

Magazica



Issue February 2025

Health

Hope, Happiness

From
Diagnosis to
Empowerment
& Resilience

Exclusive Articles and
Interviews with:

Dr. Bea Mackay,
Naiara Perin Darim,
Shannon N. Knelsen,
Ardra Shephard,
and more...

February is
Psychology
Month!

Discover the power of
the mind with insights
from experts

ARDRA
SHEPHARD

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Magazica

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A large pink t-shirt is centered in the upper half of the page. On the t-shirt, the text 'Pink Shirt Day' is written in a white, rounded, sans-serif font. Below it, 'Wednesday, February 26th, 2025' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the t-shirt, 'Let Kidness Grow' is written in a white, rounded, sans-serif font. To the right of the t-shirt, there is a black and white line drawing of the Toronto skyline, featuring the CN Tower prominently.

Pink Shirt Day

Wednesday, February
26th, 2025

Let Kidness Grow

On Wednesday, February 26, 2025, people across Canada will come together to celebrate Pink Shirt Day, an annual movement dedicated to raising awareness about bullying prevention and fostering a culture of kindness and inclusion.

Pink Shirt Day 2025:

Standing Together Against Bullying

By Editorial Team

On Wednesday, February 26, 2025, people across Canada will come together to celebrate Pink Shirt Day, an annual movement dedicated

to raising awareness about bullying prevention and fostering a culture of kindness and inclusion. This initiative, which began as a small act of solidarity, has grown into a nationwide campaign, reminding us of the power of compassion and community.

Bullying, whether online, in schools, or in the workplace, can have lasting effects on individuals and society. Pink Shirt Day serves as a call to action, encouraging individuals to take a stand against bullying by promoting respect, understanding, and positive interactions. The movement isn't just about wearing pink—it's about taking meaningful steps toward creating safe environments where everyone feels valued and supported.

This year's theme, "Let Kindness Grow," emphasizes the importance of small acts of kindness and their ripple effect in shaping a better world. Much like a garden flourishes with care and attention, communities thrive when people uplift and support one another. A simple gesture, a kind word, or standing up for someone in need can make all the difference.

Schools, workplaces, and organizations across the country are set to participate by hosting events, discussions, and fundraisers to spread awareness. Purchasing and wearing the official Pink Shirt Day t-shirt is one way to contribute, as proceeds support youth anti-bullying programs, mental health resources, and community initiatives that help build a more inclusive society.

Getting involved is easy—whether by wearing pink, donating to anti-bullying programs, or simply engaging in conversations about respect and empathy. Change starts with each of us, and Pink Shirt Day is a reminder that everyone has a role in making kindness a habit, not just a one-day event.

For more information, ways to participate, and official merchandise, visit www.pinkshirtday.ca.



Interview

*With
a Writer,
Consultant,
Podcaster and
Speaker*

Ardra Shephard



Photo by Alkan Emin

Ardra Shephard is a writer, consultant, podcaster, and speaker, known for her award-winning blog "Tripping on Air". She is a prominent voice in the chronic illness community. Diagnosed with MS at 23, Ardra has openly shared her experiences with the condition, advocating for acceptance and adaptation rather than resistance. She is also a regular columnist for BUST Magazine and is set to release her memoir "Fallosophy: My Trip Through Life with MS" in March 2025.



From Diagnosis to Empowerment & Resilience:

Ardra Shephard's Inspiring Journey of Living with Multiple Sclerosis, Challenging Stigma, and Finding Joy

Imagine a life suddenly altered, a path redirected by an unexpected diagnosis. At 23, Ardra Shephard's world shifted with a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis, a moment that could have defined her as a victim. Instead, it became the catalyst for a journey of self-discovery, activism, and profound joy. From the shadows of an "invisible illness," Ardra stepped into the light, not just as a person living with MS but as a force challenging societal norms and embracing her narrative. Her story, marked by

falls—both literal and figurative—is a masterclass in resilience, adaptation, and the quiet strength of self-acceptance. This isn't just an interview; it's a glimpse into the life of someone who found her power, one step at a time.

Magazica: Welcome to today's episode of Magazica. We are thrilled to have a truly remarkable guest with us, Ardra Shephard.

Ardra is a writer, consultant, podcaster, and speaker, whose award-winning blog “Tripping on Air” has earned international acclaim. With a powerful voice in the chronic illness community, she has been featured in major outlets like In Style, and WebMD.

Ardra is also the creator and host of AMI-TV’s “Fashion Dis,” a groundbreaking lifestyle series that celebrates fashion and makeover transformations for people with disabilities. But her work doesn’t stop there. She is also a regular columnist for Magazine and is preparing to release her memoir (Douglas & McIntyre) “Fallosophy: My Trip Through Life with MS” in March 2025. Very exciting times for Ardra.

Hi, Ardra, welcome to Magazica.

Ardra Shephard: Thank you so much for having me. I am excited to be here.

Magazica: Let’s start with your early years. In your blog and various articles, you’ve mentioned that you were first diagnosed with MS at the age of 23. How did that diagnosis change your perspective on life at such a young age?

Ardra Shephard: Everything changed. It was a defining “before and after” moment for me. At 23, you think everything is possible and you don’t know how your life will unfold. That diagnosis changed everything in ways I anticipated and in ways I didn’t. It was a traumatic time.

Magazica: What was your initial reaction upon learning about your condition? Were there any misconceptions or fears that stand out in

hindsight?

Ardra Shephard: I didn’t know anything about MS, so it seemed like the worst possible thing that could happen. My presenting symptom was vision loss; I kind of went blind overnight and also had difficulty walking. Despite such serious symptoms, I didn’t think something was seriously wrong—I thought I might need some antibiotics. I was shocked by such a serious diagnosis. It affected me at that time in my life. But over the 20-plus years since that diagnosis, I’ve learned so much. A difficult life doesn’t have to be a joyless life. That was a surprise after getting an MS diagnosis at a young age.

Magazica: I truly understand. When my son was first diagnosed with ASD, we had no idea what we were dealing with. We thought our best days were behind us. Can you share how the societal stigma impacted your personal and professional life in the early years of your MS journey?

Ardra Shephard: Stigma was something I was unprepared for. I naively didn’t expect people would treat me differently, but I learned quickly that they did. It was another shock and insult to an already difficult situation. I had a lot of support from coworkers, family, and friends, but I also had experiences filled with stigma and misconceptions. Being left out or passed over made me more closed off and protective of personal information. Now, more than 20 years later, I have a very public presence as someone living openly with MS. It’s been a long journey to claim my narrative and tell my own story. There were years when I was secretive about my condition because it had cost me

some things. I realize now that the only way to crush that stigma is to be open about it.

Magazica: In your blog and writings, you've mentioned being secretive about medications and the processes you're going through. How did you eventually find the confidence to embrace your condition publicly and start your popular blog "Tripping on Air"? What sparked that change?

Ardra Shephard: I think it was. You know, we haven't talked about what multiple sclerosis is. It's very common in Canada and is the most disabling disease of young people. Typically, people are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 40, although it can happen earlier or later. It's a neurological condition, and I like to say that what can go wrong might go wrong. It can affect vision, mobility, sensory perception, pain, and cognition it looks different in everyone, with no two cases being the same. However, many symptoms overlap, fatigue being a common one. It's also known as an invisible illness or a non-apparent illness. For a long time, I was passing as non-disabled because I could hide my symptoms. But about 10 years ago, my symptoms became more apparent—my foot would drag, people would ask what was wrong with my leg, and eventually, I needed a cane and now use a walker.

Ardra Shephard: The blog started when my illness was becoming less invisible, and I was getting asked questions that I didn't like. It wasn't just from people I knew but also strangers. Every time I got out of an Uber, people would ask, "What happened to you?" or "What's wrong with you?" Being asked what's



wrong with you by someone who doesn't know you is incredibly demoralizing. To think that someone's first impression of you is that something's wrong is tough. Starting the blog was a way of asserting how I saw myself—not as damaged goods, but as someone living with a condition that I adapt and adjust to. I needed to assert my own narrative and show that I have a great life.

Magazica: Yeah, I was reading one of your interviews where you mentioned being denied the restroom at a Tim Hortons.

Ardra Shephard: Yes, that happened.

Magazica: So you started “Tripping on Air” to share your journey. That must have taken a lot of courage.

Ardra Shephard: Thank you. One of my first posts in 2015 was titled “Honey, I Peed the Bed,” where I talked about my experience with bladder incontinence—a very personal and taboo subject. I wanted to write what I needed to read when I was diagnosed with MS. I aimed to create honest content that wasn't already out there, to help others and myself feel less lonely. Knowing that someone else is going through the same thing is profoundly comforting.

Magazica: Yeah, for sure. One of the lines that popped into my mind while listening to you is that self-respect isn't always about respecting yourself; sometimes it's also about understanding your worth along with all your limitations.

Ardra Shephard: Yeah, I think the way we look

at illness culturally in North America is as something to overcome. We don't talk enough about adapting to it. We often see adapting and accepting as failure and use warrior language to describe fighting our illness. But who am I fighting—myself? I don't want to be in conflict.

Magazica: Probably not.

Ardra Shephard: Right. One of the bravest and strongest things we can do is adapt and figure out how to live with our condition. It's practical. Otherwise, this fighter mentality can set us up for resisting tools like mobility aids, which can lead to falls and injuries. Culturally, we've assigned value to resistance, but it's not healthy. It hasn't been healthy for me.

Magazica: It's not always about having a fight or flight response.

Ardra Shephard: Exactly. I think not fighting doesn't mean you don't do things you can control to have the best possible outcome. I can do my physio, take my medication, and set myself up for success without framing it as a battle.

Magazica: Understandable, easily understandable. Now, let's talk about your upcoming memoir, It's a blend of your personal stories and reflections. What inspired you to write it, and what do you hope readers will take away from it?

Ardra Shephard: I'm so excited about this book. “Fallosophy” is very much in the style of my blog. The blog starts about 10 years ago, while the book begins with my diagnosis, filling in a

lot of blanks. It's funny and relatable, even if you don't have MS. We all go through stuff, and it's about adapting and coping.

Magazica: It's such an evocative play on words. Can you explain the deeper meaning of Fallosophy?

Ardra Shephard: Sure. It relates to "Tripping on Air," which describes my life with MS and my gait issues that make me fall sometimes for no reason. "Fallosophy" is a collection of my worldview and philosophies, informed by literal and figurative falls.

