



Inquiry into hate in the pandemic:

Hearing Transcript

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Presenting organizations: Yorktown Family Services

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Introductory comments from Human Rights Commissioner Kasari Govender not included in transcript

David O'Brien: Thank you everyone, for inviting us, inviting me, representing Yorktown Family Services. My name is David O'Brien, and I'm the director of mental health from Toronto, and I also want to acknowledge the traditional territory that Toronto sits on, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishinaabeg, Chippewa, and Wendat peoples.

So once again, thank you. I'm just wondering, if I can upload a bit of a slide presentation, Is that okay?

Perfect. Okay, just give me a few seconds. You'll have to enable me, I think, to share.

Okay. [exhales]

Can everyone see that? Yeah? Okay, good.

Once again, I'm from Yorktown Family Services. We are an organization operating out of Toronto, and we offer a variety of mental health and social health programming. And we have several pillars, including child and youth mental health center, women's shelter for women fleeing domestic violence, and a great services hub for youth and adults. With a variety of services

¹ BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner

including housing supports, mental health services, including therapy counseling, a walk-in clinic, mental health walk in clinic, youth mentorship program, care navigation. In all, about 32 programs, we serve about 5,000 people per year, operating in primarily West Toronto.

One of programs I'm here today to talk about, that relates to the Commission's report is called ETA, estimated time of arrival. So, we are one of the few programs in Canada that is really a mobile team made up of interdisciplinary positions, including a therapist, youth engagement workers, engagement and intervention workers, psychiatry, that engage with youth young adults, and sometimes adults that are the pathway, or involved with violent extremism. Also, hate groups, and, you know, grievance-based violence in particular. So, we cover the greater Toronto area, and, essentially, we work with people up to the age of 35, but can take referrals beyond that.

So, we offer, sort of, a non-criminalized approach to help people to disengage with hate, and involve an extremist activity. So, we offer psychosocial supports for integrated care approach, with multiple evidence-informed, and evidence-based behavioral health interventions. We also offer a public education campaign to support other organizations, to engage with people that might be headed down "The Hate Pathway", as we call it. To build capacity for them, and for them to engage in their own communities with vulnerable people, that might be headed towards violent extremism, or hate motivated crimes.

We work with people all across the spectrum, and so, in terms of radicalization towards hate, primarily most of our clients are radicalized, or are radicalized to violence. So, the difference between the two is that, someone that's radicalized has an ideology of perhaps how the world should look, how the world should behave, and quite an obsession with that particular ideology, that is always associated with a hate inspired, sort of, ideology.

Radicalized to violence, is someone that believes that violence is the only way to get a message or point across. And often, that targets a particular demographic with, you know, that type of behavior or action to, kind of, send a message, and we'll talk a little bit about what we're seeing, and how we're experiencing this. But in terms of, a lot of the folks, 90% of the folks we work with have been recruited online through chat rooms, social media sites, dark web, you know, and often, kind of engaging in online hate communities that are transnational.

So, it's not necessarily localized to Canadian context sometimes, but can be, sort of across, primarily continental Western Europe and North America. So, our general observation, and today I'm speaking on behalf of all the information that clients tell us, and I think, you know, in this space at least, we're able to gather a lot of information in terms of how recruitment happens, why people join. So, I'm happy to share that with you today because I think it's important to, kind of, look at other avenues to address hate.

As we know, this is an increasing issue in Toronto, across Canada.

So primarily, our youth speak about being recruited online through-- typically it starts off in typical mainstream social media outlets, including Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram.



We've also had youth as young as 11, 12 years old be recruited through video game platforms; Roblox, Call of Duty. And a lot of this recruitment comes from people that are likely older, it's transnational in nature. And what happens is, people get invited into these, sort of, transnational communities online that really involving a lot of hate speech, and at the extreme level, kind of, ways to attack particular demographics that are perceived as at threat. Often, our youth about being sort of recruited on these sites, and then brought to more secure platforms, more encrypted channels, that can evade parental supervision, or parental engagements.

