

# Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

December 10, 2020, 1:00pm-2:30pm

**Presenters:** Dr. Samantha Abel, PhD, RSW, Social Worker, Flemingdon Health Centre  
Janet Rodriguez, Lived Experience Advisor; Health Mentor for Inter professional education

**Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT) Workshop facilitators:**

John Mossa, Independent Living Skills Coordinator

Rebecca Wood, Peer and Parenting Program Coordinator

Robin Simmons, Inquiries Generalist



# Land Acknowledgement

CILT would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the territory of the Haudenosaunee, and most recently, the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

This territory is also covered by the Upper Canada Treaties.

Today, the meeting place of Toronto (from the Haudenosaunee word Tkaronto) is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community, on this territory.

# Workshop Agenda

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|--|---------|
| 1) Welcome, Land Acknowledgement, Agenda           | 5 mins  |
| 2) Workshop Disclaimer & Guidelines, Introductions | 5 mins  |
| 3) Workshop Objectives                             | 45 mins |
| 4) Question and Answers                            | 30 mins |
| 5) Resources, Evaluations & Thank You              | 5 mins  |

# Workshop Disclaimer

- **DISCLAIMER:** This PowerPoint presentation is for general information purposes only. This presentation should not be taken as replacement for any medical/clinical advice. If you are needing some support throughout this presentation, please feel free to send a message directly to Rebecca Wood (CILT Staff) or Robin Simmons (CILT Staff) in the chat box and they will assist you.
- The information is current as of December 10, 2020. The information and resources given are subject to change. For the most current information, participants should check the resources mentioned at the end of presentation.
- This presentation is the property of Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT) and neither the whole or part is to be circulated without expressed consent of CILT. You can contact John Mossa, Independent Living Skills Coordinator at 416-599-2458, ext 238 to get consent to circulate it.

# Workshop Guidelines

- We will be recording the first half of Zoom presentation so we can share with people with disabilities and our allies. We will stop recording at the questions and answers section.
- Workshop is meant to empower you with information and resources.
- For privacy and time management, we ask you to mute your lines to reduce noise disruptions. We are also asking that you turn off your video to preserve bandwidth except for the hosts and ASL interpreters until questions and answers section.
- We have both live captioning and ASL interpretation available.
- For ASL interpretation- You can pin the interpreter's video. To do this you need to go to the top right of the interpreter's video, click on the dots and select "pin video".
- If you need live captioning please click the CC button along the bottom of your screen and the captions will appear.

# Workshop Guidelines

- If you have a specific question/comment for the facilitators, please ensure that you type it in the chat box and Rebecca Wood (CILT Staff) will ask it during questions and answers section.
- If you are joining via phone, and you would like to ask a question during the Q+A raise your hand by dialing \*9. Rebecca will then ask you to dial \*6 in order to unmute and mute.
- Talking about mental health and mental health supports can activate all kinds of emotions. If you are needing some support over chat throughout this presentation, please feel free to send a message directly to Rebecca Wood (CILT Staff) or Robin Simmons (CILT Staff) in the chat box and they will assist you.
- We want to co-create a space that everyone will feel heard and respected.
- We reserve the right to remove anyone from the meeting who does not follow these guidelines.

# About Us: Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT)

CILT believes in **Independent Living Philosophy** where people with disabilities are seen as **consumers** who have the right to: examine choices, make decisions, take risks, make mistakes, and take responsibility for one's own life. We are

- Rooted in the “**Nothing About Us Without Us**” disability rights movement
- Community-based Resource Centre run by people with disabilities for people with disabilities.
- Working towards building a society where people with disabilities have social and economic equity.



# About Us: Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT)

**CILT Core Programs** assist persons with disabilities to take control of their own lives and to live independently in the community.

They are:

- Information & Referral/Volunteer Program
- Peer Support & Parenting with a Disability Network
- Attendant Service Application Centre (ASAC)
- Direct Funding Program
- Independent Living Skills Training & Community Engagement



# Brief Introductions: Dr. Samantha Abel & Janet Rodriguez

- Dr. Samantha Abel, PhD, RSW, Social Worker, Flemingdon Health Centre:

- Dr. Sam Abel is a social worker, an artist, and occasionally an academic. Her social work practice focuses on mental health, gender-based violence, refugee settlement, disability advocacy, and body positivity. Sam's academic research explores weight discrimination in therapy and plus-size fashion. You can see more of her artistic work @saucy.nudles.