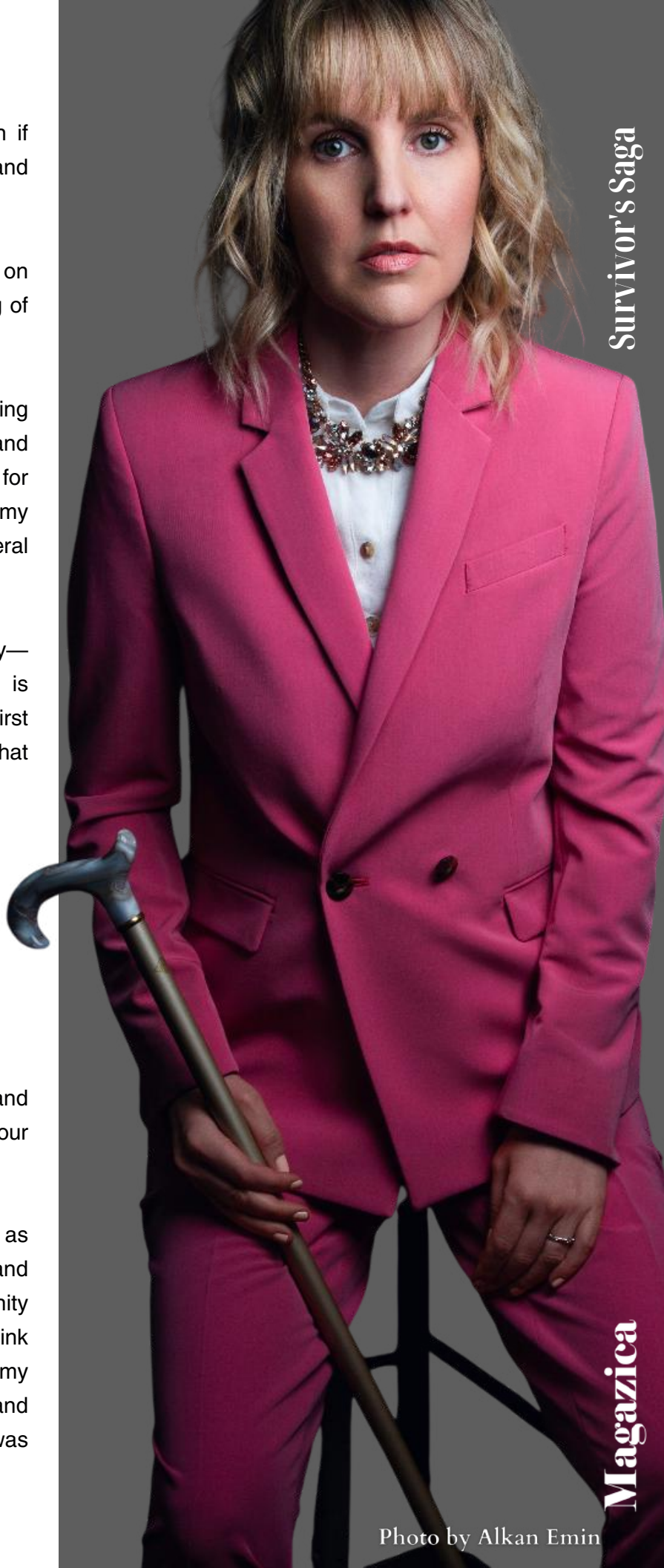
Magazica: I'm a big fan of stoic philosophy—Marcus Aurelius, Seneca. "Meditations" is almost always on my bedside table. When I first heard your book's name, I thought, "Wow, what a beautiful name."

Ardra Shephard: Thank you!

Magazica: Let's dive into some core essences of your blog and your upcoming book, "Fallosophy." Let's talk about overcoming challenges.

Magazica: How do you self-catheterize, and how did you build that resilience? What is your mechanism?

Ardra Shephard: I don't think of myself as overcoming anything; it's about adapting and adjusting. Many people in the MS community and even the medical community might think that having to self-catheterize to empty my bladder sounds horrifying and terrible, and that's certainly what I thought before it was



introduced to me. But I learned quickly that it was a solution to a massive problem. It doesn't hurt and doesn't need to be stigmatized. It's a tool that helps me get on with my life. It was freeing. This is similar to the language we use around wheelchair use—people say “confined to a wheelchair” when, in reality, a wheelchair is a tool that helps you get around, just like eyeglasses help you see. You're not confined to seeing things through lenses if that makes sense.

Magazica: Makes sense. Personally, what do you do in your day-to-day life? Is there a role for journaling or maintaining a diary in shaping this book?

Ardra Shephard: Yes, I've always kept a diary, and you can see a lot of them behind me. Keeping a diary has been therapeutic for me. It helps me understand myself and my life, remember things, and relive good experiences like traveling. Journaling has been key to knowing myself, and I'm thankful to my younger self for doing it. The book *Fallosophy* spans 20 years and hearing my 23-year-old voice helps me write authentically. It's amazing how our memories warp and change. Seeing my younger self in my diary helped me write in that voice.

Magazica: And you can also see your evolution over the years.

Ardra Shephard: Absolutely. Getting through tough times and reminding yourself that you did it gives you the courage to face the next challenge. All those experiences accumulate, and you start to see the pattern—if I survived

this, I can survive what's coming next.

Magazica: What's coming next? Absolutely. Now, how much do you think the support system—social or specifically family—plays a role in overcoming challenges? You've talked about your mother before. How does her support and the words of your family impact you?

Ardra Shephard: I almost feel like this book is a love letter to everyone in my life who has supported me—my parents, my husband, my best friends, even my dog. MS can be a very lonely disease, and as important as any pharmaceutical therapy or medication is, cultivating relationships is crucial. Having a support system—a team—is everything. This includes other people with MS and my family, friends, and dogs. It's critical to getting through life in general.

Magazica: Readers already know you have a busy life, both personally and professionally. How do you balance the two?

Ardra Shephard: I don't, you know. I think, who does? Many days, I don't feel that busy. I have to sleep and rest when I need to. Externally, it can seem like I have a busy public life, but it's hard to see how much downtime I need in a day. I have to be protective of that time. Most people with MS don't have as many available hours in the day. We make the most of the time we have, but it's important to give myself grace when I need a day to stay in my pajamas and read a book.

Magazica: The reason I'm asking is that we

sometimes work with corporate clients who say they don't have any time. As someone with an HR background, I tell them they need productive time as well as downtime for themselves.

“

A DIFFICULT LIFE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A JOYLESS LIFE

”

Ardra Shephard: A hundred percent. We make time for what's important to us. It can be hard for people who work too much and don't spend enough time with friends, family, or hobbies. I liked Martin Short's memoir because he broke his life into categories and scored himself. If work isn't going great, can I be better at friendship or exercise? When I have a lot of work, other things suffer, like not doing enough physio or eating well. I have to recognize those choices because my work feels valuable to me, and I'm lucky to have work I love.

Magazica: Oh, yeah.

Ardra Shephard: There's often a cost. There's not enough energy in an MS body—or any human body—to get everything done. We have

to make choices, and those choices can be different every day.

Magazica: One thing a business professor used to say in our entrepreneurship class at U of T, “How do you build a successful business?” We expected answers like having a revolutionary product or new technology, but he said, “You will make money when you solve people's problems.”

Ardra Shephard: Interesting, because culturally, we measure success based on money. We don't think enough about being successful by helping others. A successful life isn't just about what we gain but also what we give back.

Magazica: And that's what you're doing through your blog, your book, your speeches, and “Fashion Dis.”

Ardra Shephard: Thank you. I feel a little awkward accepting that compliment because this work is so healing for me. It doesn't feel like giving back as much as it feels like it's helping me figure things out and come to terms with it.

Magazica: But your courage and resilience are inspiring for so many people and families.

Ardra Shephard: Thank you. That's kind of you.

Magazica: It's true. You've been journaling, speaking, and working with communities for almost 15 to 18 years now. What changes have you noticed in people's understanding of chronic illness, specifically MS, over the past 20 years?

Ardra Shephard: The most change I've noticed has been in the last five years. Social media has changed who tells stories and who the gatekeepers are. I've noticed a difference in communication between doctors and pharmaceutical companies, with more involvement of patients in their care. When I started posting pictures of myself with mobility aids on social media, I was hashtagging them "babes with mobility aids" because I was looking for role models. Now, it's all over social media, normalizing the experience. Social media often gets a bad rap, but it has been positive in giving voice to and normalizing these experiences.

Magazica: I read somewhere that you work with pharmaceutical companies as an advisor. Is that correct?

Ardra Shephard: Yes, I've consulted with several pharmaceutical companies on patient advisory boards. It feels great to have a voice in these rooms. These powerful organizations can make immediate improvements in the lives of people with MS and other chronic illnesses. It's about inclusion, getting rid of stigma, and effective messaging.

Magazica: That's great to know. I checked the statistics before this interview, and Canada has the highest per capita incidence of MS. How does that shape awareness and resources for people with MS?

Ardra Shephard: I'm fortunate to be a member of the BARLO MS Centre at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, which has almost 11,000 patients. It's a world-leading facility with a top-notch team of research scientists on the cutting

edge of MS research. The work they're doing will impact the MS community globally. Toronto's diverse population provides valuable research data, which is a strength of the center.

Magazica: That's enlightening. I had no idea such a significant institution was in Toronto. We'd be honored to highlight their work for the community. We bring attention to the services provided by the Canadian medical community for citizens, especially those working silently.

Ardra Shephard: I'll give you some names after the interview. I'm sure they would be delighted to come on and share their work.

Magazica: We would be honored. And now, after 20 years of writing, your memoirs, and everything, if anyone asked you, in your silent moments, deep down in the core of your resilience, what are the life lessons you want to give to others?

Ardra Shephard: I think it's joy. A difficult life doesn't have to be a joyless life. Seek out joyful experiences and don't deny them to yourself. We have to make a better world for ourselves, each other, and our children. It's hard to sum up into a lesson, but I think joy is really important and available to all of us. Give people the benefit of the doubt because everyone is going through something, whether you know what it is or not.

Magazica: Let's talk briefly about the future activities you're planning. How do you see the future of "Tripping on Air"?

Ardra Shephard: Oh, gosh! On the heels of writing a book, it's like, "What do I write next?"

I don't know. There's room to see stories of disabled bodies evolve in television and movies. We're heading in that direction, and I'd love to be part of more authentic storytelling where people with disabilities are in the room and part of the conversations. For this year, I'm focused on talking about the book and meeting people. When I started the blog "Tripping on Air," I didn't know how it would resonate. I focused on telling the truth and making something that feels quality, good, and real. The opportunities will come, and that's how I feel now.

Magazica: And I'm sure all of these will inspire people a lot. So, after "Fallosophy" what's next?

Ardra Shephard: I don't know. I think that's exciting and a little bit scary. I'm not rushing to find out what that is. One thing I've learned from having MS is that there have been times when I didn't think I had a next chapter, and then I was surprised to discover that I did. So, we'll see what happens next. I don't know.