So, stuff like Telegram, Reddit, Reddit sites, and SubReddits. Also, of late, for the last year, especially during the pandemic, several of our clients report being involved in Gab, which is a social media far right channel, you know, that openly has, you know, hate speech and engagement with quite a lot of violent extremism, sort of, propaganda.

So, who are the people we work with—who are they, and why are they ending up in these situations?

We noticed that we have a data collection, you know, we do interviews, and this is part of our treatment because, you know, we are a treatment program for this.

And so, all of our clients have a history of trauma. So, people that are committing some of these hate crimes, or hate speech, have a trauma history themselves.

Mental health is highly, highly, prevalent in all of our clients. And in particular, anxiety, depression, ADHD, and that's important here because a lot of the times, anxiety and depression creates the isolation. And in particular, during the pandemic, most of our— all of our clients have been, you know, online. And a lot of times, prior to that even, they were online. ADHD is important because the impulsivity of hate speech sometimes can—can, you know-- there's sort of no filter, they kind of just, you know, blurt things out and attack people, either verbally or violently.

So, there's this real trend around that too. Interestingly enough, about 80% of our clients are survivors themselves, of domestic violence as a child, or have witnessed abuse.

Majority of clients have experienced some sort of racist of themselves, or been bullied over a long period of time, causing trauma.

Many of them have disruptive relationships with their caregivers, and in particular, males with their dad, or father figures.

Most of them suffer from severe emotional regulations, so a lot of anger and impulsivity. So, not a whole lot of ability to, sort of, contain, or contain themselves in situations.

About a quarter are homeless. or couch surfing. We're seeing a real increase over the last couple years around misogyny, and violence against women, rhetoric in terms of violence against women

That's open on chat rooms, and then begins to play out in, sort of, real life. And so, a lot of referrals have been for males that, you know, are— are, you know, making threats, sort of hate language, derogatory language, violence, violent threats towards women, and these are



teenagers, and these are youth. A Lot of our clients lacked, sort of, social skills, healthy relationship development. Primarily because of what they've been through in their life. Blocks skills to understand, sort of, you know, critical thinking. They have very difficult time understanding their own identity, and where they fit in the world. So, a lot of times these ideologies come along and offer a bit of a false sentiment roadmap.

In particular, we're seeing that with some of the white nationalist movements, and far right, and extreme right-wing groups. So, it really gives them a bit of template— a false sense of a template, to feel like they belong somewhere. They often have suicidal ideation, and of course, also homicidal ideation too.

I just want to walk you through, I guess, a case scenario. And so, some of the details have been changed to protect confidentiality, but this is a typical situation. How someone gets lured into a hate group online, and then begins to spread propaganda, as they're moving up in the ranks in terms of the command-and-control structure in the chat rooms. So, this is a situation that that several of our clients have talked about, and maybe the nuances are a little different, but certainly, I think, this will give you clarity as to what's happening. So, we'll call the person D. So, they have a history of depression, feeling lonely. They have significant disruption in their family relationship and have a history of being bullied at school, so, they're kind of, socially isolated.

They're on a gaming site, and, you know, they begin to develop an online community of friends from across North America. They begin to develop online relationships, and so, they don't really have any real life or sort of in-person relationships, but online they begin to develop some friendships.

They get to know each other online, some of personal information is being exchanged, they're talking about common problems at school.

And so, the client that we have begins to, kind of, find like-minded people, want similar offline experiences, feeling isolated, not being accepted.

So, somebody in these online gaming chat rooms invites them to more of a private chat room, and friendships begin to, sort of, foster and grow. So, they've moved to a non-gaming, social opportunity online, and perhaps it could be one of the sites that we talked about earlier, around Telegram and the more encrypted sites, or could be even, you know, just typical online mainstream sites.

So, conversations begin to talk, they get more personal, they start to talk about grievances they're having in their world, their own lack of successes, common characteristics that are shared, and similar backgrounds are found amongst the youth.

So, a disconnection with the family, and really beginning to talk about grievances that they're facing around the world, or things that they're upset about by, including politically. I think it matters to suggest to, kind of, move on to other platforms, telegram, discord, and so, less people join those chat rooms. And so, a new cohort of people, they engage within a different type of chat room.



So, D begins to meet people in more of an encrypted chat room, and begins to notice that there's a lot of racism happening.