- Janet Rodriguez, Lived Experience Advisor; Health Mentor for Inter professional education:

- Janet Rodriguez is a translator by trade; an experienced trainer; a pain survivor; and an accessibility advocate. She identifies as a racialized, disabled woman of colour. She volunteers as a Health Mentor with the Inter professional Education program at U of T. Whether in a face to face mentoring session or in a zoom setting, Janet brings awareness of the barriers people with disabilities face on a daily basis; and encourages others to be part of the solution by breaking the biggest barrier: **Attitude.**

# Workshop Objectives

This workshop will have following objectives:

- 1) What is COVID-19 and its impact on people with disabilities?
- 2) Includes knowing when to seek mental health support
- 3) How to determine a provider's disability lens
- 4) How to ensure your access needs are being met
- 5) Tools and Resources
- 6) Question and Answers

# Objective 1: What is COVID-19?

- **COVID-19** is short for **CO**rona **VI**rus **D**isease. The number 19 refers to the fact that the disease was first detected in 2019. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified COVID-19 as a pandemic.
- Some of COVID-19 most common symptoms are a cough, a high temperature and shortness of breath.
- While COVID-19 can make anyone sick, **some Canadians** with specific health circumstances **are at an increased risk of more severe outcomes, including individuals:**
  - **aged 65 and over**
  - **with compromised immune systems**
  - **with underlying medical conditions**
- **Use the term COVID-19 for this presentation**

# Objective 1: Impact of COVID-19 on People with Disabilities

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of the **medical model approach** has grown in **the health care system**, with people with disabilities being increasingly treated as sick and as objects of health intervention or **deprioritization**, or as a burden to ourselves and our families. We are seeing an **erosion of the Independent Living Philosophy/Model**.
- COVID-19 has increased social and economic inequalities for people with disabilities, seniors and marginalized groups.
- Disabled people are often placed at society's margins and stand to be the **most impacted by COVID-19 but we are usually the last to be heard**. **We must come together to highlight, amplify and advocate our human rights!**

# Objective 2: Knowing When To Seek Mental Health Support

## 2 Zoom Poll Questions:

1. Do you need mental health support?

2. Are you having difficulty accessing mental health support that use a disability lens?

# Objective 2: Knowing When To Seek Mental Health Support

## 5 Signs You Might Need Mental Health Support

### 1. You feel sad, angry, or otherwise “not yourself.”

- Eating more or less than usual?
- Sleeping more or less than usual?
- Withdrawing from family or friends?

### 2. You are using substances or engaging in risky behaviour to cope

- Alcohol & drug use
- Self-harming behaviours such as cutting, burning, or pulling out hair
- High-risk sexual activity ex. unprotected sex with strangers

# Objective 2: Knowing When To Seek Mental Health Support

## 5 Signs You Might Need Mental Health Support Cont'd

### 3. You can't do the things you normally like to do.

- Have you stopped doing things that normally bring you joy? Why?

### 4. Something traumatic has happened.

- History of abuse or neglect
- Victim of a crime or accident

### 5. You've lost someone or something important to you.

- Grief during COVID-19
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/where-science-meets-the-steps/201303/5-signs-its-time-see-therapy>

# Objective 2: Knowing When To Seek Mental Health Support

## What is Grief?

- Grief is our body's involuntary response to loss (the severing of an attachment).
- Grief is normal and universal. We all have a grief response that is not within our control. Grief may manifest:

Physically - pain, fatigue, nausea

Emotionally - crying, feeling anguished, lonely, or vulnerable

Cognitively – difficulty concentrating, trouble making decisions

Socially – impacts our relationships with others

Existentially – the shattering of assumptions we hold about the world

- Credit: Being Here, Human <https://www.beingherehuman.com/>

# Objective 2: Knowing When To Seek Mental Health Support

## Tangible vs. Intangible Loss

Tangible: Something or someone I had in my life is now gone.

