



CASE FOR SUPPORT

HARD FEELINGS MENTAL HEALTH

THE PROBLEM

Accessing mental health supports has always been hard, and in pandemic recovery this has become even more complex and challenging. We know that one in four Ontarians will struggle with a mental health concern in their lifetime (CAMH, 2023). We also know that there are many barriers to accessing mental health supports. Not knowing where or how to get support is one of the biggest barriers (Mental Health Research Canada, 2023). Other barriers include the high cost of market-rate therapy, long wait times in publicly funded care, and the stigma of reaching out for help.

OUR MISSION

The mission of Hard Feelings is to bring innovation to the mental health sector that reduces barriers and increases access to stronger mental health. We work with mental health professionals, community members and partners to facilitate the delivery of low-cost counselling, curate mental health resources, and foster conversations that fight stigma..

OUR HISTORY

We opened our doors in 2017, as a non-profit, on Bloor Street West at Ossington in Toronto. In this location, we had three counselling rooms for in-person therapy, and a retail storefront that offered mental health and wellness resources. Our innovative storefront model also served as a space to encourage conversations about mental health, and for people to connect with the supports they needed to build stronger mental health.

We grew steadily through the next few years and successfully adapted our model through the pandemic crisis, to operate fully on-line. Our storefront has now moved to Church Street at Gerrard, allowing us to facilitate in-person therapy and programming again, and immersing us in a new diverse and vibrant community.

Having received charitable status in July 2023, we are now focused on engaging with every opportunity this provides us to grow our work and connect more people with resources that build stronger mental health.

HARD FEELINGS

STRONGER MENTAL HEALTH

ABOUT US

Hard Feelings exists to address the gap in service for accessible and affordable mental health supports and resources. We support an innovative Community of Practice that offers low-cost, limited-term counselling (up to 20 sessions) to individuals facing barriers in accessing mental health supports. There are currently 20 counsellors in our Community of Practice, selected based on their clinical skill and expertise, and to represent the diverse population of our city and province.

Our storefront is at the heart of what we do. It is a hub for conversation about mental health, and a place to get support in navigating a complex mental health system. It is the location of our retail store (also available online) that offers a curated selection of books and products that support stronger mental health. It's where we host our book club meetings, where clients wait when meeting counsellors in-person, where we gather for community-based activities, and home to our new Mental Health Library.

Hard Feelings is governed by a diverse Board of Directors, and led by Executive Director, Kate Scowen, MSW, RSW. We are a small team of six staff, supporting our Community of Practice and storefront, with seven volunteers currently assisting in our storefront.

OUR IMPACT

2,000+ individuals have accessed mental health support through low-cost counselling and groups at Hard Feelings.

"I was unemployed when I started. The counselling helped me deal with that stress and get a new job. Thank you for accessible care." (Online client, 2022)

9,800+ individuals have visited us, either in our storefront or online, to find mental health resources, connect with a Hard Feelings counsellor, or get help navigating the mental health system.

"The welcoming atmosphere of the staff and bookstore up front as well as the music is such a wonderful way to de-stigmatize the typical clinic atmosphere." (In-person client, 2019)

300+ individuals engaged in active counselling in 2023, with 1,900+ counselling hours, and an average of 100+ individuals in counselling each month.

"Coming to therapy to talk about what's been difficult is never easy, but I found the space and the therapist I worked with made it so much easier to get myself in the door. I always felt welcome and that there were few barriers to doing the difficult therapeutic work." (In-person client, 2020)

600+ individuals reached out for service navigation support in the last year.

"I'm appreciative that I was able to access much-needed counselling, especially since my student insurance doesn't cover much; the low-cost model was useful for me for making the most of my limited student insurance." (In-person client, 2019)

OUR PROGRAMS

Research confirms that not knowing how or where to get help is a major barrier for accessing help (MHRC, 2023). We also know that one negative interaction can limit help-seeking behaviour, so it's important that when people do reach out, they are provided with meaningful supports and interactions. Our programs are designed to address these issues, and to engage with our community to inform innovation and growth.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

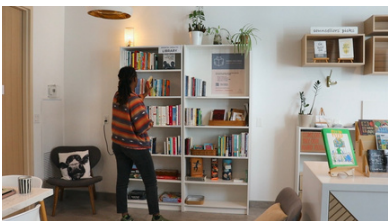


- **Counselling:** We facilitate the delivery of low-cost counselling in-person (Toronto only) and online (across Ontario), supporting a community of professional counsellors in a unique practice model. Clients who face financial barriers can access up to 20 sessions of therapy, at price they can afford.



- **Navigation:** We provide mental health service navigation through hundreds of interactions in-person at our storefront; through our counselling practice; by phone and email; and online through our active social media presence. We take time to listen to what people need, and do our best to connect them with resources.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES



- **Retail Storefront:** We operate a bricks-and-mortar and online retail store that features books and resources focused on supporting stronger mental health and wellbeing.

- **Mental Health Library:** We operate a free Mental Health Library where everyone is welcome to borrow mental health books and other self-care items.



- **Pop-Up Market:** We host an annual Pop-Up Market that brings together local vendors whose work intersects with mental health. This is a dynamic opportunity to celebrate our work and foster conversations that fight stigma around mental health with on average 400 annual attendees.

COMMUNITY EVENTS



- **Hard Feelings Hangouts:** We run free weekly drop-ins where individuals can participate in activities that support stronger mental health and wellbeing.

- **Book Club:** We host a book club that meets in-person and explores titles connected to mental health and wellbeing.



- **Groups and Workshops:** We collaborate with other community and mental health organizations to facilitate low-cost and free workshops and groups for our community.

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

Everything we do at Hard Feelings is rooted in innovation. Our mission is to bring change to the way mental health is viewed and supported, and to significantly reduce barriers to access.

We began as a non-profit and we have learned a lot over six years of operations. We have never wavered in our belief that we need to do things differently to meet the mental health needs of our community and society. Our socially innovative model enables us to generate revenue through our Community of Practice fees and retail sales in our store. Charitable status provides additional funding opportunities enabling us to operate more efficiently and respond to emerging needs with innovation and resilience.

INVESTING IN OUR WORK

Given the growing challenge of the rising cost of living in Toronto, limited finances are a major barrier to accessing mental health care. This issue is also a driver of poor mental health, increased social isolation, substance use, and relationship breakdown. Low and middle-income young adults, post-secondary students, and families are disproportionately impacted by the current economy. They face unique challenges when it comes to being able to afford private counselling or access the mental healthcare system that has long wait times and stigmatizing pathways to care.

When you donate to Hard Feelings, you are investing in an organization that is working to achieve positive social impact and long-term change. Our priority is to build a sustainable and resilient organization that can deliver on our mission and grow as need expands or shifts. Your investment in our work will directly impact accessibility to mental health supports by:

- Growing and diversifying our Community of Practice, to offer more low-cost therapy.
- Increasing available space for in-person therapy and groups.
- Developing and facilitating more free group programs and workshops.
- Maintaining and growing our mental health lending library.
- Increasing our staff and volunteer capacity to expand our storefront hours of operation.
- Expanding our service navigation supports as an accessible and positive experience that reduces stigma and ensures ongoing help-seeking behaviors.
- Engaging with our community and partners to evaluate and design programs with impact.

Invest in our vision: A world where everyone has the mental health supports they need.

CONTACT

Kate Scowen
Executive Director
kate@hardfeelings.org
647-740-3335

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353 Church Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5B 0B2