

# Talk-Listen: Centering Youth Wisdom in Group Work at Peak House

*Bhupie Dulay, Stefanie Krasnow, Vikki Reynolds and Graeme Sampson*

“Drugs just took over. But I was always there — hidden somewhere. I just needed to find the old me again. Peak House was the place I could do that”

Serina

## *Abstract*

The Talk-Listen group is a therapeutic group at Peak House that exemplifies a set of ethics, values, and practices, which aim to center and uphold youth wisdom. In this article, transcripts of Talk-Listen groups are utilised to illustrate therapeutic practices that aim to co-construct relational safety, address the contexts in which struggles exist, illuminate resistance, and weave a sense of belonging, connection and hope amongst youth. These practices create the foundation on which youth wisdom can be recognised and witnessed. Through the demonstration of youth wisdom in practice, this writing also explores the importance of recognising the following in therapeutic work with youth: resistance to oppression as wisdom, the ways that youth laterally mentor and uphold one another, true collaboration and client-centered practice, transformation and change, and the ethical requirement of amplifying hope.

## **Peak House**

“I’ve never had a space like this before ...”

Perry

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Peak House is a live-in program for youth ages 13 to 18 who are struggling to reclaim their lives from substance misuse and oppression. This program is known for its history of creativity in therapeutic practice, and for its efforts to provide a welcoming space for youth of all cultural backgrounds, genders/gender expressions, and sexual orientations. Peak House utilizes a narrative-informed, collaborative approach (Anderson, 1997; White & Epston, 1990; Madigan, 2011) when working with youth, their families, and communities. This ethic of collaboration manifests as a spirit of *walking alongside* youth on their journeys as opposed to a paradigm of *treatment*. During a young person's stay at Peak House, the entire staff team collaborates with them through ongoing dialogue, negotiation, exploration, and solidarity work. Any professionalized knowledge that staff hold is decentered to make space for youth wisdom, creativity, and insight. By doing so, youth become the centre of the work. Because Peak House is a group program, centering the youth refers to individual youth *and* the group of youth as a whole. Centering youth in this way requires fluidity, flexibility, and moral courage.

Peak House has been, quite literally, co-created by the youth who have walked through the doors over the past 30 years. Wisdom and feedback from youth are directly incorporated into practice. The program guidelines, therapeutic practices, and environment at Peak House have all been shaped primarily through the contributions of youth over time (W. Wittmack, personal communication, April 10, 2012). There is a long history of collaborative and innovative therapeutic practices emerging from Peak House, of which the Talk-Listen group is only one. Many staff have written articles to share these innovations with other communities (Dennstedt & Grieves, 2004; Reynolds & Kelly, 2018; Sanders, 2007). The Talk-Listen groups owe much to the rich history of reflecting teams<sup>1</sup>. The Talk-Listen group, like the program as a whole, enacts the co-creation of Peak House culture. In this therapeutic group, youth co-create a *safe-r* (Bird, 2004; Reynolds, 2011), collaborative space within the house by sharing and honoring one another's stories, celebrating their therapeutic work, and acknowledging the ways they each contribute to one another's journey. Many youth have let us know that such practices often extend beyond the Talk-Listen group and influence the group culture at Peak House as a whole. For instance, youth who are newer in the program have expressed that being invited into

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<sup>1</sup> The origination of Reflecting Team practice begins with Goolishian's Family Impact Teams (MacGregor et al, 1964), the work of the Milan Team, (Boscolo et al., 1987), the work of Tom Andersen (1991) who gave this specific practice its name, and especially Michael White (1999). Anderson and Jensen (2007) dedicated their expansive book *Innovations in the Reflecting Process* to practitioners in what they called the reflecting process movement.



Talk-Listens helped them feel safer to open up and share their own stories in other contexts.

### **An Overview of the Talk-Listen Group**

“I’m proud of myself now for realizing all this and I’m also really grateful that there’s people here I can talk to about that.... I don’t know how you did it here, but you showed me, so I’ll try and do what Peak House did for me for someone else.”