- Death of a loved one, lost a favourite item, losing a job

Intangible Loss: Less acknowledged, can be hard to identify and articulate

- Loss of identity
- Loss of routine
- Loss of purpose
- Loss of sense of safety
- Loss of mobility



# Objective 2: Knowing When To Seek Mental Health Support

## It's Ok To Not Be Ok.

- But what can we do about not being ok?
- Focus on small joys, momentary peace, tiny wins
- Interrupt our constant focus on the negative
- Step back from social media and the news

# Objective 2: Knowing When To Seek Mental Health Support

## Strategies to Make Ourselves Feel Better:

- Do something sensory and pleasant for your body: gentle movement, take a bath, light a scented candle, take a moment to focus on your breathing
- Do an activity that you enjoy: reading a book, knitting, listening to music, water your plants, play with your pets
- Engage with people socially: Call your parents/family, text a friend
- Build trust and allyship with yourself. Trust yourself about what works and what doesn't, know your limits during this time and don't apologize for them. Be intentional about who and what you are letting into your life during this time.

# Objective 3: Why is a Disability Lens Important in Seeking a Mental Health Service Provider?

During the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen the disability rights movement regress and the rights and needs of Canadians living with disabilities have been, for the most part, left out of the conversations and response.

Identified below are four core areas in which people living with disabilities have been affected by the lack of the use a disability lens when responding to a public health emergency.

- 1) Access
- 2) Financial
- 3) Social Isolation and Exclusion
- 4) Health and Wellness

<http://www.accessibilitynewsinternational.com/a-disability-lens-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>

# Objective 3: Why is a Disability Lens Important in Seeking a Mental Health Service Provider?

## Importance to Having a Disability Lens When Seeking a Mental Health Service Provider

- To acknowledge that when you are accessing free services you may not be able to choose your mental health service provider.
- To acknowledge disabled people have been harmed by the medical system.
  
- However, remember with any professional relationship with your mental health provider, **You have agency, control, and choice :**
  - **To set boundaries** and say “this is what I want to talk about and don’t want to talk about”
  - **To ask questions and get feedback** from your mental health provider: “How do you want to hear feedback?” or “I didn’t like the way you said that to me.” It is never too late to give feedback to your therapist and save the relationship. If you find they don’t take your feedback, better to walk away from a mental health provider that is not serving you and find another.

# Objective 3: How To Determine A Provider's Disability Lens

**Disability Lens must include Social Justice Framework:**

**Independent Living Philosophy & Nothing About Us Without Us**

- **Independent Living Philosophy** is founded on the right of persons with disabilities to:
  - **Live with dignity** in our chosen community;
  - **Participate** in all aspects of our lives; and
  - **Control and make decisions** about our lives.
- **“Nothing About Us Without Us”** is key Independent Living Philosophy principle that the **person with a disability is the best expert regarding their needs.**

# Objective 3: How To Determine A Provider's Disability Lens

**Disability Lens** must include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- **Definition of Disability** that is used to apply to all persons with disabilities.
- **Full Citizenship** people with disabilities must be full citizens.
- **Intersectionality:** People with disabilities have intersectional identities, Indigenous Peoples, gender, class, race, and sexual orientations. **“We do not live single issue lives” Audre Lorde**
- **Social Inclusion** making sure that all people participate as valued members of society. Disability justice recognizes **wholeness of the person**. People have inherent worth outside of capitalist notions of productivity. Each person is full of history and life experience.

# Objective 3: How To Determine A Provider's Disability Lens

## Important Questions: How To Determine A Provider's Disability Lens

- Does this counsellor/therapist have experience working with people with disabilities
- Do they have any experiences working with your specific disability?
- Do they have experiences with people with disabilities with intersectional identities of race, class, gender and sexual orientation?
- How do they see/define disability? Charity, Medical, Social or **Independent Living Model**
- Are they willing to listen, learn and work with you?
- Are they going to respect my decisions with regards to treatment?

