

## **Episode 1 - So, What is the Grove? Special Guest Cyndy Forsyth**

### **Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

Hello, everyone and welcome to Get with the Grove podcast. This is an exciting day because today is actually our first episode of this podcast. I will start off with introducing myself a little bit. My name is Sabrina and I'm a Youth Ambassador based out of the Palmerston location for the Grove, which is a part of the Youth Wellness hubs Ontario initiative. I'm a fourth year neuroscience student at the University of Guelph, and I love to bike and play soccer in my free time. But enough about me. Let's get to the real star of the podcast today. And that is a director of the grove hubs Cyndy Forsyth. Hello, Cindy, how are you doing today?

### **Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

I'm great, Sabrina, how are you?

### **Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

I'm doing pretty good as well. Thanks so much for joining us today to talk a little bit about the story and roadmap of the grove.

### **Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

I really appreciate being asked to participate in this Sabrina. This is an excellent opportunity to share our story and let people know how it really started.

### **Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

Yeah, we're all really excited to know about the story because I knew, even when I started, there's stuff that I'm learning along the way about the Grove, which is amazing.

### **Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Great. So why don't I take us back in time to August of 2018? Because that's the first time I learned about this transformational model on how to deliver services in a different way to youth and actually include youth as part of the decision making process.

### **Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

And where did you learn this?

### **Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

I learned that at the Rotary Club of Guelph.

### **Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

Okay.

### **Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

So I'll even go back a little bit further is I joined the Rotary Club of Guelph in April of 2018. And in that month, a gentleman by the name of Marty Fairburn, who was a school trustee, attended a conference in Toronto where Dr. Joanna Henderson was the keynote speaker. And Dr. Joanna Henderson is the executive director of Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario. And when Marty learned about the model, he wanted Dr. Henderson to come to speak to our Rotary Club. And that's where I learned about this model. So Dr. Joanna Henderson explained to our Rotary Club about this new way of delivering care. And what it did was put youth at the center of the model. So it's kind of like a bricks and mortar site where youth walk in the door. And they get out an array of services, a variety of services that are designed to meet their needs. So I use could walk in the door simply because they want to access Wi Fi, because they want to plug their phone in, they might need a place just to do homework, a quiet space to chill, they might want to increase their sense of belonging so they may want to meet friends. So these hubs have

recreational spaces. They also have space, if a youth is struggling and wants to reach out to a professional. So it could be regarding resume writing help, financial workshops, housing support, they might want to access a counselor because they're feeling anxious or a little depressed. Or they could have some addiction issues, *or* have a friend who has addiction issues. And they want to learn more about that.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

And are all these services for you when they walk into the hub?

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Yes.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

That's amazing.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

That is the key to this. Is not hiring a whole bunch of staff, but working with existing service providers, and just asking them to relocate their services. So that youth who would normally be able to access the services don't have to go to five different locations. Those five service providers come to one location.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

Yeah, I think that's really important. Because I think when you do want to reach out and get help, it can be really frustrating being passed on from one service to the next service. And it's really nice to walk into a hub and have all of that already. So you can use it.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

So the key to this, this model is about making it as easy for you to access services as possible. Co-design the programs along with youth. So youth have been involved in this since the beginning of this journey.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

And how have they been involved?

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

In a myriad of ways. So we started off with a youth engagement working group. So that youth engagement working group, those youth meet on a monthly basis, and we run decisions by them, opportunities by them, ask their opinions. Youth have been involved in designing the site locations. So last year, we had a group of youth meet over zoom because we couldn't meet in person, and with the designer and the designer took them through several exercises on, you know, Blue skying, what they wanted in the hubs, and what type of programming they wanted so that we could build the hubs with what the youth wanted.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

And were these youth from Wellington county?

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Variety of locations. So what we did was, we've met with youth in Guelph, to help design the new CMHA Waterloo Wellington site in North Guelph. We met with youth from Palmerston - localized in Palmerston to design the Palmerston site. Same with Fergus. And the same in Erin.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

That's amazing.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Yeah, what you told us is they want bold colors, bright spaces, a space where they can feel comfortable. And I think we've achieved that.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

Oh, I can definitely say that, because as I mentioned, we've had a lot of youth coming into the Palmerston hub. And that's the first thing they point out when they walk in. They love the space, the dividers, the colors and everything.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Wonderful, that's so gratifying to hear. One thing I did want to mention is that our services are really hyper focused on intervention and prevention. And what I mean by that is, when I talk about prevention, I like to think of a youth walking through the door, who's maybe 13, or 14, and is nervous about exams, and really just wants to talk to somebody about, you know, that nervousness and and how the person can learn coping strategies. If we teach them those coping strategies at 13, 14, 15, and they learn that the butterflies they're feeling and the anxiety they're feeling is normal. And these are ways to mitigate those feelings, then hopefully, we can prevent full blown anxiety or panic attacks, when they enter university or college or a new job.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

Yeah, that's amazing. I wish I had something like this growing up as well, I feel like it definitely would have been beneficial to me and a lot of my friends.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

The other component is the integration part. And when I talk about integration, what I mean is, let's say that same youth walks through the door, and they're nervous about exams, they've got precarious housing, and they want to find a job. So Melanie, in the at the Palmerston site, would sit down with the youth, really get a comprehensive idea of what the issues are, and then reach out to maybe a Agilec, or second chance, reach out to cmha for counseling and reach out to Wellington county for housing, and bring all those service providers together. So everyone sits down with the youth, and they carve a plan in conjunction with the youth. So it isn't a "you have to do this", It's "what do you think of this idea? And let's build a care plan around you." It's a very holistic model.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

I love that. And are these hubs, evidence based models?