People are being blamed. In particular, for this client, at the beginning of COVID, there was a real, sort of, attack on Asian-Canadians, in particular China, Chinese Canadians, and that there was videos being shown of, kind of, conspiratorial stuff happening. That China-- Chinese people were spreading the virus, and that they're a threat to Canada in society. He's starting to feel like he's connected to these people, things are making sense in life, that there's a virus, there's a pandemic, but he feels accepted.

He's then encouraged by some leaders in the chat room to spread disinformation, or information about China, Chinese people, and COVID online, and he's encouraged to do that on Facebook, Twitter, and some of the more mainstream platforms to get the word out. So, our client feels like he has special information, and begins to, kind of, begins to cross into this hate speech, or targeted hate towards a particular demographic.

He's promised rewards if he's to spread the word about what's happening, and begin to spread this hate ideology.

He's also that encouraged to invite new members into these more hate race— racist kind of sites, and more secure chat rooms by the group leader.

4Chan, Message Chat, and other sites that are even more encrypted.

He's asked to download VPNs, so that his-- their conversations can't be tracked by parents, or caregivers, or police. And then, also asked to begin to give up personal information themselves.

So basically, in order to get more information about what's happening in the world, and to belong to this community, bank accounts, credit card numbers, location, downloading special apps where his—his location can be tracked. And then, also encouraged to continue to spread even darker propaganda.

In particular, you know, impacting at that time was not just Chinese Canadians, but also other demographics.

So, at this point, it's been about a year into the process.

Finally, it becomes clear that this person is now involved in an online community supported by far right, or right-wing white nationalist groups, that's transnational.

Keeping in mind the child is 12, and so, also being used as an agent to kind of spread this hate literature.

At some point, police become involved, and our services are then put into place. So, that kind of gives you an indication from a youth perspective, and online perspective of this recruitment and grooming that begins to happen. And in some ways, a little similar to sex trafficking, when people-- young women get groomed into that, or young men get groomed into that.



So, there's a whole process that happens, and one thing that's clear is this is very transnational too because of the Internet, crosses— crosses boundaries.

So, it's an organization we work with called Moonshot, and so, they do a lot of online engagement and research.

And so, if you look at this chart, and I know you're from BC, so this might be important to you.

So, if you look at search engine for hate, or engagement with hate groups, or hate online communities, Moonshot did a research project during the early part of COVID. So, the left side is pre-COVID in terms of searches, or engagement with, and then the right side is post-COVID. So, if you look at Vancouver, there was a significant increase. In-- in Most cities across Canada there was an increase, some more than others, In terms of.... all kinds of things.

Number one, the amount of hate material that's online, and number two, the engagement that people repeatedly engaging these are not just one-time engagements, these are repeated

So, from our perspective and research and what's happening, and, you know, we're here today to talk, you know, the increase. And certainly, I think there's in some ways, unfortunately, there's a perfect storm happening in a lot of ways.

So—so basically, from what we hear from clients, our discussions with them, certainly Covid has escalated hate. Also, because, you know, COVID has brought a lot of fear to people.

So, people when they're fearful, often need something to latch on to, to kind of blame, or feel like there's a reason for it.

And so early on, as I mentioned earlier, the Chinese community was very targeted, we feel, around the blame for COVID. That's dissipated, I believe, but I think certainly still relevant there.

We also—our clients talked a lot about, a lot of the hate groups have co-opted I guess, sort of, protest movements that were, you know, sort of against the public health restrictions.

I think we saw some of that, certainly during the convoy, but that had been happening for several years during COVID, from the beginning, really. So, a lot of the white Nationalist groups have launched onto these, sort of, what could be considered, you know, legitimate grievances or concerns, or on public health restrictions.

But, you know, often you see hate groups to latch on to social movements that are often legitimate, but may also help these hate groups expand their horizon, or scope.