# Objective 4: How To Ensure Your Access Needs Are Being Met

## What is Self-Advocacy?

- Self-Advocacy is about speaking up for yourself.
- Self-Advocacy is a way for you to change a negative situation that affects you.
- 4 SELF- ADVOCACY STEPS: STEP 1: PREPARE, STEP 2: PLAN, STEP 3: ACT, and STEP 4: EVALUATE



# Objective 4: How To Ensure Your Access Needs Are Being Met

- **4 SELF- ADVOCACY STEPS:**
- **STEP 1: PREPARE:** List and prioritize your key issue(s), gather information, find support:
  - What are your access accommodations needs and how can you and mental health service provider work together to accommodate them? What help are you seeking?
- **STEP 2: PLAN:** Think and choose your best solution(s), be as specific as possible
  - Use of accessible technology available to you (phone, internet)
- **STEP 3: ACT:** Advocating Assertively: Set boundaries [This is me/my body/ this is what I want to talk about and don't want to talk about]
- **STEP 4: EVALUATE:** Evaluate your action plan. Ask yourself, have any positive changes occur? At the end of session; did you get your needs met? Are you able to provide feedback?

# Objective 4: How To Ensure Your Access Needs Are Being Met

When problems arise with aspects of your service:

- **Step One:** First discuss your concerns with the therapist most directly responsible. Describe how you want things done and clearly outline your expectations. Allow the appropriate time to correct the problem.
- **Step Two:** If the issue cannot be resolved at this stage and a reasonable amount of time has passed, contact the therapist's manager. Discuss with them what the problem is, what steps you have taken to resolve the issue and again, clearly outline your expectations/solutions. At this point you may want to find out about the **organization's compliant and appeals policies and lay a compliant.**

# Objective 4: How To Ensure Your Access Needs Are Being Met

- When problems arise with aspects of your service:
- **Step Three:** If your issue is still not resolved, repeat Step Two moving steadily up the management structure. For example, in most organizations authority is as follows: 1. Therapist ; 2. Therapist's Program Manager; 3. Executive Director; 4. Board of Directors
- **Step Four:** If after appealing to the Board of the service agency, the issue still is not resolved, you may choose to contact the Program Supervisor of the Government Ministry with responsibility for that agency. **OR**

# Objective 4: How To Ensure Your Access Needs Are Being Met

- When problems arise with aspects of your service:
- You can **lay a complaint with a professional body that regulates a service provider** like OCSWSSW - Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers  
<https://www.ocswssw.org/>
- **In cases of discrimination**, you may choose to contact your Provincial/Federal Human Rights Commission. Be sure this is the most appropriate choice. Talk to Human Rights experts or with people who have experience with Human Rights.
- **In cases of a violation of privacy** or the misuse of personal information there may be an appropriate privacy commission to raise your concern with. In Ontario there are both Provincial and Municipal authorities to file an appeal with. Again talk to some others and get some advice.

# Objective 4: How To Ensure Your Access Needs Are Being Met

- When problems arise with aspects of your service:
- You may choose to contact your **City Councillor, Member of Provincial Parliament, and/or Federal Member of Parliament.**
- Another option you may choose is to contact the **Media**. However, be aware, this option may have unexpected consequences. Media may misrepresent or misquote your issue. If you choose this option, contact an individual or organization with experience dealing with Media.
- You may choose to contact **Patient Ombudsman**. They facilitate resolutions and investigate patient and caregiver complaints – without taking sides – about patient care and health care experiences in public hospitals, long-term care homes and Community Care Access Centres (CCACs).

# Objective 5: Self-Advocacy **Tools** for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

- The following self-advocacy tools will be sent to you:

1 Self Advocacy Tip Sheet

2 Sample Format for Complaint Form

3 Standard Self-Advocacy Letter Template

4 How to Meet with your Service Provider

5 How to find your City Councillor MPP MP Ward and Riding

6 How to Work with the Media

# Objective 5: **Resources** Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

This list was compiled by CILT on December 10 2020. Please note the links in the document are not active so you will need to copy and paste them into your browser.