**Christy**

The Talk-Listen is a structured group that aims to uncover, enrich, and intentionally honour youth wisdom. Structure is used to provide safety and a unique therapeutic environment. The Talk-Listen is a type of witnessing group (Reynolds, 2002) where youth share their expertise, wisdom, and insight. Talk-Listen groups usually occur closer to the end of a youth’s stay at Peak House and/or after a significant piece of therapeutic work has been completed, as a sort of rite-of-passage ceremony. To this end, the Talk-Listen group tracks and honours the changes youth make in their lives. This witnessing transforms the stories of change into stories of wisdom and legacies that extend far beyond the individual youth themselves by virtue of being witnessed by a group.

#### ***The Structure***

The format of the Talk-Listen group is divided into three parts: one youth and therapist have a conversation [the Talk-team], then the rest of the youth and a second therapist [the Listen-team] have a conversation about what they heard from the Talk-team and how it impacted them, and finally, the Talk-team has a concluding conversation about what it was like to hear the Listen-team’s reflections on their first conversation. In general, the Talk-team and the Listen-team do not interact with each other directly. This provides a linguistic space for each team to listen and witness the other without needing to respond in the moment. Such structure allows youth the opportunity to experience the impact they have on others, which is significant for youth whose voices and experiences have been silenced or marginalized. Even though the Talk-team does not directly address the Listen-team, their presence is acknowledged and named to ensure safety, since a young person and a therapist would have a very different conversation if they were talking alone as a dyad and not being witnessed by a larger group. Though the Listen-team is not



directly spoken to by the Talk-team, they serve a central role in framing, reflecting, and augmenting the significance of the conversation had by the Talk-team. Many youth report that this is their first experience of witnessing their positive impact on others while being witnessed for their own strength, courage, and wisdom. The therapist who facilitates the Listen-team's conversation works to gather points of connection, solidarity and resonance by asking questions to the Listen-team such as, "How does this relate to you?" and "What was it like to hear about [youth's name] journey?" The role of the Listen-team's conversation is to weave a sense of community, belonging, and connection (Reynolds, 2002). Youth in the Listen-team strengthen the story of change that the Talk-team discuss, learn from the wisdom shared, amplify hope, and build or strengthen solidarity.

### ***The Purpose***

I learned from Fae's Talk-Listen. Even now, later in my stay at Peak House,  
I keep thinking, what would Fae do?

**Cynthia**

The Talk-Listen group is an intentional celebration of the hard work youth accomplish when renegotiating their relationships to problems and to significant others while at Peak House. The Talk-Listen group provides space for individual youth to be witnessed, respected, and listened to; at the same time, it provides the space for a group of youth to learn from and inspire one another. Youth are frequently told what they need to be doing by not only well-intentioned adults but by the systems that govern their lives. Youth are continuously told that their brains have not fully developed and that therefore, they are not able to make sound decisions about their lives. Our experience at Peak House has demonstrated that youth can not only make brilliant, significant, and logical decisions but also mentor and inspire other youth, if they are given a safe enough space to do so. Youth also look forward to Talk-Listen groups as they take pride in leaving a legacy or teachings behind. This is illustrated by Valerie speaking to the therapist, Vikki, about why she wanted to participate in a Talk-Listen:

*Vikki:* What is it about Talk-Listen group that was interesting to you?

*Valerie:* I just want to kind of get a message out there I guess.

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*Vikki:* Do you have any hopes for what could happen in this conversation?

*Valerie:* I hope that people can relate to some of the things that I'm saying and hopefully something will occur to them or they'll have an epiphany. Best-case scenario someone realizes something they didn't realize before.

Valerie challenges the stereotypical assumption that adolescents are self-involved, as she discusses the importance of being a role model and creating change in communities:

*Valerie:* There's a lot of people that aren't here but people out there that I know that I'm really hoping they can follow my example. Like people that need help that I care about back at home. So even if in some way, one day they can hear my voice and see that if I can do it they can do it and for people here too.

### **Structuring Safety**

I really appreciate everyone making it a safe space for me to be able to share stuff like that. Everyone is supportive of it and even if people don't have the same opinions of it as I do, they still give me space to say mine, which I really appreciate.