Certainly, after January 6th, we do know that thousands and thousands of people had joined Gab, which is a, you know, a platform that really doesn't monitor hate speech, and some ways indirectly encourages that, so that was certainly a significant influence. The integration between conspiracy theories and mainstream politics. In particular, I think we saw the QAnon movement really grow in the United States, in support of Donald Trump. That hasn't gone away, but now they're moving towards Russia, and really supporting Putin, and those kinds of ideologies too. And the rise in cons-- conspiracy series in general, the acceptance of that, and also, the kind of



mainstreaming of those ideas. In particular, south of the border it's also had a ripple effect in Canada.

So, all of our clients who are involved in hate crime, or hate ideology, also are very staunch supporters, are engaged with conspiracy theories.

And, you know, I think it's been a tough couple of years. So, in general there's been a mistrust in government, mistrust in politicians, which also hate groups capitalize on to, kind of, leverage this sense of chaos, accelerationism, and kind of, really pushing people towards this anti-government stance, even within the mainstream populations.

We also see that, there's been increase obviously, an awakening in some ways around, sort of, racism and diversity in Canada. Most people see that as a real step forward and, some people don't. So, often we hear from our clients that, you know, their race, or their demographic is being forgotten about in this, sort of, progressive push forward that we see. And that they feel blamed because of their demographic, because their position in life. If they've attended anti-racism training, or just messaging through the media that, you know, we've all engaged with and probably supported, but it has had an adverse effect on certain demographics.

In particular, looking at white males, you know, and most of the people engaged in the hate space from, sort of a white national standpoint, are white males.

But we do keep target--- dates-- I'm sorry, data on who's vulnerable in terms of community, you know, what are the charges our clients are facing, what was the lead up to that, who was the target, and I think that's really important for us, to kind of, look at trends.

And if you can see this, in terms of our clients, and we deal with violent extremism, so that's sort beyond the hate space, but hate is, of course, part of violent extremism. But really, we're looking at a common theme across multiple types of extremism.

So, we're not just talking about white nationalism here, we're also talking about, you know, what we would call ISIS inspired, or you know, sort of, different kind of fringe social movements operating in Canada. But the general theme here is pretty clear to us, is that transphobic, homophobic, antisemitism, anti-government, and misogyny are the key elements in all of the hate groups.

Again, thinking beyond white nationalism, so there's a common theme amongst that, and a growing theme around violence towards women, and rhetoric.

We've also known that, you know, there's been an uptick in incel movement, which is, you know, a movement that openly promotes, you know, violence or hatred towards women, and so that's certainly on the increase. And in Toronto, we had that attack in 2016, which led to our funding, and why we got into this space. We're also in partnership with Moonshot to do what we call, Canada Redirect.

So, we have ad placements for our program on known chat rooms, message boards, hate websites that promote hate, hate news outlets.



And so, what happens is, if somebody sort of googles, you know, their favorite chat room or blog our ads can be popped up, so it's kind of like product placement.

And so, it's been a huge success actually, we've had a lot of people engage with us, and we've been able to pull them out of those situations.

But what's interesting here, I think, and important to see, is we talked about COVID being a bit of a vehicle, but also, I think the current—our current protest, or convoy, or occupation, whatever you want to call it in Ottawa, certainly had a big impact on increased people engaging with these websites, which is concerning.

So, if you can see, September, October, you know, these are very minimal referrals, are people engaging with us after they've clicked on our ad.

But in January, just when the convoy was happening, we saw a significant uptake in terms of people engaging with us, primarily in Ontario at least. In late December, we went into, I think, 4th or 5th lockdown, which really, really caused a lot of... concerns amongst the general public.

But also, I think if you're in these spaces in terms of conspiracy theories, and kind of believing that, you know, the government was doing this to, kind of, oppress people. On top of that, these right wing or, you know, extremist groups capitalizing co-- co-opting those legitimate concerns in some ways.

So, that kind of perfect storm is creating that sort of envi-- that environment.

So, after January 22nd, the convoy began.

I think it landed in Ottawa on the 28th, but during that, week we had a significant uptake in referrals, and even more so in February when the Emergency Measures Act was announced.

You know, and so, people primarily being very angry at the government. And also, kind of tying it into race and ethnicity, that this was sort of a China-Chinese people take over of Canada, with multiple referrals because of that issue coming to us, and that—that, you know, illegitimate grievance.