Magazica: Give yourself some time, and after dealing with the publication, talk about the book to larger audiences as we are now. You're talking to the readers of Magazica, so let's talk about it and the experiences you have. I'm sure there will be many, many books ahead.

Ardra Shephard: Oh, gosh, thank you. I think that's probably the angst of any writer, right? What's next?



Magazica: That is the blog, that is the book. As a person, what's next for Ardra Shephard? What exciting plans or projects do you see on the horizon?

Ardra Shephard: I love to travel, so I'm excited to travel and talk about the book. One of my favorite roles in life is as an aunt. I have nieces and nephews aged 6 to 21, and spending time with them during these precious years is a goal of mine.

Magazica: They are lucky to have you as a role model.

Ardra Shephard: Thank you. It's cool to see these kids grow up with me in their life as someone who's disabled. They're not weird about it. It's cool to feel that and be an example for them. I'm encouraged by the next generation growing up with fewer ableist ideas.

Magazica: Children are more accepting, no?

Ardra Shephard: Yeah, I think so. Then we mess them up with all our stories.

Magazica: True. They come into this world with such pristine, good hearts, and we adulterate them.

Ardra Shephard: One of my favorite stories about my nephew: I think he was about 10, and I could hear him in the next room talking to my husband. He said, "Uncle Kari, what's it like to be married to someone...?" And I thought, here we go. But what he said was, "What's it like to be married to someone who's famous?" I was just amazed. I thought he was going to say

"disabled," but he didn't. It was about the admiration of his aunt. That's what he saw—that I'm doing cool stuff.

Magazica: The focus was on your accomplishments and activities, not on your disability.

Ardra Shephard: Yes, on the cool stuff. Not my weird walk. In their generation, it's all about the cool stuff.

Magazica: Now they'll see that you're on YouTube, on some magazine's channel.

Ardra Shephard: That's right.

Magazica: Thank you very much. I know it's a busy time for you. Thank you for sharing your beautiful thoughts. I'm enriched, and I think our readers will be too. Thank you very much.

Ardra Shephard: You're very generous. Thank you so much. It was a real pleasure to chat with you.

Magazica: Thank you for your inspiring presence.



Interview

*With
a Registered
Psychologist
and Author*

Dr. Bea Mackay



Dr. Bea Mackay's path is a compelling blend of personal and professional experience. From her upbringing on a farm and teaching physical education, she transitioned to psychology, driven by a desire to break cycles of harsh discipline. This led her to a Master's in Counselling Psychology and the creation of Bea in Balance. Her approach integrates personal insights with professional strategies, all to help others navigate their life journeys.



Transform Your Life:

Dr. Bea Mackay's Insights on Trauma, Relationships, Emotional Well-being, Lasting Change and Healing

Imagine a life where your past doesn't dictate your present, where emotions become allies instead of adversaries. Dr. Bea Mackay wasn't born a psychologist; she was forged on a farm, tempered by corporal punishment, and then refined through a search for a better way. Her journey isn't a straight line, but a compelling narrative that zigzags through physical education, and psychology, all the while converging on one single goal: transforming lives. Forget traditional therapy, this is about accessing the power of your sensations. Get ready to unlock your potential, heal from trauma, and communicate with genuine

connection. Are you ready to embark on a journey of lasting change?

Magazica: *Welcome everyone. Today we have the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Bea Mackay, a counseling psychologist dedicated to helping individuals navigate their emotional journeys. Bea's path wasn't a straight line. It began on her family farm, continued as a physical education teacher, and ultimately led her to the field of psychology.*

Her diverse background gives her a unique perspective on the challenges people face and

the strategies that can lead to positive change in their lives. Her personal and professional approach makes her insights particularly relevant to us.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have Dr. Bea Mackay, author, registered psychologist, and thought leader. Bea, welcome to our magazine.

Dr. Bea Mackay: I'm delighted to be here.

Magazica: Bea, considering your diverse background from farm life to physical education, and then to counseling psychology, how did these early experiences in your life shape your understanding of the human experience and ultimately your path toward counseling psychology?

Dr. Bea Mackay: Well, I was raised in a time when religion and schools had corporal punishment. The belief was to "spare the rod and spoil the child." I was raised on a farm, and my parents were hardworking farmers who didn't have much time to parent, and when they did, it was often harsh. When I became a mom, I wanted a parenting style that wasn't as harsh. This is important in my life and has shaped who I am and what I want for people.

Magazica: You mentioned that your upbringing, particularly regarding discipline, influenced your approach to parenting and eventually your professional work. Can you share how these early experiences impacted your decision to help others break negative cycles and how that relates to the readers of Magazica?

Dr. Bea Mackay: My experiences were both positive and negative. My earliest memory is

when I was nine months to a year old, in our farm kitchen without running water or electricity. My mother had just received her first pair of eyeglasses, and she was happy. When my mother was happy, there was a ripple effect, and everyone was happy. This powerful influence shaped what I'm doing today because when people are happy, there's a ripple effect, and life is good.

The punishment part was too harsh for me. There's a difference between discipline and harsh beatings. I looked for a different parenting style and found the Dreikers' approach, based on logical and natural consequences. This helped me, and it's what I do in my work today—helping people shift from reasoning to strategies when reasoning doesn't work.

Magazica: Fantastic. In one of your writings, you describe a sense of belonging when you entered your master's program in counseling psychology. What was it about this field that resonated so deeply with you, and what do you hope your work is providing to people?

Dr. Bea Mackay: I felt that when I was working with people and could influence them in positive ways, helping them change their lives, it was like, "Yes, I'm home." I was meant to do this. It comes from making other people happy and creating good feelings in them. That's why I felt at home in my career.

Magazica: Fantastic. Many people find traditional therapy intimidating. What inspired you to create "Beainbalance" as an accessible platform with blogs and quizzes? How does this

approach help people who might be hesitant to seek traditional counseling?

Dr. Bea Mackay: Well, I want to give you a historical development of my career.

Magazica: Please, we'd love that.

Dr. Bea Mackay: Early in my career, I was invited by a doctor who refers a lot of her patients to me. One night at dinner, she gave me some feedback that blew me away. She said, "I refer a lot of my patients for therapy, and at their next appointment, I ask them how it was, and they say it was good to talk to someone. But when I refer people to you, at their next appointment, they're already making the changes they need to make."

I did not know I was doing anything different from my colleagues. At the time, I told her, "I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm glad you realize it's from the therapy, and you keep referring people to me." I said I would find out, and that's what my work has been about finding what makes for the action component of therapy. Talk therapy is good, but sometimes people can talk forever and there's no change. What makes for the change is having people access the sensations in their body as they're talking.

This connection with sensations is powerful because when you access the sensations, they synthesize with logical data, creating new neural pathways with different sensations. When you feel different, you behave differently. It's transformative change, but it feels normal. I give people feedback on their nonverbal cues,



like when they flush or show certain expressions. They often don't realize how much expression they show and I feed it back to them. This helps them access the sensations which synthesis with their logic. This forms new neural pathways and changes sensations, which drive their actions.

My work is about helping people get back to processing their emotions. Babies are born knowing how to process emotions, but we unlearn it and try to manage emotions instead. Managing emotions creates issues. My book is called "When you Let Go of the Outcome and Let Things Fall Together" because when you are not trying to control the outcome things can come together in ways that it couldn't come together when you are trying to avoid them.

I teach people to stay with the sensations and breathe through them. The waves of sensations get smaller and eventually disappear. The brain forms new neural pathways, and the old sensations do not return. This is how you heal from past trauma—when you talk about it without the unpleasant sensations, you're healed.

Magazica: I was going to talk about trauma later, but as the topic came up, let's discuss it now. Your work focuses on helping people navigate life's challenges and heal from past traumas. What are some common misconceptions people have about trauma, and what's the basic first step you take to start the healing process with the people you see?

Dr. Bea Mackay: Well, I start with just educating people to pay attention to whatever

sensations they feel. I tell them not to try and change them, but to accept them as they are. It doesn't matter if they might be overreacting. What's important is acknowledging the sensation they're feeling. In the here and now. I teach people to reconnect with these sensations. Once they experience the creation of new neural pathways, they become more engaged in therapy.

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**TRAUMA ITSELF
ISN'T THE
PROBLEM; IT'S
WHETHER YOU'RE
HEALED FROM IT.**

”

Magazica: Sometimes, when facing trauma, people might be in a state of denial or suppression. Do you encourage them to acknowledge their experiences openly?

Dr. Bea Mackay: Trauma itself isn't the problem; it's whether you're healed from it or not. When you are healed physically and psychologically, trauma can make you wiser and more resilient. Unhealed trauma goes underground in our subconscious and can cause developmental and emotional arrests. For example, a woman I worked with had an

affair for years and couldn't understand why she couldn't stop. Through therapy, we uncovered a memory from when she was three years old at her father's funeral. She saw the pain on her daddy's face and decided, at a young age, not to have children to avoid the pain of losing them. This unhealed trauma led to her actions.

Many of us have parts of ourselves arrested at a young age due to trauma. These parts operate from a place of pain, trying to avoid something they don't even understand.

Magazica: Beautiful. Let's transition to our next topic relationships. In one of your blog posts, you discuss relationship communication skills. What are some simple yet effective strategies our readers can use to improve communication in their relationships, and how do these skills relate to general well-being?

Dr. Bea Mackay: I'm currently writing a book called "Effective Communication Skills for Everyday Life." One strategy I call "putting the inside outside." If your partner does something that gives you goosebumps, share that with them. In therapy, I model this by telling clients how their words impact me. I coach couples to say what they need to say and then ask about the impact on their partner. This helps them feel heard and connected.

We tend to keep our emotions to ourselves, but connection is essential. Technology can make us feel robotic and disconnected. Simple actions like expressing that someone heard you, saw you, or made you feel safe are crucial. These simple yet powerful expressions

can transform relationships.

In couples therapy, I learned that progress can sometimes lead to discomfort because it's unfamiliar. People need to develop new neural pathways to handle positive sensations. Breathing through these sensations helps them get comfortable with progress.

Magazica: Wow. You mentioned you're writing a book on effective communication. Was your first book "Let Go of Outcome"?

Dr. Bea Mackay: No, my first book was "How to Work with the Self in Conflict." It's a manual for therapists based on the gestalt technique. It helps people access sensations and have a conversation with themselves, which is different from role-playing. My second book, "The Power of Connection," is also for the lay person, written in easy language to ensure it's practical and helpful.

Magazica: Okay. And I really like all the titles. But I really like the next one, "Let Go of Outcome." That's a very powerful message.

Dr. Bea Mackay: Yes.

Magazica: The book title itself is so powerful, and fascinating.