Christy

Creating (relative) safety in a group cannot be achieved by resorting to formulaic approaches. As described by Reynolds (2011), structuring safety is fluid, relational, intentional, and imperfect. The therapist is required to remain open to dismantling power while genuinely collaborating alongside youth. Before a Talk-Listen takes place, the therapist and the youth who is at the center of the Talk-Listen have conversations about whether they would like to participate in a Talk-Listen. In this conversation, they discuss what that process would look like, what they would like to focus on in the Talk-Listen, and what they want to refrain from discussing in front of their crewmates<sup>2</sup>. This ensures that the youth is fully informed about the process before they enter the vulnerable space of a Talk-Listen group. All of the above is re-visited at the beginning of the Talk-Listen with a series of questions from the therapist such as, "What had you saying yes to the Talk-

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<sup>2</sup> Youth at Peak House refer to their peers as "crewmates."



Listen?", "Do you have any hopes for this conversation?", and "How will you let me know that you do not want to talk about something?"

Part of structuring safety with youth is normalizing the process of saying "no" even and especially to adult authority figures, such as therapists. Below, Vikki discusses the importance of saying "no" and by doing so, Vikki acknowledges and fosters Valerie's courage amidst a system where a youth's "no" is routinely invalidated. Hearing a youth's "no" ensures that we do not replicate the interpersonal, systemic violence that all too many youth experience:

*Vikki:* If I ask you anything that's not cool, stop me yeah?

*Valerie:* Okay yeah.

*Vikki:* Okay and if I go anywhere you don't want to go.

*Valerie:* Okay.

*Vikki:* Okay. Just so you know, you can say no to me.

*Valerie:* For sure.

*Vikki:* Jess always does. So do these four. \*laughter\* So just, you know because I might ask you a question you might not really want to answer, so think about that.

*Valerie:* Mmm.

Structuring safety in this way is essential for creating a space where youth can be vulnerable and authentic. When youth say "no", this is in fact a very vulnerable, courageous, and in many ways, risky moment for them. Below, Christy says, "no," by correcting her therapist, Graeme. Graeme hears the "no", honours the teaching from the youth, decentres himself, and acknowledges her strength and courage. This type of genuine critique from the youth illustrates the presence of relational safety between Christy and Graeme:



*Graeme:* Your idea of what's useful, it sounds like that's really changed too.

*Christy:* Yeah, definitely.

*Graeme:* Like as a woman being useful. You're talking about speaking to other women and you're talking about breaking silence and you're talking about raising consciousness.

*Christy:* I think because I've really overplayed the term useful in my head, so it kind of pisses me off now to have to think about is this useful, is this not useful?

*Graeme:* Let's not cover it then \*smiles\*.

*Christy:* I go way too far in. I'd like to think that everything I say could be useful to someone somewhere even if it seems really pointless right now, you know what I mean?

*Graeme:* Thanks for correcting me on that, I appreciate it. And the other thing is, it must take a lot of courage and forgiveness on your part to have these conversations with men, like me, for example.

While honouring the teachings from the youth, the therapist also makes his privilege transparent and is accountable to that power.

### ***Situating Struggles in the Social World***

I feel like I am cared for at Peak House and that hasn't happened anywhere else in my life.

**Cam**

Talk-Listen groups highlight the importance of recognizing that all struggles exist relationally and within a social, political context – including and especially struggles with substance misuse. Struggles do not arise nor are they healed in isolation. A central aim of the Talk-Listen group – and the therapeutic approach at Peak House at large - is to expose and address the relational, cultural and systemic dimensions of the problems affecting the youth we serve. We intentionally situate youth's struggles in social contexts

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where there are systemic oppressions and abuses of power that promote suffering. We resist locating suffering within the landscape of a young person's brain. This approach centers their wisdom - namely, their preferred responses to suffering, and their acts of resistance to oppression. Below, Graeme and Christy's conversation tracks the discourses that got in the way of her rights, beliefs and values, which makes space for Christy to reclaim her voice, and for her voice to be witnessed:

*Graeme:* [...] what's this process been like for you? To go from thinking this is normal, thinking to be used and disempowered is what's expected and going to, wait a minute, I have rights and I should be angry about all that.