But in their minds, you know, it was something that was being propagated online in a lot of ways.

And of course, in general, January to April is often a spike for most mental health organizations where people struggling with depression and anxiety because the time of year, and that kind of thing, so all that kind of came together, which made that spike increased.

So, what do our clients say, why do they join hate group, and I think we find our clients to be the best sort of informers of that, because, you know, that's what they're in to, and that's what we try to move them away from. But really, in a lot of ways, a sense of belonging, a sense of community, a social network, as we talked about. Gives people a sense of identity, and then they have a false sense of a template around that.



And really, I can't stress enough, and I think you guys know this, that, you know, the hate speech online is an, is a public health issue.

It's everywhere, and so, there's no regulation really happening.

I think the mainstream sites have clamped down a little bit, but there's still stuff happening quite a bit.

A lot of people, in particular white males, are feeling like they're losing their identity, as culture as, an identity, and that their identity is constantly under attack.

And so, there's a lot of paranoia around that, and also, that ties into the propaganda being pushed by these groups, that, you know, sort of, the great replacement theory is that, you know, white males will be, I guess, eliminated at some point. And again, just general fears around not being able to find a job.

Lots of people are laid off during the public health restrictions, and of course, displaced blame on new immigrants, and this kind of thing certainly was always on the rise, and a lot of these groups do provide a sense of, I guess false sense of emotional safety, and can provide basic needs, which a lot of the clients we work with lack, right, so.

Well, our clients saw, are engaging with various, what we would call sometimes, soft hate websites or hardcore hate websites.

So, American Renaissance, V-dare, Council for European Canadians, and on Z reviews, so these are the prominent ones that our clients talk about, and it's important to, kind of see, what people are engaging with to help deprogram them, in terms of the propaganda that's being pushed out there. So finally, recommendations, you know, what we've learned through our work since 2020 and being involved with this space. You know, we really see that we're doing a lot of work around diversity, inclusion, and on a macro scale which is great, but I think, you know, we're seeing successes, we're seeing people moving away from these spaces through individualized micro interventions with a social and mental health perspective.

So, it is working. I think, you know, in society we've moved away, in Canada at least.

You know, we tend to isolate people that are-- have hate views, and for good reason sometimes because the safety issue causes harm.

But the same time, the isolation actually is growing this-- this problem, and there's multiple people involved in the space, and it grows like wildfire.

And so, we're really, you know, encouraging governments and advocacy bodies, to really, you know, we need to be engaging with people actually, and professionals-- mental health professionals need to be engaging with people that are committing acts of hate. Why is this happening, how can we help you out with this, and understanding there's some real concrete reasons why people are moving towards this. For macro level around on regulation and propaganda, and that being pushed, sort of polarization happening in politics, but also there's individual risk factors to that, that this is where we come in to help mitigate. And again, I think



more programs that support people away from hate-based violence, and I think, you know, language is really important here, and you know, we work with many people from many different demographics, so certainly terms like white supremacy, terrorist, extremism, really can stigmatize communities, but also empower people.

The people we work with want to be a white supremacist.

So, when we see that word, that actually confirms for them that they're winning. So, and I know, the term "white supremacy" is interchangeable, and it's sometimes a bit confusing, as to where it should land, but it does do damage to our clients because it really empowers them and emboldens them, because you know, white supremacy is about supremacy, and that's what they're trying to fight for.

And of course, terrorism and extreme have been labels, in particular with our Muslim communities after 9/11. It still has done a lot of damage, and continues to, so, you know, trying to move away from, you know, that language can be highly political too.

So, separating, sort of, politics away from people, and this kind of issue. Anti-racism training is very helpful, but I think, you know, reconsidering looking at cross-cultural competency, which is a little different. One big thing that we're really trying to fight for and do ourselves is, you know, getting back to critically helping people critically think. Digital media, media literacy, training in schools that really reflect the current state, and I think some of the models are quite old, and really should be implemented in all schools, workplaces. Understanding misinformation, disinformation, and really, you should consider a public health issue. It's considerable, we even have colleagues that fall into these traps too, so it's quite massive out there.