Dr. Bea Mackay: That's the book I started writing when I was finally able to write for the general population. When I turned 70, I went into a bit of a funk, a bit of a depression. The reason was that I thought it was too late for me to share what I knew with the world. A former client of mine invited me out for dinner one

night. When I arrived, he asked me how I was, and I said I was fine. An hour into dinner, I admitted I was in a funk. I don't remember what he said to me for the next hour, but when I walked out of that restaurant, I put up my umbrella in the rainy Vancouver weather and thought, "I can dream again." That's when I started writing "Let Go of Outcome."

Magazica: Fantastic. And your fourth book was "Train Your Brain"?

Dr. Bea Mackay: Train Your Brain is a book I'm working on as a sports psychologist for two young girls who are number one in Canada for their age group. It's about the relationship between yourself and tennis. At that top level, the difference is not in skills but in how your brain works and how you treat yourself.

Magazica: Fantastic! Good to know about all your books and upcoming ones. Now, back to our main topic. Your blog features posts on decision-making and the pendulum.

Dr. Bea Mackay: Yes, I did my doctoral research on decision-making. These quizzes come out of that.

Magazica: Yes, you mentioned going through a divorce and the sleepless nights trying to make decisions. Can you tell us more?

Dr. Bea Mackay: I chose decision-making as my research focus. I chose people who were already in therapy deciding whether or not to end their marriages. I used a methodology called Q-sort, translating theory into everyday language for sorting. By sorting these items, we

could tell if they were conflicted. After six sessions of Two-Year Work, we'd have them sort again to see if they had made a decision and the quality of it. This method helped so much that I created a hard copy for clients, eventually putting it online as a computer form. It's called Decision Quiz.

Magazica: Yes, viewers can access a shorter version online for free at decisionquiz.com.

Dr. Bea Mackay: Yes.

Magazica: It's fascinating. Two of our team members took it and found it very helpful.

Dr. Bea Mackay: That's great to hear.

Magazica: With your clients' emotional journeys, including dreams, how can understanding our dreams, visions, or mental maps give us insights into our daily lives and emotional well-being?

Dr. Bea Mackay: I'm halfway through writing a book on working with dreams without needing to know their meanings. It's always fun to know what they mean, but you don't have to. I opened "Let Go of Outcome" with a nightmare I had before presenting at an international conference. I woke up at 5 a.m. with cold sensations of terror. I knew I was over-reacting, however it did not stop the difficult sensations of terror. Fortunately I knew what to do I lay in bed and breathed through the sensations of white cold terror causing from my head to toes for two hours. When I got up, they were gone, and I haven't had a panic attack since. You can survive a panic attack by breathing through the

sensations. If you're not experienced, it's good to have a therapist as a container, reassuring you that you're okay.

Knowing you can handle it frees you to do what you want without avoiding sensations. When you let go of the outcome things can come together in a new way.

Magazica: While you were talking about writing a book on dreams, I remembered reading C.G. Jung's "Memories, Dreams, Reflections" and "Man and His Symbols."

Dr. Bea Mackay: Yes, those are great works. Yes, well, he is very well known. One way to work with dreams is to go with images, symbols, and metaphors. But you don't have to do that. I had a fellow come in who was having nightmares every night. We worked on it in our session, and I told him to re-enter the dream letting go of logic and see himself handling it well. The hardest part is letting go of logic. I taught him how to do that, and we practiced it in our sessions. Several weeks later, he said he no longer had nightmares. If he wakes up from a bad dream, he lies there and imagines different scenarios where it turns out well.

That's the book I'm writing now. You don't have to know what the dream means. It's usual to want to know, but you don't have to.

Magazica: Oh, yeah, I'll wait for your book. It will be more accessible for me. Jung's work is more classic, so I'll wait for your book.

Dr. Bea Mackay: Well, I'd like to say something about jargon. I don't use any jargon

in my therapy. You don't have to learn any therapist-specific language. It's just your own everyday language. That's one reason it works with so many people.



Magazica: Good for us.

Dr. Bea Mackay: Yes, and I don't like to put people in boxes. If someone comes in and says they have ADHD or they're paranoid, I say most of society is in the normal bell curve. Rather than saying you're paranoid, say you scare yourself too much. If you own it, you can do it more, or less, or do something totally different.

Magazica: This alternate framing of situations can be very proactive and have a positive impact on people.

Dr. Bea Mackay: Yes, it gives them a sense of agency.

Magazica: True.

Dr. Bea Mackay: For example, anxiety and depression are not causes or conditions. They're the symptoms. When we get anxious, we're scaring ourselves with our self-talk, and we don't even know it. I get people to own that they're scaring themselves. They're usually trying to protect themselves from some horrible fate of sensations. Depression is when people feel trapped in a situation, more psychologically than physically, and they cope by getting depressed because they feel they cannot solve it.

Magazica: That's enlightening. What's the one thing you wish everyone knew about mental well-being, and how can individuals take a proactive role in their emotional health?

Dr. Bea Mackay: It's the quality of sensations that determine how we think and act. If you feel

different, you act differently. People don't realize they can change the quality of sensations by creating new neural pathways, just by breathing through these waves. If people stay with the sensations and others let them, they can handle it. People are afraid to know what they know because they're afraid they'll do something different, but it's helpful for them.

Magazica: And for dealing with that, always get professional help, Beainbalance.

Dr. Bea Mackay: Yes.

Magazica: You've said you're halfway through a book on dreams and writing a book on effective communication. Any other future projects we can expect?

Dr. Bea Mackay: Yes, I have a whole list. One is an almanac for children, targeted at ages six to eight, called "How to Do Life," covering topics like preventing accidents and handling abuse. Another is a book on doing couples counseling on your own. Relationships are interactive, and if one person changes, it impacts the partner. People can do couples counseling even if their partner doesn't want to go.

Magazica: Fantastic! We'll be waiting for all your beautiful work. Bea, thank you very much for this conversation. You've changed many perceptions in me to become a better, more sensitive person. Thank you.

Dr. Bea Mackay: Thank you for giving me the opportunity.

Magazica: Definitely. Please let this not be the only time we converse. We will talk again if you allow us.

Dr. Bea Mackay: I'd love to. I want to get my word out to the population.

Magazica: When your books on effective communication and dreams come out, we'll have a detailed talk.

Dr. Bea Mackay: Good. They can benefit from reading my two published books in the meantime.

Magazica: Definitely. Thank you for your time and presence, Dr. Bea.

Dr. Bea Mackay: You're welcome. My delight to be here. Bye-bye.

Magazica: Bye-bye.



SHARE YOUR STORY OF STRENGTH

At Magazica, we aim to highlight inspiring journeys of overcoming health challenges.

Have you faced a health crisis, battled illness, or adapted to a chronic condition?

Your story of resilience could inspire others and spark hope. We'll work with you to share your experience respectfully and authentically. Whether it's a physical triumph, emotional growth, or simply finding strength to persevere, your story matters.

Share your story at editorial@magazica.com

Let's inspire hope and healing together. Your voice could change someone's life.

Magazica

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Shannon N. Knelsen



*By Founder
and CEO of
Olive Branch
Mentorship Inc.*

Shannon N. Knelsen is a registered healthcare professional with over 20 years of experience. A self-described "wise elder-millennial mentor", she is the Founder and CEO of Olive Branch Mentorship Inc., a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting young professionals and emerging leaders in the social and public sectors. Shannon is also a Professor at various colleges across Ontario, sharing her expertise and passion with the next generation of healthcare professionals.



Turning Trauma & Chaos into Purpose:

A Journey of Transformation – Shannon Knelsen

Imagine a life forged in a garden shed, a beginning as unconventional as they come. This isn't a story of privilege; it's a story of resilience, of a young girl caught in the turbulence of a chaotic family life and a system that didn't always know how to help. Witness how Shannon Knelsen, once a child visiting her mother in psychiatric hospitals, transformed her pain into purpose. From a young girl doing odd jobs to a healthcare professional making an impact, Knelsen's journey is not just about

survival; it's about transformation. It's a story of love, loss, and the unwavering belief that you can rise, no matter where you start. Prepare to be inspired by a life that demonstrates how chaos can become the very foundation for a meaningful life. This is more than just an interview; it's an invitation to witness the remarkable journey of a human spirit.

For the first few years of my life, I was the centre of my mother's universe. At just 14-years old, she poured all of herself into raising me, determined to give me the best life she could despite overwhelming odds. I wasn't her first baby—when she was only 13, she gave birth to her first child, who was placed for adoption. The pain of that loss left a deep scar, and she vowed not to repeat it with me. She ran away from home and became the first young woman to enter “The Rehoboth Home – House for Unwed Mothers,” a refuge for pregnant teens in 1987. The company tag line was “an alternative to abortion.” It was there in that not-for-profit, that she clung to hope and to me, choosing me and to fight for a life for us both.

Years later, I gained access to my mother's diaries and learned more about how I came to be. She wrote that I was conceived in a backyard garden shed—a detail that, while unconventional, revealed her desperation for agency and love in a world that gave her so little control. That shed became a defining metaphor for my life: an unlikely beginning in an unlikely place, but one that was filled with a fierce determination to survive.

Although my mother never finished Grade 9, when she was in school, she found ways to make me part of that world. She brought me to her parenting class as a real-life baby for her classmates to learn from. Technically you could say before I could even walk, I was helping teach people what it meant to care for a child. Those early years with her, though marked by struggle, were filled with love and determination. She gave me everything she

could with the resources she had available to her.

When my mom was 18, she gave birth to my younger brother. It's no doubt that she experienced postpartum depression, compounded by the drugs she was using and the people she had gotten involved with. Her struggles grew heavier, and by the time I was four, the weight of her mental health challenges, substance use, and the chaos of her relationships became undeniable. My brother and I were swept into the turbulence, caught in a system that didn't always know how to help us or her.

In the 1990s, courts overwhelmingly favored mothers in custody disputes, often overlooking the complexities of their situations. My brother and I were repeatedly taken away by Children's Aid Society (CAS) workers and placed into the custody of family members or adult relatives, only to be returned to her when the courts deemed her fit again. Each time we were taken, I hoped things would get better when we returned, but the cycles of chaos and instability always repeated.

During these turbulent years, my mother was frequently admitted to psychiatric institutions. I vividly remember visiting her at the psychiatric hospital in St. Thomas, Ontario. The stark hallways, the heavy air, and the supervised visits are etched into my young mind. During one visit, she gave me a multi-coloured (extremely ugly) blanket she had crocheted as an inpatient. It was a gift that symbolized her love for me, even during her severe struggles—a love she could express in the ways she still had control over.

By the time I was 10, the court system made a final decision. My brother's biological father—who had been in my life since I was nine months old—was awarded full custody of him. But he didn't stop there. Knowing that placing me in the foster care system would likely separate us forever, he chose to adopt me as well, alongside his wife. Though we didn't share biology, he made the conscious decision to accept me as his own, giving me a home and a family when I needed it most. His choice to take me in was a profound act of love and protection, ensuring that I wouldn't be lost to the system.