*Christy:* Yeah, I guess it's something I've always known inside of me, but I never had anyone to say that to, and I never had a right to get mad about it, you know, 'cause in my life, I'm surrounded by a lot of men that hold power positions, so I never really thought that I had a right to complain about anything like that. So now realizing that I have a voice, and I do get to say stuff like that, is pretty awesome.

*Graeme:* It's been really powerful to be allowed to witness that.

Above, Graeme and Christy mutually acknowledge *both* the social constraints on Christy's life - the things she's been taught by patriarchy - *and* Christy's personal agency within these constraints - the way she's "always known." In this regard, Christy is positioned not as a passive victim of these social constraints but as an active agent in her own life (Brown, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). Youth have mentioned that being held up in this way supports them to embody their own values and preferred ways of being.

The Talk-Listen often goes a step further in acknowledging that it is the absence of cultural space for youth wisdom, youth resistance and solidarity that is the problem. Christy articulates how she feels isolated, not only from women in her life, but from her preferred meaning of women's culture. "Connections that are liberatory and preferred" (Reynolds, 2002, p.97) are eclipsed in Christy's life by patriarchal structures that pit women against each other. Christy acknowledges that those structures benefit from keeping women isolated from solidarity with one another, because if women banded together to "talk about the real problems" those systems could be more easily dislodged:





*Graeme:* You talk a lot about the ways society is set up and the messages women are taught, do you think that society doesn't want women to be talking to each other about this kind of thing?

*Christy:* Yeah [...] I have a lot of theories. [...] Women are always in a competition for the attention from the men and that's one of the ways to turn women against each other, so they don't team up and talk about the real problems.

Locating problems in contexts helps youth not only to separate from the struggles they experience but also to find connection and belonging with others who stand alongside them in relation to these struggles. The therapist continually enacts an ethic of belonging (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012) by making points of connection amongst the youth visible and relevant. Here, Graeme speaks to the conversations between young women at Peak House, and the impact that experiencing this connection to community can have:

*Graeme:* What kind of a difference has it made being able to have conversations with other women, like, here for example, or...?

*Christy:* [...] it is kind of sad because I know I'm not the only person that goes through this. You know, it'd be a lot easier if I just went through the shitty time, but [...] this is a real problem in the world we live in and I think most of the female-identified people that came into Peak House have had this problem on their own. I've talked about it with them. So, on the one hand, it's heartbreaking but on the other hand it's also helpful because it's empowering, because I don't have to do it myself. You know what I mean?

### **Youth Wisdom**

Wisdom is often recognised synonymously with age. Ageism erases the wisdom that youth carry. Adults working with youth can easily replicate ageism and dismiss the insight, strengths, and abilities of youth. Youth often find themselves silenced or are taught to doubt their own voice and knowledge. In this way, ageism teams up with many other systems of oppression that silence and invalidate youth's wisdom. The Talk-Listen group is a space where this is deliberately resisted and reversed: youth voices are centered, and elevated. In Talk-Listen groups, the therapist seeks to acknowledge and affirm



youth's ideas, perspectives, experiences, and insights as wisdom. The group environment creates a space where youth's wisdom is validated and witnessed for its ability to transform not only a single life, but the lives of others. The Talk-Listen thus involves youth hearing their own knowledge and wisdom reflected in the knowledge and wisdom of their peers. Youth tell us that being honoured for their wisdom instils a sense of pride that challenges and usurps any negative stories about their identity inherited from the dominant discourse about youth who struggle with substance misuse.

### ***Celebrating Resistance as Wisdom***

Drugs, the media, and others have written our story for us. Here [at Peak House], we challenge that, we rewrite our stories. We become the authors of our story.

**Byron**

Resistance of oppression is often pathologized to discredit, dismiss, or silence it (Coates & Wade, 2007). Youth resistance to power is frequently pathologized or dismissed through language such as "non-compliance" or "disobedience." In the Talk-Listen, we intentionally challenge and reverse this by witnessing, recognising, and acknowledging youth's behaviours as acts of resistance to power and oppression - in fact, we recognize that young people's behaviours often exemplify creative, compassionate, and ingenious tactics of resistance. We acknowledge this resistance as part of their work as youth, particularly as they will be inheriting the struggles and turmoil in the world created for them by us adults and our predecessors.

