

Co-operators Community Fund - Stella's Place

Co-operators Community Funds provide grants to organizations that support skills training and employability of underserved youth and individuals facing mental health challenges.

Maureen Lewis, Chief Development Officer, Stella's Place

Maureen:

One of the single biggest accelerators of poor mental health outcomes is loneliness, is isolation.

So Stella's place is based on that whole concept of community. We understand that breaking down the barriers of isolation is one of the first things we can do to improve your mental health. Whether you're a young person or at any age, having people with shared experiences, feeling understood, feeling seen, is a really critical part to getting help and getting into the next step of where you want to be in life.

Stella's place is a charity. We were founded by one person, Donna Green. Our founder had a vision that there are opportunities for better community-based mental health supports out there. Her daughter Stella is a real person. Suffered significant depression and was able, through a lot of hard work and through finding some of the modalities that we use at Stella's Place, that community, peer co-design and dialectic behavior therapy is one of the main modalities of treatment we use, was able to turn her life around.

Cecilia Amoakohene, Senior Peer Initiatives Manager, Stella's Place

Cecilia:

We're not a space that is designed to tell them what to do or force them in a particular direction for their life. Really, our work is focused on this idea of supporting young adults and empowering themselves specifically to be able to live the lives that they so choose, which includes the management of their mental health on their own terms. And so I think that's really the unique piece of the work that we do, is that we let the youth and young adults that we work with kind of guide the pace and the flow of where we go with them on their journey.

Maureen:

Stella's Place exists to support young people 16 to 29. We have three pillars. We have our community access drop-in programs. We have our clinical treatment programs. And we have our amazing My Next Chapter peer training program that's funded by Co-operators.

Chukuka Ebuta, Peer Initiatives Coordinator, Stella's Place

Chukuka:

So My Next Chapter is a peer support training program. It gets people ready for the workforce. It gets people ready for the larger helping sector. But we specifically focus on peer supporters.

Fourteen or fifteen or so people show up by the time they leave, you can see the progress, not only who they are personally, but you can see that they're really learning the skills.

Gulpreet Abrol, Peer Initiatives Coordinator, Stella's Place

Gulpreet:

It is a support service where you get to sit with the person who's been there, done that, who is ready to share their journey with you, who is ready to bring hope into your life with their journey.

And that's why we call it my next chapter. You know, you've navigated some sort of chapter in your life, and this is your next chapter. It's like a door that is going to lead you to a different path in your life.

Chukuka:

To see the growth and to be a part of someone's journey, even if it took a couple of months, I get to do that multiple times of a year.

And not all jobs that you feel that sense of, I'm part of this person's story, and they're going to go on to do something great. And I'm a part of that and that's just a really warming feeling. It reminds me when things get a little hard, this centers me and brings me back to, oh, you are like changing people's lives.

Cecilia:

Peer support helps to inspire hope in people. The support that we get from Co-operators enables us to touch so many more lives of youth and young adults throughout the city through various ways.

It says something to the participants that it's not just donors from Stella's Place who support this piece, but like other external organizations, see the work and see it being so valuable that they want to support it and help it to grow.

Yeomal Aher, Peer Ambassador, Stella's Place

Yeomal:

As a kid or a teenager who struggled with mental health his entire life, I always wanted a space where I felt I could feel validated, where I could feel safe. And then when I heard about Stella's Place, I was almost in shock. I couldn't believe a place like this existed.

Here you feel validated. You feel compassionate through people, through not only the staff, but just the people who've come here for like years and years and years.

And the best part about the space is that we were all on the joint belief of creating a positive cycle in the world. We're able to learn and help others, and the beauty of that, you know, you can't take that away.

Jake Bradshaw, graduate My Next Chapter (2023)

Jake:

I think I would want everyone to know how rigorous the program is, and how it creates really awesome opportunities to learn about peer support, learning from other people, from your peers, and also learn from mental health professionals who have been doing this work for a really long time. So I think the one thing would be knowing how, you know, strong the program is and how it really sets people up for success in the field.

Rhine Basu, graduate My Next Chapter (2024)

Rhine:

It's not just a place where, you know, you can show up and find community so easily, but it's also somewhere that you can actually learn from other people and grow, because you're going to feel so much love and so much support and encouragement.

There really is no place like it.

Chukuka:

Every now and then I think about the fact that lives are changing. when I get over the

enormity of it. It feels like something truly unique and incredible. And it's given so much to so many people.

And that's a truly remarkable thing, and it keeps me grounded in a lot of ways.

Maureen:

Together we are going to be stronger than any one of us can be standing alone.

To live in the kind of society that we all want to share, and where we have young, resilient, empowered and well tooled, well skilled young people making decisions about how we move forward as a society.

And together, with Co-operators, we are quite simply building the future of young adult mental health.

Co-operators Community Funds is proud to support organizations like Stella's Place whose programming enables participants to gain meaningful employability-related skills and training, while continuing on their journey of recovery.