From the moment I was adopted, work became a defining part of my identity. At 11 years old, I started my first paper route. I babysat, cut grass for neighbors, and looked for any opportunity to contribute. By the time I was 13, I began volunteering at a long-term care (LTC) home, folding laundry and helping in small ways. That experience opened a door for me, and at 14, I was hired as a "laundry student," officially starting my career in healthcare. I worked in that same LTC home for the next eight years, learning the value of hard work, empathy, and community. It was in this LTC home where I met "Olive" – a 93-year-old who seemingly made a remarkable impact on my life, and she wouldn't even know it. She was the first person I ever experienced death with.

When I turned 22, I made the decision to move to Toronto, eager to expand my opportunities. There, I continued my work in long-term care, and by running an Alzheimer's Day Program every Saturday for the next eight years. It was rewarding and humbling work, teaching me



patience and the importance of dignity in every stage of life. These years solidified my passion for working with people, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances, and helped shape the career I would go on to build.

In 2012, I transitioned into the hospital system, starting a new chapter in my professional journey. Over the years, I've worked in various capacities, from patient flow & complex patient case management to clinical operations and leadership roles. My 27-year career has been defined by a commitment to service, compassion, and continuous growth. What began as a paper route and babysitting gig turned into a lifelong mission to make a difference in people's lives.

Alongside my career, I've channeled my energy into giving back to the community. In 2023, I founded Olive Branch Mentorship Inc., and we were incorporated as a non-profit in April of 2024. OBM Inc. is dedicated to supporting young professionals and fostering intergenerational connections. Through mentorship programs, leadership initiatives, and community projects, I'm working to create opportunities for others who feel unseen or undervalued, just as I once did. The not-for-profit has been thriving, and we're now looking to expand with The Olive You Podcast, a project that shares inspiring stories, professional development advice, and mentorship opportunities to reach even more people.

In January of this year, I've also started a new business: The Human Experience Co. This venture focuses on a series of small, positive

projects designed to "improve the human experience." My goal is to integrate these initiatives into businesses and public places, spreading positivity during the moments and experiences when people need it most. Whether it's a dopamine dispenser filled with motivational messages, simple acts of kindness in unexpected places, or creating thoughtful tools for workplaces, I want to help people reconnect with the beauty of life, even in its hardest moments.

Resilience, for me, isn't about pretending the pain didn't happen or moving on quickly. It's about acknowledging it and using it as fuel to create something better. My journey has been anything but linear—it's been filled with loss, heartbreak, and challenges that I often struggle to put to words. But it's also been filled with love, growth, and the belief that I could turn my struggles into strength.

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RESILIENCE, FOR ME, ISN'T ABOUT PRETENDING THE PAIN DIDN'T HAPPEN OR MOVING ON QUICKLY. IT'S ABOUT ACKNOWLEDGING IT AND USING IT AS FUEL TO CREATE SOMETHING BETTER

”



Losing both of my adoptive parents has been one of the hardest things for me to overcome. I thought I would have them forever, given how young they were when they adopted me. My adoptive father, who chose me and gave me a home, passed away after a 4.5-year battle with Lou Gehrig's disease – ALS. My adoptive mother followed years later after a 7-year fight with cancer that spread from her colon to her lungs and brain. My mother's passing laid bare the fractures in my relationship with my adoptive siblings, who claimed I was never "officially" adopted (untrue) and excluded me from the family estate – changing my mother's will 2-months before she died. They have chosen to live off the life insurance left behind, clinging to what their parents built while never creating anything meaningful for themselves. I could let this betrayal define me, but I refuse to let it.

“

MY STORY ISN'T JUST ABOUT SURVIVAL—IT'S ABOUT TRANSFORMATION. IT'S ABOUT FINDING LIGHT IN THE CRACKS AND PROVING THAT NO MATTER WHERE YOU START, YOU CAN RISE, THRIVE, AND INSPIRE OTHERS ALONG THE WAY

”

Instead, I've put every ounce of my energy into building a life of purpose. My work with Olive Branch Mentorship Inc., The Olive You Podcast, and The Human Experience Co. are all reflections of my commitment to creating something meaningful out of the broken pieces of my past. Through mentorship, storytelling, and small acts of kindness, I'm working to make the world a little brighter for those who need it most.

Today, I am proud of the life I've built. I don't have contact with my biological mother, out of choice and to protect my peace (read: sanity). My story isn't just about survival—it's about transformation. It's about finding light in the cracks and proving that no matter where you start, you can rise, thrive, and inspire others along the way.



Naiara Perin Darim

Interview

*With
a Registered
psychotherapist
and Instructor*



Shannon N. Knelsen is a registered healthcare professional with over 20 years of experience. A self-described "wise elder-millennial mentor", she is the Founder and CEO of Olive Branch Mentorship Inc., a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting young professionals and emerging leaders in the social and public sectors. Shannon is also a Professor at various colleges across Ontario, sharing her expertise and passion with the next generation of healthcare professionals.



Navigating Mental Wellness and Prioritising Mental Health:

Insights from Licensed Psychotherapist Naiara

Ever felt like your mind is a tangled mess of thoughts? Like you're not quite yourself? Imagine a guide, someone who understands the labyrinth of the human mind. Meet Naiara, a licensed psychotherapist whose expertise spans continents, from Brazil to Canada. She's not here to offer platitudes but practical, evidence-based strategies to help you navigate the complexities of your mental health. She

draws from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). Are you ready to understand the mind-body connection, learn techniques for managing stress, and discover the power of self-care? This interview promises a journey towards a healthier, happier you. Let's begin!

Magazica: Welcome, Naiara! Thank you for joining us today. Our readers are eager to learn more about mental health and how it impacts their overall well-being. Can you share a brief overview of your experience and the type of therapy you specialize in?

Naiara: Thank you for having me! I'm Naiara, and I'm a licensed psychotherapist specializing in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). I worked as a clinical psychologist in Brazil from 2011 to 2018, when I moved to Canada, in Ontario I am a registered Psychotherapist. I always worked with cases of high vulnerability that involve environmental or social issues. Due to that, I am very client-centred, trauma-oriented and family-focused when applying the evidence-based techniques I mentioned.

Magazica: Mental health is a complex topic, often shrouded in stigma. In simple terms, how can you define mental health and its role in our daily lives?

Naiara: Mental health addresses our general feeling of well-being and influences how we think and behave. Being mentally healthy is about having the resilience to cope with challenges, maintaining meaningful relationships, and functioning effectively in daily life. Just like physical health, mental health can fluctuate, and it requires care and attention. Neglecting mental health can lead to emotional distress, strained relationships, and decreased overall well-being.

Magazica: Reducing stigma starts with understanding that mental health is a universal

aspect of being human—it's just as important as physical health and deserves equal attention and care. Many people experience stress, anxiety, or low moods occasionally. How can our readers distinguish between normal life challenges and situations that might benefit from professional help?

Naiara: It's normal to feel stressed or anxious occasionally. We all evolved to have pleasant and unpleasant emotions in more or less intense ways depending on what we are navigating in life - emotions exist to communicate our needs and help us meet them. However, if these feelings don't seem to meet the reality of your life, if they persist for weeks or months, interfere with your daily functioning, or lead to significant distress, it may be beneficial to seek professional help. If you're experiencing symptoms such as constant worry, overwhelming sadness, unusual thought patterns or difficulty managing everyday tasks, talking to a mental health professional can provide support and guidance.

Magazica: You mentioned Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). Can you break down these terms for our readers and explain how these approaches can help people improve their mental well-being?

Naiara: Both are therapeutic approaches that are based on results from scientific research that have been replicated over time. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a structured, goal-oriented approach that helps individuals identify and change negative thought patterns and behaviours. By addressing these patterns, CBT

can reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) was developed based on CBT; it combines cognitive-behavioral techniques with mindfulness and emotional regulation strategies. It's particularly effective for individuals who struggle with intense emotions and self-destructive patterns. Both approaches empower individuals with practical tools to manage their mental health more effectively.

Magazica: Beyond therapy, what are some practical strategies our readers can incorporate into their daily routines to manage stress, improve sleep, and boost their overall mood?

Naiara: Incorporating simple, daily practices can make a significant difference. Each person needs to figure out what works with their resources and preferences. Here are a few strategies:

- **Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques:** Practices like meditation, deep breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation can help manage stress and improve focus. I usually recommend that folks try to stay in the present moment as much as possible and do one activity at a time - for example, as you are brushing your teeth, focus on that activity only. Little mindful moments like that can improve the practice over time.
- **Regular Exercise:** Physical activity is a powerful mood booster and can help reduce anxiety and improve sleep quality. A light stretch in bed can go a long way to get you started.



- **Good Sleep Hygiene:** Establishing a regular sleep schedule and creating a calming bedtime routine can improve sleep quality. Using passive modes of distraction can be very helpful if you tend to spiral in your thoughts at bedtime.
- **Social Connection:** Maintaining relationships and seeking support from friends or family can provide emotional relief and strengthen resilience. Talking to people you trust about your experiences and thoughts can be the first step into having significant insights about your patterns and it allows others to offer you validation and connection.

Magazica: The connection between mind and body is undeniable. How does our physical health, such as diet and exercise, influence our mental well-being?

Naiara: Physical health has a profound impact on mental well-being. Regular exercise can enhance mood by increasing endorphins and reducing stress hormones. A balanced diet supports brain function and overall energy levels, which can influence mood and cognitive performance. Adequate sleep is crucial for emotional regulation and cognitive processes. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can create a strong foundation for better mental health. Also, self-care acts are a very important way in which we practice self-love - when we prioritize our health maintenance, we are sending a “note to self” that we are important.

Magazica: Many people struggle with maintaining healthy habits. Do you have any tips for our readers on how to create

sustainable routines that support both their physical and mental health?

Naiara: Creating sustainable routines involves setting realistic goals and making gradual changes. Start by incorporating small, manageable habits into your daily life, such as light stretching, eating an option of fruits or vegetables, or establishing a 2-hour window in which you’ll go to bed. It’s also helpful to track your progress and celebrate small victories. Building a support system can provide encouragement and accountability. Consistency with the small steps is the most important part of this process.

Magazica: Technology plays a major role in our lives. Can you discuss some potential benefits and drawbacks of technology use as it relates to mental health?

Naiara: Technology offers several benefits for mental health, including access to online therapy resources, mental health apps, and educational materials. It can also help connect people with support networks and self-help tools. However, excessive use of technology, especially social media, can contribute to anxiety, depression, and decreased self-esteem. It’s important to manage screen time and be mindful of how technology affects your mood and relationships.

Magazica: How can our readers leverage technology in a healthy way to support their mental well-being? Are there any apps or resources you recommend?