We also recognize the many ways youth have developed strategies of resistance in order to survive or to protect and care for others in their lives. We see youth resistance as the way youth seek to protect their (or others') safety and dignity, rather than seeing it as an inconvenience to adult agendas. In fact, many youth express that being "othered", or being forced to conform (for instance, regarding sexual orientation, gender expression, creative or spiritual identities or practices) is often part of what led to problematic substance use in their lives. Below, the therapeutic conversation tracks the systemic oppressions that caused the pain, isolation, and self-doubt in Christy's life, which substances then took advantage of:



*Graeme:* You've talked before about how you trust yourself now, and how that's been huge for you. [...] you've been talking about society and we're talking about structures that are sexist and patriarchal... do you think that there's anything in there that has people, particularly female-identified folks, not trusting and second guessing themselves?

*Christy:* I think people talk about this as a problem that used to happen, but it's actually a problem that still happens and women are kind of, a lot of the times, made like they [...] shouldn't have opinions [...] so most times when a woman tries to speak up about something like this, they are just like, "Oh, you hate men, you hate this and blah blah blah," so, I think [that] makes people quiet about it. [...] a lot of this is stuff I've wanted to talk about, but [...] drugs have had a huge role in [...] making me not want to do it and [...] scared to do it [...] drugs kind of quieted my opinions inside myself so I didn't care to have to ... you know what I mean? [...] So, I think taking that away, I had a lot bottled up that I wanted to say for a long time.

*Graeme:* So, would you say that drugs really teamed up with all this stuff that you're talking about in society? [...]

*Christy:* Well, for myself anyways, it's like, because I didn't feel like I was useful in other ways, but when in the "drug world" I could do things. Drugs made me hold onto the thought of being useful to someone. I was useful to men when I was using. I guess holding on to that because I didn't want to lose that, I didn't want to go back to being not helpful, not useful, and small.

Throughout the Talk Listen, the therapist challenges the myth that people choose their struggles with problematic substance use to support youth's resistance to oppression. The therapists work to highlight the wisdom, knowledge, ability, and intelligence that youth carry with them that is often pathologized, problematized, or minimized, especially in youth (Reynolds, 2011; Richardson & Wade, 2008). By deliberately witnessing these acts as resistance, space is created for the youth to recognize and appreciate their own power. For example, once space has been reclaimed for Christy to remember her own wisdom and power, the story of her knowing herself begins to be strengthened, alongside the story of her resistance of ageism, patriarchy, and misogyny:



*Christy:* I think it's weird that I have these ideas 'cause I never used to be opinionated like this, but now I have a lot of opinions and I actually say them.

*Graeme:* But you also said that you had a knowing about this for a long time.

*Christy:* Yeah, it was in me somewhere, but I just didn't know how to talk about it, and I kind of beat myself up, like I shouldn't think like this, like, "Oh I'm in the wrong for thinking this," but then coming here and learning more about it, it's like, actually it's not me that's at fault. [...] It's not my fault these problems are here.

*Graeme:* It's hard to speak out when you don't have a lot of people to listen to you, right?

*Christy:* Yeah. I mean, even a lot of the women in my life don't see it, and that's not their fault either, it's just they're part of a system, but it sucks. It's hard not to be able to talk about it, like with my mom, with my aunt, or... you know what I mean?

#### **Youth as Lateral Mentors**

To be in a program with a bunch of other youth with different views.  
I don't think I'd be able to do it on my own. Everyone is supporting each  
other here [...] and that's the biggest thing.

**Halle**

In the Talk-Listen, youth take positions of "lateral mentoring" (N. Arthur, personal communication, March 1, 2010), whereby they build relationships of solidarity around shared struggles, form alliances around means of resisting or healing from these struggles and inspire one another in the telling and witnessing of their stories. This matters in particular as the alliance, solidarity and inspiration is created among, for, and by the youth. Corey illustrates the impact of being in solidarity and community with people in their journey through Peak House:

*Corey:* Christy was really quiet when I first got here and she was still kind of figuring things out for herself. And just how far she's come in almost nine weeks that we've spent together. Holy shit. Yeah, she wanted to love herself and have respect for herself and to





let people know if something that we're saying is bothering her. If she doesn't like something we're talking about she'll be like, "Don't talk about that."

