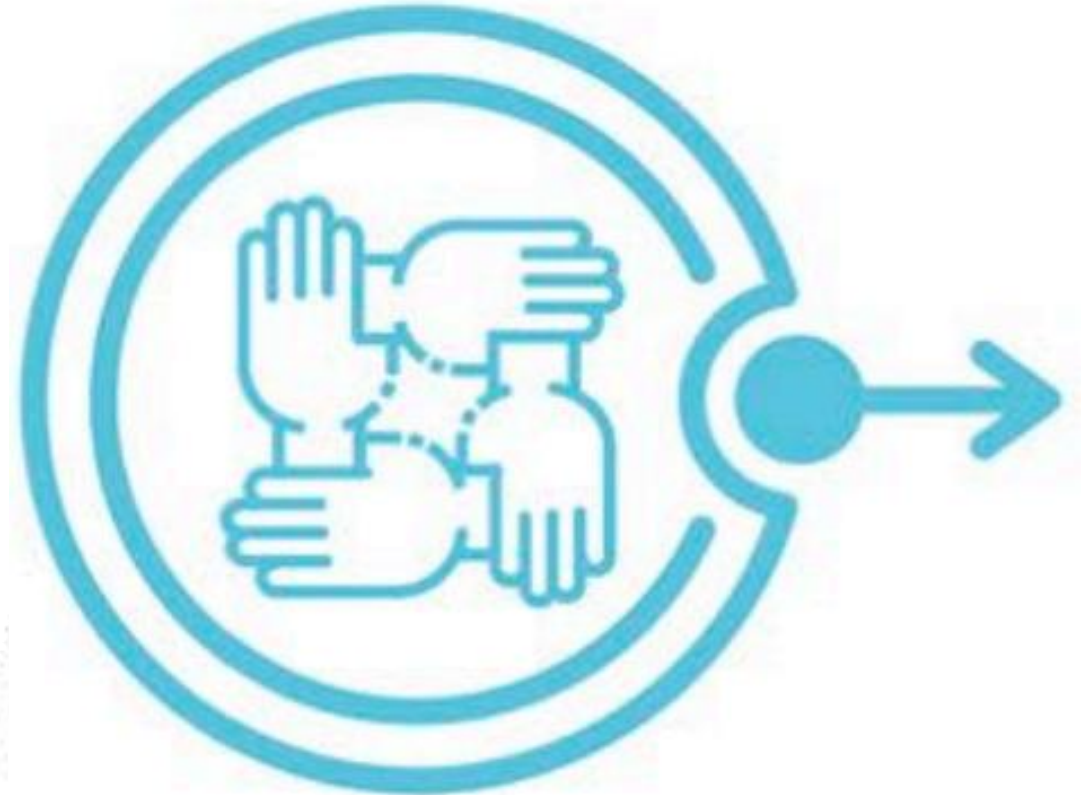


PEER SUPPORT

There are multiple phases to Portage's program with defined goals and the attainment of specific competencies tied to advancement through each

Once clients develop the coping strategies, social competencies, and understanding of their own addiction and underlying factors, they promote recovery and healing as mentors to other residents

Leveraging their stories and lived experiences to help others, this enables clients to collaborate and build connection with others while continuing their own healing



COLLABORATION

Clients are included in their treatment planning and develop their own specific objectives for each month

Daily meetings are run by community members; staff supervise and guide as needed

When nearing the end of treatment, clients write their own exit plan to guide their social reintegration and course of follow-up

Clients are trusted as experts of their own lives and are guided and worked with in line with their identified needs



EMPOWERMENT VOICE & CHOICE

Helping clients find their voice when it comes to communicating and standing up for their needs, values and objectives is reflected heavily in Portage's competencies, daily meetings, and tools of therapy.

Residents' Committee: Elected resident representatives who present community concerns, programming ideas, and feedback to the staff team on a monthly basis

Taking care of feelings: a strategy taught to clients to help them voice their emotional experiences in daily living in a non-judgmental, productive, and effective way.

Portage's 21 competencies: attainable skills that are conducive to helping clients in their pursuit of healing, belonging, and autonomy post-treatment and act as specific treatment objectives



DIALECTICAL-BEHAVIOUR THERAPY

Dialectical-behaviour therapy-based groups are offered to clients experiencing specific behavioural regulation difficulties that can follow trauma events or other childhood experiences



SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

Lack of motivation, sadness, sense of helplessness, and/or feeling lack of control over one's own life are commonly self-reported in clients

Portage often provides clients with the tools, coping strategies, self-insights, and perspective necessary for long-term success when returning to school, work, and improving relationships

Without an opportunity for transfer of knowledge between environmental contexts, lower chance of long-term success in recovery can be expected

Social reintegration involves case conferences with the support network, bi-weekly weekend visits home, exit planning, and Aftercare support

CLIENT PROFILE AFTER COMPLETING PROGRAM



80%
**NO LONGER ABUSE
SUBSTANCES**

63.4%
**ENROLLED IN
SCHOOL**



76.6%
FOUND WORK

95.1%
**IMPROVED FAMILY
RELATIONSHIPS**



AFTERCARE SERVICES

Follow-up for 2 years to support youth following their program:

Relapse prevention

Monthly individual meetings with Aftercare counsellor

Weekly support groups offered in Saint John, Fredericton, Moncton, and virtually

Option of returning to facility for weekend visits

Recognition ceremony

Scholarship opportunities



ADDRESSING RELAPSE POST-TREATMENT

Many who experience substance use disorder have experienced abandonment or rejection during the course of their addiction, especially in cases of relapse

Access to programs and services might have previously become inaccessible or complicated by relapse

While sobriety is the goal, Aftercare clients who experience a slip will be welcomed to reflect on their relapse cycle and circumstances that led to the event

Group members are supportive and provide constructive and productive insights and perspectives in a non-judgmental way

Maintaining a sense of connectedness and belonging is crucial to addressing relapse

FAMILY SERVICES

Trauma and addiction share the commonality of often being intergenerational

For best outcomes, working with the entire family/support system in the process of recovery is imperative

In those who have experienced trauma, even perceived social support can reduce feelings of distress and lower the risk of trauma-related disorders (Adepoju et al., 2022)

Individuals diagnosed with PTSD are more successfully treated when increased levels of social connectedness are experienced (Olf, 2012)

Portage strives to create this opportunity for connectedness with family members of individuals in treatment

FAMILY SERVICES

Family support group offered on a weekly basis

Workshops intended to support family with youth in treatment or any of phase of recovery

Also open to those without a youth connected to our services

Opportunity for sharing and to receive insights and understanding from other parents following workshops

Confidential, safe, welcoming, and understanding environment



FAMILY SERVICES (CONT.)

3-month workshop rotation covers a variety of topics, including:

Healthy communication

Positive parenting

Management of emotions

Conflict resolution

Establishing boundaries

Re-establishing trust

Self-care



FAMILY SERVICES (CONT.)

When client and support network are equipped with the same tools, transfer of knowledge is simplified

With client consent, family members are highly involved in treatment through home visits, case conferences and completion ceremonies

Specific challenges within the family dynamic can be mediated in meetings and other interventions



CONCLUDING REMARKS

Portage recognizes that trauma plays a central role in substance use disorder and that trauma-informed care is essential

Creating an environment in which the principles of safety, trust & transparency, peer-to-peer support, collaboration, and empowerment are ingrained in the daily structure is Portage's goal

Maintaining a sense of connection and acceptance for clients who experience a relapse is crucial for the healing process

The most effective intervention with both trauma and addiction involves working with the entire family, support network and within the community