Naiara: To leverage technology healthily, set boundaries for screen time and use technology purposefully. For mental health support, consider using apps like Headspace or Calm for mindfulness and relaxation or Moodfit for tracking mood and setting mental health goals. Online therapy platforms and hotlines can also provide convenient access to professional support. Watching familiar shows or listening to music/podcasts can also be an effective way to focus your attention when your thoughts are racing.

Magazica: What are some common misconceptions about mental health that you encounter in your practice? How can we help address these misconceptions and encourage people to prioritize their mental well-being?

Naiara:

1. "People with mental health concerns are lazy or not trying hard enough."

- Remember the reality of mental health conditions, which often involve significant physical, emotional, and cognitive challenges. Depression, for instance, can sap energy and motivation, making it difficult to complete even basic tasks.

2. "They're just seeking attention."

- The truth is the opposite, many people struggling with mental health issues go to great lengths to hide their struggles, fearing judgment. Seeking help or expressing emotions isn't about seeking attention but about surviving—address by listening without judgment. Highlight the courage it takes to speak up about mental health.



3. "Mental health problems only affect weak people."

- Mental health conditions can affect anyone, regardless of strength, resilience, or life circumstances. Biological, genetic, and environmental factors all play a role. Address by sharing stories of well-known, successful individuals who have openly discussed their mental health struggles to normalize vulnerability.

4. "Therapy is for people who are 'crazy.'"

- Therapy is a tool for growth and healing, not a sign of failure. Many people use therapy for personal development or to navigate life's challenges, not just crises. Reframe therapy as a proactive way to improve well-being, akin to going to the gym for physical health.

5. "You can just snap out of it."

- Mental health conditions are not a matter of willpower. They often require professional treatment, time, and a supportive environment to improve. Explain that recovery is a process and often requires a combination of therapy, medication, and lifestyle changes.

Magazica: For readers who might be interested in learning more or seeking professional help, what resources would you recommend?

Naiara: Here are some reputable organizations and services available in Canada, Ontario, and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA):

National Resources:

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)
- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)

Provincial Resources (Ontario):

- ConnexOntario: Provides free and confidential health services information for people experiencing problems with alcohol and drugs, mental illness, or gambling. Available 24/7.
- Good2Talk: A free, confidential support service for post-secondary students in Ontario aged 17–25. They offer professional counselling and information on mental health, addictions, and well-being.
- Youth Wellness Hubs: Offers free access to mental health services, support for substance use concerns, primary health care, social services, housing, employment, and recreation for youth aged 12–25 across Ontario.

Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Resources:

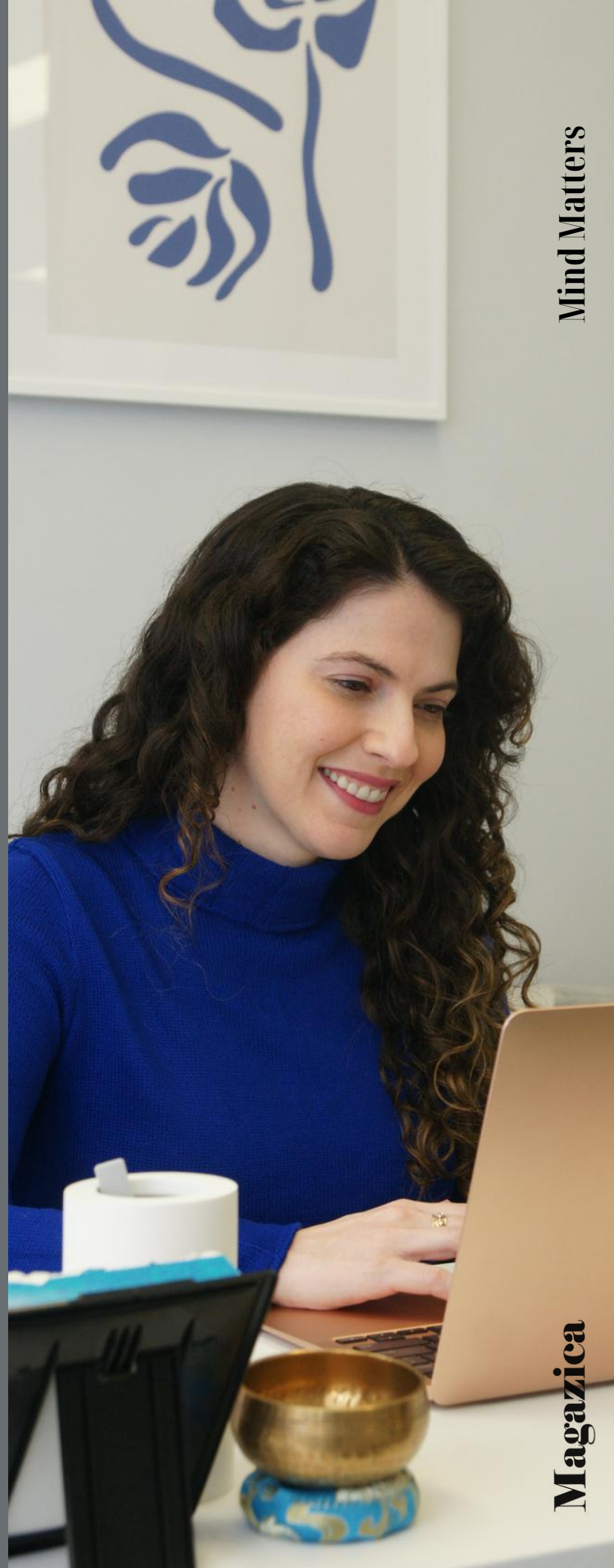
- Toronto Distress Centre: Provides 24/7 telephone support for individuals in crisis requiring emotional first aid. They also offer text support from 4 p.m. to midnight.
- Gerstein Crisis Centre: Offers 24/7 telephone support, in-person mobile crisis teams, community support referrals, substance use crisis management, follow-up, and access to short-term crisis beds.
- Kids Help Phone: Canada's only 24/7 eMental health service offering free, confidential support to young people in English and French.

- Toronto Community Crisis Service (TCCS): A community-based service with multidisciplinary teams of crisis workers responding to non-emergency calls from people in crisis and requests for well-being checks.
- Toronto Seniors Helpline: A single point of access for seniors and caregivers to receive information and access to community, home, and crisis services.

To identify independent registered professionals, you can also use Psychology Today - making sure to check that the professionals.

Magazica: As we wrap up, is there a final piece of advice you would like to share with our readers on how to live a healthier and happier life?

Naiara: My final piece of advice is to prioritize self-care and be kind to yourself. Make time for activities that bring you joy and relaxation. Building a support network and seeking professional help when needed are crucial for maintaining well-being. Remember, taking care of your mental health is an ongoing journey, and every step you take towards self-care makes a positive difference.



February 12th to 16th

SEXUAL HEALTH WEEK

Magazica.com

Sexual Health Week in Canada:

A Continuing Conversation on Wellbeing

By Editorial Team

Although Sexual Health Week 2025 took place from February 12th to 16th, the conversation around sexual health remains as important as

ever. Organized by Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, this annual campaign aims to raise awareness about the vital role sexual health plays in our overall well-being. The message for this year, Sexual Health is for Everyone, continues to resonate beyond just one week.

For more than two decades, this initiative has sought to educate and inform Canadians about the diverse aspects of sexual health, moving beyond traditional topics like pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Sexual health also encompasses self-confidence, relationships, consent, pleasure, and identity, making it a key component of both physical and mental well-being.

Sexual health is fundamentally tied to personal freedom, respect, and informed decision-making. It is about having access to the resources and support necessary to make choices that align with one's personal values and needs. It's also about creating an inclusive society where everyone, regardless of age, gender, background, or sexual orientation, can access quality sexual health education and services.

Although the official week has passed, the need for ongoing dialogue and action remains. Advocacy groups, healthcare professionals, educators, and community organizations continue working year-round to provide resources and promote inclusive sexual health education. This effort includes addressing systemic barriers that prevent marginalized communities from accessing essential services, promoting comprehensive sex education in schools, and ensuring that healthcare providers offer non-judgmental and inclusive care.

Various organizations continue to offer workshops, expert panels, and community outreach programs throughout the year, highlighting the importance of ongoing education and awareness. Schools,

universities, and healthcare institutions play a key role in fostering these discussions and ensuring that individuals are equipped with accurate, up-to-date information to make informed choices about their sexual health.

The movement also extends to policy advocacy, with organizations urging lawmakers to improve sexual health education in schools, increase funding for reproductive health services, and strengthen legal protections against discrimination in healthcare settings.

At Magazica, we recognize that sexual health is a lifelong conversation, not just a topic for one designated week. Keeping these discussions alive and ensuring access to reliable education and resources is crucial to fostering a society that values inclusivity and informed decision-making. By engaging in these conversations, exploring available resources, and supporting advocacy efforts, we can help create a future where sexual health is understood, respected, and prioritized.

For further information on sexual health initiatives, visit Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights at www.actioncanadashr.org.

Dr. Viji Vibhu Prakash

Interview

*With a Professor,
HR Consultant
and Workplace
Wellness Advocate*



Dr. Viji Vibhu Prakash is a respected scholar in Human Resources, coordinating and teaching in the postgraduate program at George Brown College. Her career includes roles in recruitment, consulting, and training, before transitioning to academia. A proponent of experiential learning, she integrates real-world challenges into her curriculum using case studies and industry insights. Her doctorate from the University of Liverpool focused on action research and real-time performance management. Dr. Prakash is an expert in people analytics and talent management, and she advocates for the strategic role of HR.



Strategic HR, Talent Management, Real-Time Performance Management & Adapting to AI:

Insights from Viji Vibhu Prakash

Ever wondered how HR evolved from a reactive, firefighting department to a strategic, tactical powerhouse? Get ready to meet Dr. Viji Vibhu Prakash, a leading voice in human resources who has witnessed this transformation firsthand. From her early days in recruitment to spearheading people analytics at George Brown College, her journey is a masterclass in adaptation and innovation. This

isn't just about HR; it's about understanding the evolving workplace, embracing disruption, and leveraging technology like AI to create a better future for employees and organizations alike. Prepare to have your perspective shifted, and discover the secrets of real-time performance, work-life integration, and the future of talent management. This is more than an interview—it's an awakening.

Magazica: Dear viewers and our beloved audience, we are here for another exciting session of Magazica. We are here with an education leader and one of the most prolific voices in the HR field, working in George Brown College's Human Resource postgraduate program. She's the coordinator and also teaches people analytics. Her name is Dr. Viji Vibhu Prakash.

We are delighted to have her with us. We will talk about education, human-centric education, work-life balance, and many things related to it. She has graciously permitted me to address her as Viji. So Viji, welcome to the conversation.

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Thank you, Suman. I appreciate the opportunity and look forward to sharing some of my experiences and views here.