*Bhupie:* To the point where she even did it to Graeme. Isn't that amazing?

*Corey:* And nine weeks ago she wouldn't have done that [...] and now she advocates for herself and she's aware of what people are saying and how it shouldn't be a part of society. She stands up for herself now, and that's something that's truly admirable.

### ***Youth as Professional Collaborators and Change Makers***

We learn our work on the backs of the youth we serve. The youth we have the privilege of working alongside show great courage in opening up to us and are generous when sharing their knowledge. As discussed previously, Peak House believes that youth are the experts of their experience. In Talk-Listen groups, the therapists work hard to deconstruct power by ritualistically giving *youth wisdom* the prestigious, centered space that professionalized knowledge usually occupies. Youth often express having had contrary experiences to this in their lives; they tell us that their knowledge, if recognized at all, is seen as less-than, where they are positioned as passive receptacles for the superior knowledge of adults. Through the Talk-Listen, we hear, honour, acknowledge, and celebrate not only youth's wisdom in their own lives, but their contributions to our work at Peak House and the world at large:

*Vikki:* So, I'm just hoping that Christy listens to your wisdom; this is so hard won from your life and from your work here. It makes me so proud to be part of Peak House. I'm just super moved and I think it's because I've been here for over 20 years and seen so many women devastated by men's violence and seen so many young men get caught up in this and it's not what they want to be doing either, so this really fed my hope.

*Bhupie:* I remember when she was just starting to talk about some of these things and you and I looked at each other, we're like, "What?! That's amazing!"

*Vikki:* That's the shit!

*Bhupie:* Right? This is stuff a lot of folks take a lot of time to figure out.



*Carol:* Christy has changed the community at Peak House from being able, with bravery and courage, to do this Talk-Listen. This will be a gift for them to look at. And if we change our communities, it's one step to changing the world. Yeah, I'm super honoured and feel, similar to Vikki, that these are the young people, these are the young women, that are coming up. The world is in good hands [...].

*Vikki:* And also what she's saying about everybody here has made that space. So, there are young men and gender variant folks who aren't stopping young women from speaking.

In the above transcript, the youth's contributions are witnessed and valued as truly transformative, not merely supplementary. Bhupie, Vikki, and Carol, a youth counsellor, acknowledge and honor the impact of youth wisdom by celebrating youth legacy, the ways their wisdom carries forward and comes to shape how we serve others in the future.

### ***Centering Transformation***

I thought I would take time away from drugs and it wasn't really anything.  
That I would go back to using after and then I realized that I can actually  
change my life around.

**Leo**

The Talk-Listen was created to center the youth's transformation and to provide a format where the group can acknowledge the impact that those transformations have on others: including the youth's peers, the therapist(s), other staff, and the Peak House community at large. While the real effects of substance-misuse and oppression are richly acknowledged, the therapists work hard to decenter problem-talk and center the incredible change and transformations that the young people make. By centering the conversation on the transformation rather than on the struggles, the therapist creates a space to challenge the cultural discourse about youth, particularly youth struggling with substance misuse.

The lived experience, abilities, qualities and values that the youth have, which they mobilize to resist oppression and dominance - are rendered visible and intentionally appreciated. The therapist makes these qualities visible by asking questions like: (1) How



did you make this change? (2) Why was it important for you to make that change? - which get at strengths and values respectively. The therapist also asks questions that reveal the impact that change has on their lives, families, supports, and communities.

### ***Amplifying Hope***

In addiction there is no hope so as soon as you're out of it you start to get like a little glimpse and if you feed it – it gets bigger and bigger.

**Kora**

Talk-Listen groups magnify, engender, and inspire hope. Youth's wisdom, insight, creativity, and brilliance fuels hope all around, for both youth and staff. We believe that we hold an ethical obligation to hold onto that hope and bring it forward. As illustrated below, Nora describes the hope that she feels for herself knowing that another person (Christy) went through a similar journey:

*Bhupie:* You're talking a lot about the analysis and for her to be able to forgive herself and others. [...] How does that change your perspective on things around?