If you are in need of support right now, we encourage you to connect with a service that feels right for you:

- **Distress and Crisis Lines**
- **Non-Crisis Peer Support, Text and Online Support**
- **Information and Referral Lines**
- **Low Cost, No Cost and OHIP Covered Options**
- **Free Self-Directed Mental Health Support**
- **Disability Specific Peer Support**
- **How to find a Private Therapist**
- **Additional Resource Lists**

# Objective 5: Resources Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

## Distress and Crisis Lines

- Can be accessed by phone (some by text) 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
- If you are having overwhelming thoughts and need immediate support
- Take a look at the list in a calm moment.
- Find that number that fits best for you and write it down or program it into your phone.
  
- Example: Anishnawbe 24/7 Mental Health Crisis Management Service**
- Website:** <https://indigenousto.ca/mental-health-crisis-line/>
- Call:** 416-891-8606
- Who is it for:** Support based on Traditional practices and approaches for Indigenous peoples.



# Objective 5: Resources Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

## Distress and Crisis Lines

If you feel you or someone close to you is at risk of harming yourself or others

**call 911** or

**Contact Gerstein Centre Crisis Line (416) 929-5200**

**PLEASE NOTE:** Think of safety in an intersectional way, for some people calling 911 is the best option, for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), you may want to call Gerstein Centre Crisis Line (416) 929-5200 or another distress line in the Resources. Know you have options.



# Objective 5: Resources Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

## Non-Crisis Peer Support, Text and Online Support

- Reach out if you need someone to talk to
- Some are mental health professionals responding to you
- Some are volunteer/peer support

# Objective 5: Resources Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

## Information and Referral Lines

### - ConnexOntario

**Website:** <http://www.connexontario.ca/>

**Call:** [Mental Health Helpline](#) 1-866-531-2600

[Drug and Alcohol Helpline](#) 1-800-565-8603

[Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline](#) 1-888-230-3505

**-Who is it for:** Province-wide information and referral services for those with mental health or addiction challenges.

# Objective 5: Resources Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

## Low Cost, No Cost and OHIP Covered Options

- Community Health Centre or hospital department social worker
- Hospital groups/classes like Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
- These programs will have **waitlists**

# Objective 5: Resources Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

## Free Self-Directed Mental Health Support

-Online mix of videos and self work with some coaching support from mental health professionals

**-Bounceback** <https://bouncebackontario.ca/>

-Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) specific skill building

**-Wellness Together Canada** <https://ca.portal.gs/>

-Mental Wellness support focused on mental health and substance use.

# Objective 5: Resources Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

## Disability Specific Peer Support

-Peer Support with others with your disability organized by associations/societies/organizations

**-Call and ask!**

**-CILT Peer Connect** is a biweekly peer support group for adults with disabilities coping with impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Contact [rebecca.wood@cilt.ca](mailto:rebecca.wood@cilt.ca) to register.



# Objective 5: Resources Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

## How to find a Private Therapist

- OHIP covered matching service called Greenspace where you answer a questionnaire and speak with a social worker who helps match you with a private therapist
  
- If you are assigned a therapist through a free or low-cost service you can also use these resources to look them up and learn more about them.
  
- Colleges have lists of registered practitioners and are also where you go to make a complaint.

# Objective 5: Resources Self-Advocating for Accessible Mental Health Supports for People with Disabilities During COVID-19

## Additional Resource Lists

-When you are feeling down or stressed it can be a challenge to go through a list of resources.

-Feel free to call **CILT Service Navigation at 416-599-2458 extension 228** for help finding the right support for you.

# Objective 6:

## Question and Answers

- If you have a specific question/comment for the facilitators, please ensure that you type it in the chat box and note who it is for and Rebecca Wood (CILT Staff) will ask it during this questions and answers section.
- If you are joining via phone, and you would like to ask a question during the Q+A raise your hand by dialing \*9. Rebecca will then ask you to dial \*6 in order to unmute and mute.

# Resources, Evaluations & Thank Yous

- Resources: PowerPoint, Tools, and Resources
- Zoom Poll Evaluations
- Thank you for your time & participation
- Thank you to our Presenters, CILT Staff, ASL Interpreters and Captionist
- Thank you to our funders United Way GTA, City of Toronto, & IL Canada

# CILT Contact Information

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