Magazica: We'll be delighted about that and we're looking forward to a very insightful conversation. So first, would you please tell us about your professional journey? What motivated you to join the education sector after working in other sectors? What was the basic motivation to join academia?

Viji Vibhu Prakash: My enrolment into the Master of HR was by chance, but I loved it. Training and development was an area of keen interest but realized that I had to work in the industry and learn nuances to approach training within the industry. My first stint was in recruitment, and then I moved on to human resource functions through consulting projects across industry verticals: supply chain,

pharmaceutical, retail etc.

The transition into training was through the diploma in training and development from the Indian Society of Training and development (ISTD), which is affiliated with IFTDO. Along with exposure to cross organisational training, my interest in psychometric dimensions, led me to get certified in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) Step 1 and 2 Certification. The profiling knowledge helped me better understand the audience within training and organisations.

Training experience is what cascaded down and prompted me to explore academic profiles. My first job in Canada was within training, where I used Myers and Briggs extensively. Equipped with the operational background in human resources, I identified different courses to teach and getting my doctorate was supportive. It opened the doors to engage in critical research. Currently the whole dimension of education is changing, we see a lot of diversity and I have always wanted to bring what I learned in my doctoral journey, and experience back into academia, within classrooms.

Magazica: Okay. And where did you get your doctorate from?

Viji Vibhu Prakash: My doctorate was from the University of Liverpool, which specializes in the action research model. My thesis explored an organizational problem and studied it through cycles of research. Had the opportunity to implement components of my study to manage strategic change. This was done within a

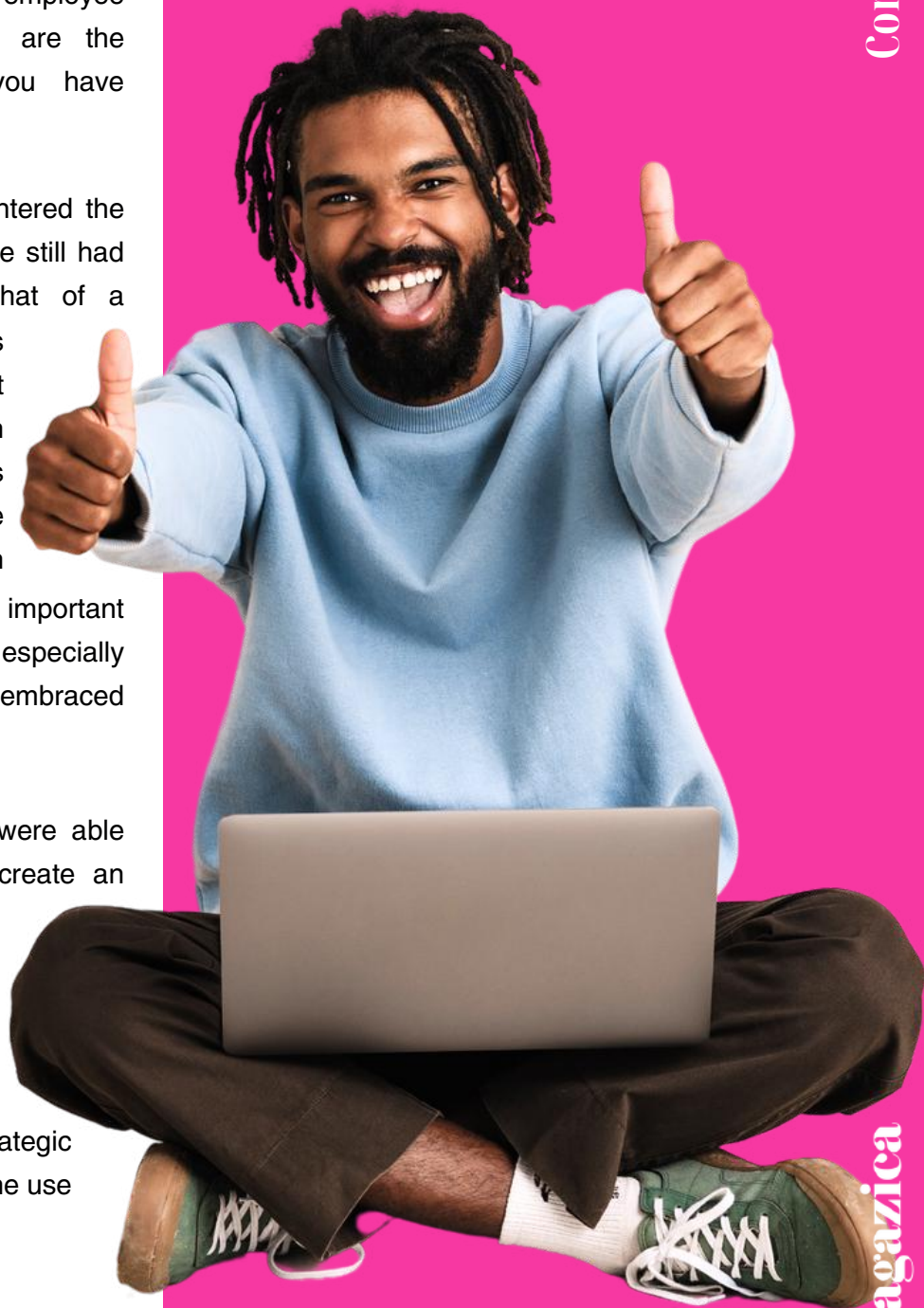
manufacturing unit in Thika (Kenya) in the area of performance management within the human resource domain.

Magazica: So, with the years in human resources, you have probably covered the majority of the spectrum, if not all. What significant changes have you observed in the HR practices, and how have they influenced employee well-being or related to employee well-being over the years? What are the changes in the HR practices you have observed?

Viji Vibhu Prakash: From when I entered the recruitment domain, in the 1990s. We still had the whole image of HR being that of a firefighting department. Now there is a need in the industry to do it effectively. i.e. efficiency coupled with cost-effectiveness. HR Industry has changed tremendously, given the strategic involvement of HR within operations I think one of the most important things that HR is doing right now, especially since COVID, is that we have embraced disruption.

The human resource departments, were able raise at that critical moment and create an environment that managed employees who were overwhelmed, HR created a safe zone for employees to work in. HR has migrated to embracing disruption and come out as a function that is strategic and more tactical in nature, through the use of people analytics.

We have seen the trend and shift in HR, at George Brown, within our programs. So we are focussing on exposure and skill training in the area of people analytics and this has been supported by the program advisory committee (PAC) as a critical / futuristic skill among HR professionals.



There is tremendous change, both positive and challenging around performance, with real time performance management strategies. The industry needs students to have the ability to be analytical, foresee relationships, and predict associations based on analysis of existing data, both from within organizations and the market, and be able to benchmark outcomes. Wellness is being stressed within human resources now. We're handling engagement through wellness within organisations.

If I were to use a couple of words to describe the current role of human resources, it would be strategic and tactical human resources. That's the front-end role Organizations, are looking at human resources to play. Human resource individuals are expected to lead companies towards change and change management initiatives.

Magazica: I love the phrases, "engagement through wellness," "real-time performance management," and "strategic tactical HR." Strategic HR, we have heard the term, but "strategic tactical HR" made a whole lot of new sense. You defined it so perfectly that HR was, a long time back, a firefighting department. True, now it has had a huge shift. You've practically answered my next question as well. How do the HR challenges come into the picture? I will go one leg deep. As a professor of the School of Human Resources, a planner, and a program coordinator for HR post-grad programs at George Brown, how do you integrate real-world HR challenges? You have immense real-life experience. How do you integrate those real-world HR challenges into your curriculum to prepare students for an

evolving workplace? How do you do this?

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Education within this domain is very experiential, and at George Brown College we focus on that. We are supported by a strong faculty that comes from the industry. As a program coordinator, we work along talent with industry experience, those who can share, their experiences and learnings from diverse backgrounds across industry verticals. We encourage faculty to bring their experiences in the areas of project / team and conflict management.

In terms of within the classroom, we use a lot of case studies. for example, I'm currently teaching within the people analytics program, talent management and data visualization. The class sessions are coupled with theory and example of challenges in recruitment, engagement strategies, attrition, performance strategies etc. Case studies are pulled from the industry. There's a lot of research that goes in terms of collection of databases and validation of databases used within the classes. We analyze discuss the pros and cons, and question opinions. The point is to discuss different perspectives and ideologies that would define the case. Most of our courses use open-ended learning material and we encourage our students to research framework and critique it in comparison to industry standards.

Magazica: That is a big part of action research as well. You learn by doing.

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Yes and, that's crucial. Students learn a lot within the classroom If you look at, AI, for example, I think we all have

mixed perceptions or take on AI. There are faculty who are supportive, while some who are trending slowly, and others who are a bit wary and stepping back on it. Typically, what we are trying to do within classrooms is encourage its use because, at the end of the day, it is there to stay.

The drive is to encourage the use of AI, with ethical boundaries - to see how it can support. We have strategies in place where we ask them to support research with review peer-reviewed journals and articles and to cite references, even if they've got some initial ideas through AI. The students are encouraged to research beyond AI outcomes. They are challenged to critique AI outcomes. Case studies are extensively used within HR. We bring in guest speakers into the classroom, people who are in the industry talking about current trends, what works, what doesn't, advantages, industry /employer expectation, interview strategies etc. There's a lot of debate and discussion within classrooms to encouraged and helps participants.

Courses have a project component that requires students to do primary and secondary research. They pick industry specific wicked problems and research solutions gaining exposure and outreach into the industry.

Magazica: Yeah, user and end-user experience.

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Yes, and the idea is that, at the end of the day, all these students are studying and gaining knowledge to achieve their career aspirations. That network is critical,



and we need to support and open the doors towards that network.

Magazica: So, from the professional side, let's now bounce back a little bit to the personal side of your life that is very connected to your profession. How do you balance all the professional responsibilities and personal life? What do you think are the main challenges from your own experience and others, your colleagues, your students? As a post-grad coordinator, you have seen a lot of professional students as well. How are they balancing their experience with their life? What are the main challenges these days and how do you address them?

Viji Vibhu Prakash: I think it's about setting priorities. We talk about work-life balance but the trend in HR is towards blending work-life. Organizations are encouraging employees to align their professional life with their personal life.

Magazica: We call it work-life integration now. Yes, with remote work and all that.

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Priorities, are very important. Do I personally always succeed in prioritizing? No, I have my moments where I would love to balance it, but sometimes I must force myself to create that blend to balance. Making time for myself, could be volunteering within my community or just spending time on my own to refresh and rejuvenate. Sometimes it is about juggling these priorities. Prioritising and setting boundaries have helped me personally. I don't call myself a workaholic, but I think you should probably talk to my family and friends to

find out if I'm a workaholic or not because it's always the people around you who can tell.