*Nora:* Because I struggle a lot with society and its ways of influencing women, it tells me that recovery will get a lot better when I kind of void that out of my mind and not let it brainwash me and push it out because I realize it's a lot of what women struggle with in addiction and it's a lot of what drags them in. So, I like how she completely switched it around, not only with words, but actually did the work herself to do that. It kind of shows me that I can do that, and if I do it, it'll be so much easier for me.

With the current opioid crisis, hope can be difficult to hold onto with so many people dying from overdose. Hopelessness isn't caused by the youth that come to Peak House. Hopelessness is caused by the systemic social and political conditions that exist and harm our youth (Reynolds, 2011). Hope is uplifted when youth create change, and this is precisely what is centered and highlighted in all Talk-Listen groups:

*Vikki:* This gives me hope that things can change for young women, young men, nonbinary, and gender variant folks. Things don't have to be the way they've been.



*Bhupie:* [...] These are the moments that make me feel like there is a reason why we have this space here for young folks. They already know the answers, it's just giving them time and space to do it, and how much difference it will make in the world if we do that.

### **Conclusion**

Youth wisdom is the foundation of the work at Peak House. Youth experiences, insight, expertise, skills, abilities, intelligence, and wisdom created the culture at Peak House and this culture fosters innovation, transformation, and hope. If provided safer spaces, youth will continue to inspire and create change.

It's pretty cool to think that you don't have to fix the whole world to make change.

**Christy**

### **Dedication**

We would like to thank all the youth who have entered the doors of Peak House over the past 30 years. Without your willingness to share your experiences and expertise, this article and many other practices at Peak House would not be possible.

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It is important to name that, as the authors of this article, we are not the knowledge holders. The youth, their families, and communities of supports, have a fundamental role in shaping our work at large, including the specific practices described in this article. In particular, we want to honour the youth whose voices are at the center of this article, who bravely shared their experiences and wisdom with us. All youth names printed in this article have been altered to protect confidentiality. We utilized multiple transcripts for this article, which we have permission from the youth to use for these purposes.

This work and writing occurred on the ancestral lands and traditional territories of the Musqueam, Skwxw7mesh-ulh Uxwuhmixw (pronounced Squamish) and Tsleil-Waututh nations, which were never surrendered.



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### Bhupie Dulay

is a Registered Clinical Counsellor with a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology. She was a Clinical Counsellor with the Peak House team for over five years. Currently, Bhupie works as a therapist and supervisor, and provides consultations and workshops/trainings to non-profit organisations. She practices within an anti-oppressive, intersectional, and collaborative approach. It is important to Bhupie to honour and allow the strengths, wisdoms, and lived experiences of those she works alongside to guide the work. She is also an instructor at Vancouver Community College and an adjunct faculty at Adler University.



### Stefania Kramew

is a clinical counsellor on the team at Peak House. She believes in the profound transformations that are possible when professionalized knowledges are decentered to make space for wisdoms that are rooted in cultural locations of belonging, religious/spiritual worldviews, creativity, or personal experiences. This orientation brought her to Peak House, a residential program for youth that upholds and privileges youth wisdom. She has an MA in Counselling Psychology from Adler University and an MA in Liberal Studies from The New School for Social Research.



### Vikki Reynolds PhD RCC

is an activist/therapist whose experience includes supervision and therapy with peers and other workers responding to the opioid epidemic/poisonings, refugees and survivors of torture, sexualized violence counsellors, mental health and substance misuse counsellors, housing and shelter workers, activists and working alongside gender and sexually diverse communities. Vikki is an Adjunct Professor and has written and presented internationally on the subjects of 'Witnessing Resistance' to oppression/trauma, ally work, justice-doing, a supervision of solidarity, ethics, and innovative group work.



### Graeme Sampson

is privileged to be a part of the clinical counsellor team at Peak House. Along with the Peak House team, Graeme works collaboratively with youth and communities, offering practices rooted in narrative therapy, liberation psychology, witnessing and anti-oppression work. He is honored to witness and learn from the unique strengths, courage, creativity, and wisdom of each young person, and is grateful for the hope and inspiration that youth bring to this work. Graeme completed his MA in Counselling at Adler University, and has a background in childcare and youth work.