I think looking at how curriculum is delivered in schools, so, you know, we're moving—we're really in a polarized space in Canada, and that's a concern and we're seeing that, but, you know, really getting back to sort of, facts versus, you know, opinion and teaching through opinion.

A lot of these hate groups really capitalize on this polarization, and, you know, so I think you know, looking at our education system and institutions, a little differently around-- in this time period.

You know, coming out at this from a neutral standpoint with, you know, expectations and sort of, limits around when harm might be done, and really looking at more deliberation versus debate.

How can we come to consensus, versus you're right, you're wrong, and I think, I know even my son's school, and the clients we talked to, and you know, broad-based, the consensus is that, you know, the education system has an opinion that could really divide people in a lot of ways, which then leaves people vulnerable to more of this hate recruitment.

So, that's all I have for today. Hopefully that was helpful, and once again, thanks for inviting me.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Thank you so much. That was incredibly helpful, and we have many questions, so we might not have time for all of them, but we'll try. So, I just wondered on that-- the last side you had, you recommended not using language of white supremacy, terrorism, and extremism. Do you have language that you prefer to use in your--



David O'Brien: Yeah, we've learnt this, too. So, this is a learning experience for us, and we're always evolving our language because our funding was, really, around engaging with people, sort of, involved with terrorism, and kind of using a behavioral-health approach to move them away from it.

So, that's changed, and it's been a learning for us. So, we're using grievance-based violence more now.

And we know we've heard from our Muslim community, and then also, you know the clients, it really like I said, emboldens them actually, and gives them a license in some ways.

In an odd way it works that way, but with using grievance based violence, we're using hate a lot more, I think, because at the root of extremism is hate, that's what it is, you know.

But if you recall after 9/11, you know, the word terror-- not a lot of people knew what terrorism was after— before 9/11. But really, that became politicized in a lot of ways, that word, and I think it really, kind of, led us into wars and that kind of thing, and really galvanized the public, but was incredibly stigmatizing for communities.

You know, so, I think we're trying our best to kind of, you know, move away from those labels. Yeah.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Thank you.

In your work, do you see.... do you see a lot of connections between systemic discrimination, or systemic racism, and these incidents of hate?

Do you draw that out much, or do you really focus on that one end of the spectrum?

David O'Brien: Yeah, I mean, we see that, we consider that too. I think, you know, we still live in a prearchival society, I think, so there's already a platform for the general population around who's privileged and who isn't privileged, and how that plays out in policies and systems.

And so, we do, you know, some work-- we do individual work more on the vulnerability factors, but we do consider that in our work, for sure, because it can't be discounted, at all.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: What are the-- some of the-- this is probably a large question, so I'll see if we can answer it quickly, I don't know. What are some methods that you have found successful, in your organization around the engagement with hate? So, you give us a lot about the causation and what leads people there, how that manifests, how do you disengage them?

David O'Brien: Yeah, so, I think most-- all of our clients, most of them have been expelled or suspended from other mental health programs because of their hate ideology.

So, the first and foremost is that people need a space free of them being able to harm other people to have these conversations. And I think, you know, we're one of the few programs that's, you know, experimental, but there's one in Calgary and Quebec, too.



But that's made a difference actually, it's kept the community safe, it's kept people safe, and also it helps our understanding, as to people are not born to hate, they grow into that right.

And so, deconstructing that, and having a place where there can be a conversation, you know, our staff myself, our organization is a talked verbally all the time.

It's part of the territory. It's nasty work, absolutely nasty work, but we're seeing successes because this is the first time ever that someone can openly be racist, in a private room one to one, and we can deconstruct as to what's happening. And you know, it's a really tricky situation because, you know, we have to keep people safe too, we have to keep our staff safe, you know, and so it's always that balance.

And— and after a while, you know, once we build that rapport and relationship, and that trust, we put boundaries on that, and begin to say, okay, harm reduction in some ways, you can, you know, can talk about this for a certain amount of time, but then we're going to move forward. And after a while, they begin to recondition themselves, and then also the other factors that lead them to this. Because it's a false sense of safety belonging to this movement, ideology, community. And so, beginning to, you know, find them housing, jobs, employment, building self-esteem, building relationship skills, you know, perhaps medication for depression, anxiety. So, all those, kind of come in, into a holistic intervention.