For immigrants and students who are coming into the country, it can be very challenging, and we see that in the college, for example, a student must study and work. They have moved away from their family, and it's a big change. There's a lot of turmoil going on within every individual when they away from family and friends. They are faced with many challenges, in the areas of professional and cultural acclimatization.

Magazica: And there's no mom's kitchen.

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Yes, there's no mom's kitchen. George Brown has a lot of support for students in terms of mentorship, peer, and counseling support. Faculty members, support and help with accommodations. As program coordinators, we encourage them to ask questions and share issues / challenges. We guide them to the right person or sources to get the right information. Be it international work permits, counseling, accommodation or course help? We create and define strategies and pathways to help. Student wellness is critical, and there's a lot of support within George Brown, especially for students who come to Canada.

Magazica: That's fascinating. I like the term work-life blending. I've heard of work-life integration from work-life balance. We've shifted to work-life integration, but blending—I think it's a more proactive word. Integration sometimes sounds mechanical, but blending feels more organic.

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Yes, during COVID, people collaboratively worked with their partner / spouses and kids that's where the blend happened. Flexibility and wellness and successfully integrated and blended professional and personal lives of individuals.

Magazica: Performance management is a crucial issue for organizational success within the domain of HR. What are some key elements, and considering that our generation has already started working with Gen Zs and Millennials, how do you think that over these intergenerational changes, we are in the same workplace now and also with AI? HR is having a strategic and tactical shift nicely pointed out by you. What do you think the criteria metrics or KPIs of performance management are? How is the shift going there?

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Within performance management, I've extensively used 360 feedback. My doctoral research topic was real-time performance management and its implementation.

Magazica: Can you give us a layman's understanding of it, so our professionals can get the vibe of it?

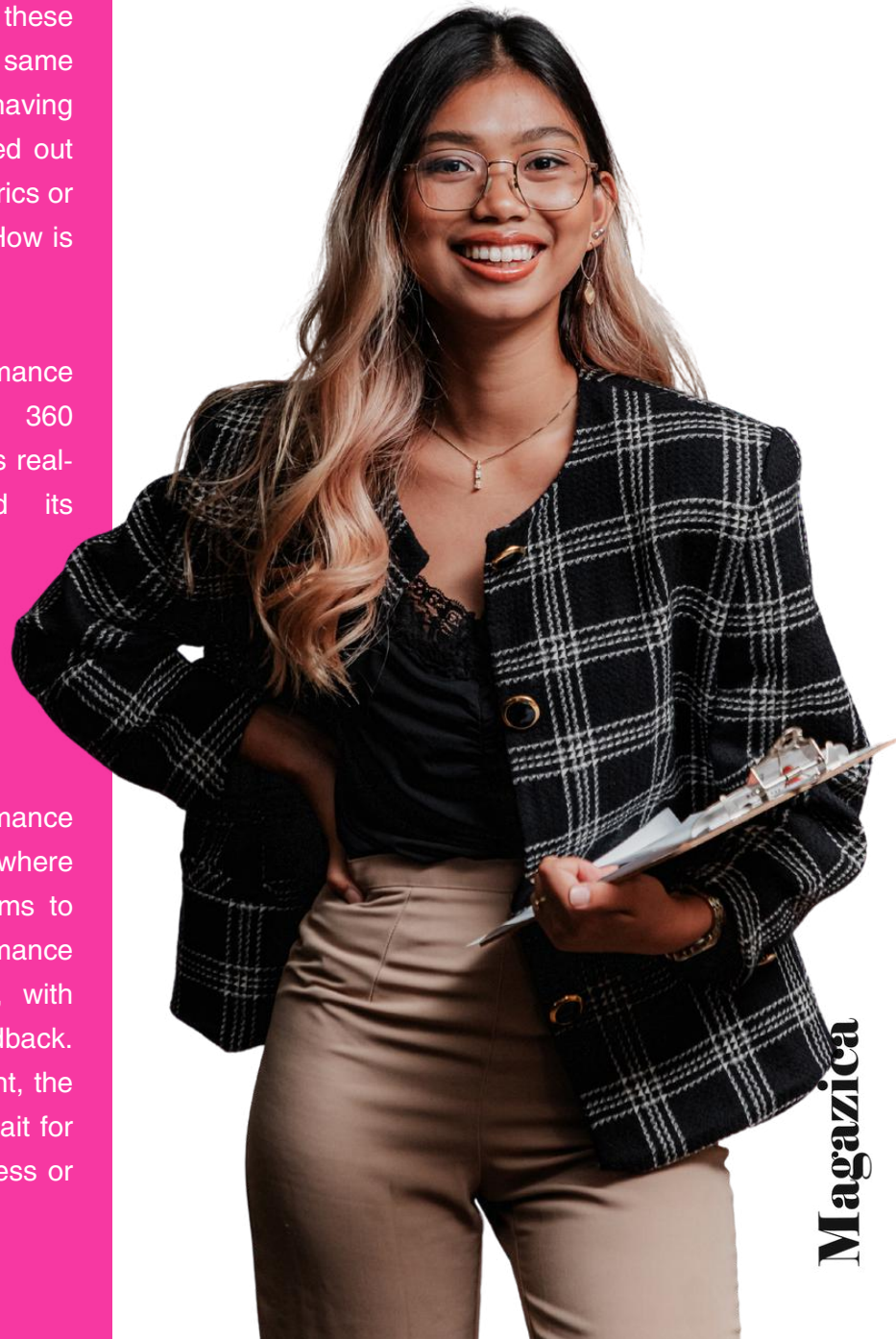
Viji Vibhu Prakash: A real-time performance management system would be where organizations use ERP and HRIS systems to assess, evaluate, and manage the performance of stakeholders within an organization, with continuous communication and feedback. Within real-time performance management, the idea is that organisations don't have to wait for a quarterly or a half-yearly review to assess or

mitigate performance issues and challenges.

Magazica: What does ERP stand for?

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Enterprise Resource Planning systems within organizations.

Magazica: Fantastic. So, we will go a bit tangent, like a small digression. Performance management closely focuses on talented people. There is a lot of noise in this definition



of talent. How do you define talent? What is your take on it? Like focusing on the 80-20 principle that 20% of the people do 80% of the meaningful tasks, something like that, very rudimentarily.

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Today, talent management encompasses all functions of HR. Examples, in recruitment the percentage of diversity implemented within our recruitment cycles, is talent management. Within training, cost-benefit analysis and the impact of training, supports talent management. The extent to which organization has been able to create smart goals, and assess individuals on smart goals, identify gaps, and bridge the gap through training and development is talent management.

Magazica: We have seen major shifts in our work life during COVID. During COVID, there was a major shift. Another major shift is the advent of AI. We are living through another shift, and usually, such shifts would come every 10 or 20 years. Now it is happening successively. We just experienced COVID; we are still adjusting to remote work and the home office concept. Then AI came in. How can we build resilience for this fast-evolving workplace? What is your experience and take on it? What would you tell your students?

Viji Vibhu Prakash: You were asking me earlier about Gen Z. They are more adaptable to change and the fast-evolving workplace. There were times when employees were defined by the companies they worked for. But if you look at Millennials and Gen Zs, they have a brand of their own and bring specific skill

sets. Entrepreneurial ventures that been successful, highlights their brand in terms of opportunities grasped, strategies, changes initiated, and efficiencies within the market. Gen Z are open to change and adaptable. Resilience is encouraged through independent and ethical thought process and the drive is to be socially accountable. Within academia we support by preparing them with the skill sets and areas to practice within the classroom.

Example, in the people analytics program, we introduce them to software like BI / RSuite / SAC / SAP /Tableau / Visier etc. we are opening doors to expose them to industry standards within the college. We give them access to tools so they can experience and work within them. They are given a safe environment to make mistakes and learn through them. Same applies to AI, and the ethical parts that comes into play.

Magazica: Viji, thank you. Thank you very much for the time you have spared with us and for contributing so many insights. We have talked about the shift of HR from traditional to strategic and tactical. We have talked about experiential learning and how students can benefit from networking, AI, work-life balance, setting priorities and boundaries, and work-life blending. We have discussed performance management in real-time. We have touched a whole lot of ground with Gen Zs and how we can adapt to the changing landscape. Hopefully, our readers, specifically working professionals and aspiring professionals, will greatly benefit from it.

Thank you very much on behalf of the whole team of Magazica for contributing these beautiful insights. Thank you. It was so thought-provoking.

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Thank you again for the opportunity, and I hope I was able to get across. I appreciate the opportunity. It was nice discussing and talking about this. It kind of

made me also go on a thinking loop of "What next?"

Magazica: That was the idea. Thank you very much.

Viji Vibhu Prakash: Thank you.



National Mental Health Nurses Day

February 21



Honoring Mental Health Nurses:

A Celebration of Dedication and Impact

By Editorial Team

On February 21, 2025, the Canadian Federation of Mental Health Nurses (CFMHN) invites healthcare professionals, scholars, and

the broader community to come together in recognition of International Mental Health Nurses' Day. This annual occasion is dedicated to celebrating the vital contributions of mental health nurses, acknowledging their dedication to patient care, advocacy, and the

advancement of mental health practices worldwide.

Mental health nursing is a profession that requires resilience, compassion, and a deep understanding of psychological well-being. These specialized nurses serve on the front lines, offering care to individuals experiencing mental health challenges, providing therapeutic support, and fostering recovery. Their role extends beyond direct care; they act as educators, mentors, and advocates, striving to create a more informed and supportive society.

This year, CFMHN is hosting a virtual educational event designed to elevate discussions around the evolving landscape of mental health nursing. The event, running from 11:45 AM to 4:00 PM EST, offers an engaging lineup of speakers and breakout sessions. Attendees will have the opportunity to explore pressing topics such as nurses practicing psychotherapy, the intersection of psychedelics and nursing, and peer support initiatives aimed at strengthening the mental health workforce.

One of the standout sessions will focus on building a sense of belonging through community support, emphasizing the importance of connection and shared experiences in fostering professional and personal resilience. These discussions will provide invaluable insights into the latest trends, research, and best practices in the field.

Participation is free for CFMHN members, while non-members can register for a fee of \$75. Those interested in becoming a member can do so for \$50, unlocking access to a range of

professional resources, networking opportunities, and educational benefits throughout the year.

As mental health challenges continue to affect individuals across all walks of life, the role of mental health nurses has never been more critical. This celebration is not only a tribute to their unwavering commitment but also a call to action for continued investment in mental health education, policy, and support systems.

CFMHN encourages all those involved in mental health advocacy and care to take part in this meaningful event. The exchange of knowledge, experiences, and strategies will help build a stronger, more resilient healthcare community equipped to address the complexities of mental health today and in the future.

For more information and to register, visit www.cfmhn.ca.



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