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Yes, as a matter of fact that they are. So I'll take a step back. These models started in Australia, under the name of headspace, and they started in the late 90s. And they have been studied. So all through the 2000s, researchers around the globe have studied how this model worked. So then other countries started to adopt the model. And we still have ongoing research happening. So by the time Joanna Henderson brought Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario into play in Ontario, she did that in 2017, 10 Youth hubs were developed. It's all based on all of the learnings that have happened all over the globe, and basically from the Australian model. So we weren't reinventing the wheel. We're taking the model that works, and we're building upon it. So now I should let you know and let the listeners know that in June, the government announced that there will be four additional Youth Wellness hubs sites in Ontario and Guelph Wellington was picked as a site. So we're now officially a Youth Wellness hubs Ontario site

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

That is so exciting and I know that it's very much needed and Guelph and especially the rural towns and cities surrounding Guelph, I go to Guelph for university, and as you know, I'm working at the Palmerston location. And it's in a very rural setting. And coming into it, I didn't know how much these hubs would be helpful. But now that we have youth coming in, I can see just how amazing it is. And even the other day, we had about I think, 10 youth and and I just had to stop for a moment and just look at everything going around, and just seeing how these hubs are actually working. And, like, people are coming in, that might not have friends and make friends at the hub. And then they talk about their own personal struggles, for example, a lot of them are really nervous to go back to in person learning and just opening up the conversation and seeing that, oh, she's nervous as well. Maybe we can figure that out together. Or we can speak to the counselor that comes here. So the hubs are working. And it's just so amazing to see that happen.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

That's.. that's music to my ears. You know, Sabrina, this never would have happened if it hadn't been for the Rotary Club of Guelph. So after Joanna Henderson spoke to our club, there were a few leaders in the Rotary Club of Guelph that came together and said, How do we make this happen? How do we bring this model to Wellington county and Guelph. And, you know, the Rotary Club of Guelph had been working on trying to build a youth center or bring a youth center for the last 25 years, they had had their sights set on trying to do this for youth. And it just - everything was fortuitous, everything sort of came together. And we decided that the best course of action was to bring the service providers together to see if there was an appetite for them to work in a different way. And we did that in November of 2018. And the we had a day long workshop. And at the end of the day, there was an overwhelming response, positive response, to the model. And that's when we started, we really brought everything together. And then I started meeting really incredibly smart, innovative leaders in our community. In Palmerston, I met Jessica Martin.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

She's amazing.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

From minto mental health, and she loved the model and wanted to pursue it. So we partnered with Minto Township. In Erin, I met Kari Simpson, and Kari, who's the executive director of East Wellington Community Services, they were already down the road to building a youth center. So this was a natural fit for them. And then in Fergus, we have Kristen Drexler from Big Brothers Big Sisters centre Wellington, they had already built the Hive. And so this just seemed like a really natural fit. So Wellington County, you know, they were already miles ahead of where we were. So it was it was really easy to partner with them, and bring this model to Wellington County. And then in Guelph, Helen Fishburne, who's the CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Waterloo Wellington, she was on board because she knows the system isn't working now. So if this is evidence based, let's go. The Guelph Y, the CEO at the time, Jeff Boyd, thought it was a great idea. And it's a natural fit for the Y because the Y is all about mind, body and spirit, and they specialize in youth activity. The University of Guelph was at the table already, they really wanted to be part of it and in a unique way. Because there's no other university in Canada that has partnered with a model like this from a service delivery

point of view. So community youth will be able to go onto campus and University of Guelph, students can use the other, the other sites.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

That's amazing to hear because I know, as I mentioned, I'm a student of Guelph. And that's something that we always have an issue with. Whenever we are going through our own struggles, we really don't know where to go and everything's kind of all over the place and it can be hard to navigate, so I'm really excited for the Guelph location as well.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

And then the last location is Shelldale family gateway. Now, Shelldale has been doing integrated service delivery for 25 years. They concentrate on a small area/depressed area in Guelph in the willow road area. And they just seemed a natural fit, because they've been doing the work for so long. So the Guelph sites all need considerable construction, which is why they're not open yet, but we're getting there.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

So there's three hubs open right now in Erin, Fergus, and in Palmerston, and then we'll have four more in the future.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Yes, sprinkled throughout the city of Guelph.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