It's not just one thing, but really, at the core of this is, that there's a space that we can have a dialogue because we need to, in order to kind of deconstruct, right?

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Yeah, I'm following up on that.

Do you—you talked now, and also before-- Oh, my screen just went very fuzzy, I hope you can still see me. Of-- about this sense of belonging, do you have programs specifically targeted at-- I think you're touching on it here, but if I could just, sort of draw that out a little bit, the programs you have specifically targeting, that's that need for that sense of belonging.

David O'Brien: Yeah, we do. So, we offer 32 programs outside of our, you know, ETA program.

So, it's youth mentorship, there's a socialization group we have on Monday nights, and so, now we're replacing the old community with a new community. And then, you know, as our program evolves, we're also-- we've also hired people formally and hate groups who've recovered, and it's been rehabilitated.

But, you know, they're also then doing some pure mentorship, too.

So, the whole idea is that we want to replace that community, that is held a hostage in some ways, and replace that with, you know, pro-social opportunities.

And what's interesting here—just, you know, our clients have come with a lot of strengths, obviously.



But one strength that's common, is such a sense of justice, they want sense of justice. Often misguided, but also, you can flip that, and turn that into something that's going to be very pro-social, it's important.

A lot of clients some of our clients will flip and onto the other side, and really, you know, become part of anti-racism movements, which is fantastic.

So again, it's such—it's such a need, and when the propaganda is in your face all the time, which it is online for a lot of these folks, you have nothing else to latch on to.

It's sort of what they do, you know?

Commissioner Kasari Govender: you talked about the increased role of misogyny and the look-- the expression of that. Why do you think that's increased over time?

David O'Brien: Yeah, I mean, I think-- I think it's a multitude of factors.

I think... I think in particular, these groups of people talk about the threat from women, or the threat from trans community, you know, queer community, you know, as more as those communities are lifted, I think, you know, there's this perceived, like, "I'm going to be replaced." That mixed in with the propaganda that's being pushed into them, so it's a perfect storm, that-- that's one thing. I think in general, there's just been a general disrespect from leaders and public domains.

I mean, if we kind of look at the Trump year in 2016, and a lot of things changed.

And that it was okay to mock people, you know, you're the leader of the free world, and that really, I think, provoked a lot of horrific ground, and it continues to be-- continues to be that. And so, these

populace movements happening, in terms of politics, and even the recent situation that the Oscars,

I think you know, these public displays of disrespect and violence, from people that are held up as, sort of, in positions of... you know, positions of leadership. You know, it's a real sort of issue of that-- that peace in a lot of ways.

So, those are some of the things we think, and from a macro standpoint that we're seeing.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Thank you, very interesting. Can you tell us a bit more about, perhaps the Canada redirect? Can you break that down for us a bit more, and then more generally, how people get connected to you and how many people you're serving?

David O'Brien: Yeah, so-- disappointingly, over the last 2 years, since 2020 since we started the program, we have 60 people that we've been serving.

Who are-- who are, you know, primarily involved in these hate spaces.



We also do prevention work, so people that might be falling into it, are not really into it yet, we engage with, too. With the Canada Redirect, that's a partnership with Moonshot, who's organization operating out of the UK, and so, basically, you know, it's really-- we're working with algorithms, and kind of looking at where are the people engaging with the hate, or why, and then having pop-up placements.

So, like, I guess, you know, in the business world you call it product placement of, like, you know, if you go online to some-- your Facebook, or whatever, your favorite car might pop up all the time.

So, it's kind of using those algorithms to place ADs, and primarily engaging people around, are you look for housing, social support, dialogue, are you upset about what's happening in the world?

And so, kind of using key terms that would really make them feel like this could be a place where I can talk about my grievances and about the world, and then we engage with that. But interestingly enough, the convoy and the Emergency Measures, the referrals really spiked up, and so really shows the impact that these movements try to co-op, and blur, and distort. These conspiracy theories really leverage those opportunities, which are meant to be to keep the public safe. But on the other side, it does create this opportunity for these groups to recruit.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: You mentioned at one point that you've got referrals from police, do you-- are those mandatory referrals for people, like, are they required through the justice process, that they have to engage with you, or is that voluntary?

David O'Brien: No, it's voluntary. I think sometimes police will come across a situation and, you know, charges could be laid, but it's a diversion.

So, they'll say, hey, go to York Town, and then— we boundary with the police, so they-- the courts won't ask for progress reports, you know, everything's changing, but we don't get into details or health information.

And so, once a referral is made, they back right out, and then we continue our work.

And—and we've had a few incidents where it's been, sort of, motivation to commit a hate crime for a clear plan, so we've negotiated with the police to, kind of, engage with that person and, you know, stop that from happening.

So, yeah, I would say it's mandatory, but I think it's an option for people.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Okay, great. I have just-- try to fit as much in here as possible, two smaller questions related to your slides.

So, one of them on the trends vulnerability factors, you had that very useful list. Is that based on research that you've done, is that sort of the anecdotal impressions of your 60 clients, where does that come from?

David O'Brien: No, that's from our registration process.



So we do outcomes pre-imposed, so we look at-- we have a quick mental health question here, a social health questionnaire, we use various tools and screeners to, kind of, pre-impose. And so, that's what people are coming in with.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Okay. That's great.

David O'Brien: Yeah. And—and those are kind of the trends, those are, you know, there's a lot of different vulnerability factors, but there's certain trends around trauma and domestic violence, which would explain a lot of the misogyny.

Makes sense, you know, and I think that sense of disconnection and identity disillusionment, and like, meaning of life.

Especially when we work with a lot of, what we call emerging adults, between the ages of 16 to 24 where people are really trying to form their identity.

Unfortunately, if they run around or connect to the wrong people, it gets, sort of, side-tracked in lot of ways, so.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: On another slide, you had the Moonshot data slide, and you showed the increase over COVID.

At the beginning of that slide, there was a decrease. I'm curious what was happening then, and whether you have an explanation for that?

David O'Brien: Yeah, I would have to pull it up, I think-- Oh, yeah, I have it right here. Let me just look at it. Yeah, so, I think if you look at, so there was a divided line, and then on the right side primarily everyone increased across Canada.

And then before that, there was, you know, relatively concerning, but not as concerning as most cities increased. And there's some dips and curves in that kind of thing, but I really think that was-- If you were to, kind of, map that on to the lockdowns and what was happening in each province, I bet you that, and we haven't done that yet, but I bet you those decreases would—may align with that. It would be interesting to see that, because people were out of school, there's disillusionment with what's happening, you know, this was a shock treatment, I think to everyone in Canada, of course, for good reason.

But I think it's something we weren't used to, and so, I think maybe those increases were likely related to those public health restrictions. Could be wrong, but it's something that we may go back and look at.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Well, thank you so much.

I know we're out of time, Sarah, I'm sorry I didn't leave you time for urgent questions.

I was-- I have something that I didn't-- I wasn't able to get to, as well.



I'm wondering if you would be willing at all, to do any follow-up questions for us if we're able to identify anything that you might be able to answer by email.

David O'Brien: Absolutely, for sure, yeah. I think this is a really important process, and I think it's a big threat. I think it's, you know, a concern and we're certainly seeing it amongst youth. Certainly, something I never grew up in an environment like that.

This wasn't, sort of, happening. If it was, I didn't know about it.

But I think, you know, I think clearly from everyone I'm talking to, even outside this there's an increase amongst young people.

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Well, your Insights have just been invaluable for us.

So, I'd love to have the opportunity to follow up with you if we can, with a few-- a few email-- a few questions by email. Thank you so much, David. Really, really, appreciate you making the time to be here with us today.

David O'Brien: Thank you, everyone, for this important opportunity.

Sarah Khan: And David, if you wanted to submit anything in writing for consideration under the inquiry, we are still allowing that until the end of April, so I'm sure the PowerPoint itself would be useful to see, as well. If you can send that my way, I can save it into the file.

David O'Brien: Perfect.

Sarah Khan: Thank you.

Carly Hyman: Thank you. Take care, David

Commissioner Kasari Govender: Thank you so much.