That's amazing. I'm really excited for that.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Yeah, it's, it's pretty phenomenal how our community has come together. And everybody's working together, they've taken the ego right out of it. And everybody's concentrating on what the goal is. And the goal is to serve youth well.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

And I think that's an amazing goal to have. Because if you help these youth, when they're young, it can definitely help in the future, when, like you mentioned, creating those coping strategies now, instead of having a full blown mental illness later on, that's definitely important.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Youth Wellness hubs, Ontario, they define youth as between 12 and 25. For one reason or another, we added 26, to the timeline so our youth 12 to 26. Because we know that that's such a challenging time for young people. And we really wanted to make sure we focused on the transitional age youth. So once you hit 18, you're considered an adult. And, and if you need mental health services, you're expected to be able to navigate the adult system. And I'll tell you right now, from personal experience, I have tried to navigate the adult system. And if I can't do it, I'm not sure how a 20 year old is supposed to do it.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

And I definitely agree with that. It's definitely hard finding the services you need and, kind of, sometimes being kicked to the corner because we are considered adults. But at that time it's definitely, I feel like a huge point in your life, because you might be starting university or college or taking an extra year or going directly into working or not knowing what you want to do with your life at all. And it can be hard not to get the support that you need.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Yeah, you know, these service providers work so hard. And they're, they've got waiting lists, and they're trying the best that they can. It's not because they don't want to help, it's because the system is broken. And this is a way to tackle one part of the system to try to get it rerouted and get the services to the people that need them the most.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

And when you say the system is broken, what do you exactly mean by that?

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

I mean, it's a siloed fractured system. So what I mean by that is you get lost in the system pretty easily. And you can get referred and who follows up? So you almost need a full time advocate to help you. Like, when someone doesn't call you back or an appointment gets canceled, or you've been referred here, but you don't have a car to get here and then you've been referred to Waterloo, and then you're told to go down to CAMH in Toronto, and like, how, like it can be extremely overwhelming. And each individual services are doing their very best. So it's that there's no overall system to treat a person in a holistic manner. What I can tell you is that one thing that I was surprised at is the number of youth that are involved in this project, and who continue to want to be involved. So we have the youth engagement working group.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

And that's still ongoing?

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Yes.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

Okay.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

So anybody who wants to be on that youth engagement Working Group, they meet once a month, and they can come in and out of it as they want. And it's very easy to get connected with us. People just need to send an email to [hello@thegrovehubs.ca](mailto:hello@thegrovehubs.ca) and we'd be happy to connect them with the leaders of that group. Last winter, we had a working group that helped us, with a lot of youth on it, that really helped us develop a training program for our ambassadors, which you went through. We had a co op student from the University of Guelph Nida Ansari who spearheaded that work and she created a dynamic training program.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

It was amazing. I, honestly, I've gone through a lot of training programs before and that one was just very different. And because it was, we had about, I think it was, two hours every day for about six days. And going into it I was like, "oh two hours. Like, this is going to be like every day after I finish work, I have to do this, it's going to be so tiring." But going into that just even the icebreakers and the check ins and the way that they delivered the trainings was something that I've never seen before. And I retained so much from those trainings because of the way they, they were delivered. So I really enjoyed them.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

So that just brings me back to - Nida is a youth. So she understands how, how the messaging needs to be delivered to youth. So then, in the spring, we hired Yumna Farouk to help spearhead a diversity, inclusions and equity, indigenous reconciliation framework, so that each of the youth hubs could be culturally sensitive, and welcoming.

She is just finishing up that work and we had lots of youth on that working group as well. And in the fall, we're hiring a co op student to implement that framework. So there'll be lots of opportunity for youth to get involved because we'll need to establish another working group to help evaluate and really look at, "are we doing a good job welcoming youth from different cultural backgrounds? And what can we be doing better?"

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

And I think that's so important to especially have these working groups ongoing, because we all know times change, and there's different needs at different points in time. So especially right now, I think, with COVID anxiety is, is important right now and, it's off the charts and a lot of youth are really anxious to go back to school and are anxious about social gatherings and they think that "is this normal, is this not?" So I definitely think it's important to have these working groups know what type of workshops we need resources and stuff like that.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

Good. I'm - I couldn't be happier and more proud of our community. Everyone, we've got, I would say, at least 275 people involved in this project, and lots of youth and that's, that's what we need.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

Well, thank you so much for meeting with us again today, Cyndy.

**Speaker 2: Cyndy Forsyth**

You're welcome. And thank you for the opportunity. I really appreciate it.

**Speaker 1: Sabrina Abdul**

Of course, we're really excited to see where we go with these podcasts. And if you're still listening to this podcast, thanks so much for staying till the end. We just want to remind you that we currently have three Grove hubs open to the public, all you need to do is walk in, and these hubs are located in Erin, Palmerston, and Fergus, Ontario. For more information about the hours of these locations or anything else about these hubs. Please feel free to follow us at the grove hubs on Facebook and Instagram. Or check out our website at [www.thegrovehubs.ca](http://www.thegrovehubs.ca). Have a great day, everyone!