



## Food Insecurity and Burnout: The State of Nonprofit Workers

### **SFX: Sounds of typing and office ambiance**

**Mary Barroll:** Welcome to CharityVillage Connects. I'm your host, Mary Barroll.

### **SFX: Hummingbird flying and tone**

That's the sound of a Hummingbird pollinating our world and making it a better place.

### **Music**

The Hummingbird is CharityVillage's logo because we strive – like the industrious Hummingbird – to make connections across the nonprofit sector and help make positive change.

We'll offer insight that will help you make sense of your life as a nonprofit professional, make connections to help navigate challenges, and support your organization to deliver on its mission.

**Mary Barroll:** In this episode of CharityVillage Connects we do a deep dive into the current state of the wellbeing of Canadian non-profit workers, and, particularly, the wellbeing, or lack thereof, of frontline staff. We'll take a look at some of the latest data from the 2025 Changemaker Wellbeing Index by Future of Good and supplement it with data from Mental Health Research Canada's Poll 24 and YMCA Workwell's 2024 Workplace Well-Being Report. And we'll discuss the implications of these latest findings with experts in the field, along with their advice for potential solutions.

**Akela Peoples:** We're very pleased to see a focus on wellbeing in the non-profit sector. It's a largely underexplored topic, and I think we need to be talking about this more and more, as we move forward.

**Anouk Bertner:** We have a third that are thriving, we have a third that are managing, and then we have a third that are either struggling or severely struggling. And what this shows us is that it's not just anecdotal evidence, it's not just a few folks or a few organizations that are really struggling, there is a large number of people.

**Steven Ayer:** About a third of nonprofit workers in the survey were food insecure. And that rose above 50% among some of the service workers, particularly frontline service workers. Half of people, who were doing service work in the nonprofit sector, say they're food insecure. For a lot of people, that is an utter crisis, and that is their day-to-day lives.

**Kate Toth:** What we found was startling. In our Workwell data, we found that 75% of nonprofit workers say negative client interactions impact their personal wellbeing. And that number jumps to 83% among childcare workers. So, just a tremendous impact on people. And that's talking about frontline staff, but it's important to know that it's not just a frontline problem.

**Anne-Marie Newton:** CAMH, the hospital, has thousands of employees who work directly with patients in a frontline care situation. Mental illness is pretty ubiquitous and most people who work here can point directly to either an immediate family member or someone very close to them, if not themselves, who experiences mental illness. So, it can be heavy, heavy work.

## **SFX News buzz**

### **News clip**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysK6rry9EH8>

“Food insecurity isn’t hidden at nonprofits trying to keep up with demand. “I see real life every day of people struggling and being hungry and being so grateful that a service like ours exists.” The report revealed Canada's hidden poverty rate of 25%. You're looking at close to 10 million people and that's 6 million more than the official poverty rate. The study also found 30% of young people, more than 44% of single parent households and 42% of renters can't afford at least two of the items on the deprivation list.”

### **News clip**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/10550099/canadian-workplace-burnout-survey/>

“Reports of burnout in the workplace are growing, year after year. Toronto-based worker Dhwanil Kshatriya recently confided in his boss about feeling burnt out, due to a heavy workload but he was told to, quote, find a way to deal with it and was offered an online chat group for support, before being laid off. “Talking on chat with somebody you don’t know, like that is not going to help.” A new survey suggests that 42% of Canadians are feeling burnt out at work. The most common causes were heavy workloads, a lack of managerial support and missing resources to succeed.”

### **News clip**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_NWkcHiPHc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_NWkcHiPHc)

“Six weeks into the new reality of Covid-19, according to an Angus Reid survey, more than half of women between 35 and 54 feel both worried and anxious. Men and women of all ages, across Canada, are affected. Almost a quarter of Canadians say their mental health has taken a blow. And more than a quarter of Canadians say both their mental health and finances have worsened since Covid-19 hit. Across the country, there's a spike in mental health distress calls. “They're using words like Covid is disintegrating my mental health.”

**Music:** Burned Out by Jordan Rabjohn  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKg9OZivyGo>

“I’m so burned out / my head’s a mess / I’m breaking down / I can’t remember what it feels like to be alright / I need someone to come and fix my brain”

**Mary Barroll:** For years now, and especially since the Covid-19 pandemic, we've seen many nonprofit professionals report feelings of burnout, stress and depression.

**SFX:** sound of piano playing dissonant chord

Their numbers are only increasing as donations continue to fall and demands for services continue to rise. These are challenging economic times for all Canadians. But in this episode, we're plunging into the often-overlooked wellbeing of Canada's nonprofit workforce – especially frontline community workers. These are the people providing the backbone of essential community services, everything from childcare and mental health support, to food banks and housing initiatives.

Hot off the digital press and published by Future of Good, in partnership with Environics Canada, is the first edition of the Changemaker Wellbeing Index. This 2025 index is the most comprehensive and representative research on the well-being of non-profit workers ever conducted in Canada. It will be updated annually, over the next decade, providing changemakers with an unprecedented, evidence-based view into the lived experiences of nonprofit workers. It offers leaders and decision makers the high-quality data research and analysis they need to address the wellbeing inequities nonprofit workers have long grappled with. Moving beyond relying on anecdotal reports -- we now have solid data that reveals, unfortunately, the wellbeing of many nonprofit workers is even worse than we feared.

To help us understand the key findings of the 2025 Index, we spoke to Anouk Bertner, Executive Director of Future of Good. She digs into what the results show about the state of wellbeing among nonprofit workers today.

**Anouk Bertner:** We looked at all nonprofit workers. So, there are some folks who work in governmental nonprofits, and they tended to be higher in the wellbeing spectrum. And we really found that those that worked at community nonprofits tended to be lower down, in terms of their wellbeing, and more likely to be in the struggling group.

We have a third that are thriving, we have a third that are managing, and then we have a third that are either struggling or severely struggling. And what this shows us is that it's not just anecdotal evidence, it's not just a few folks or a few organizations that are really struggling, there is a large number of people.

**Mary Barroll:** One of the report's most striking findings is that 31% of paid full-time nonprofit workers experience food insecurity. And this rises to 34% of nonprofit workers

working in community nonprofit, and shockingly, rises again to 50% of entry-level workers. Anouk Bertner comments on this alarming trend.

**Anouk Bertner:** This is something that we really did not expect. We saw this in the early data, and we thought that it would even out, because, oftentimes, when one collects data, we get the first few responses and it's hard to draw conclusions from that. You need the full samples to be statistically significant. But we really saw this holding through. And then, when you look at entry level workers, this actually increases to 50% of folks. And this is just really an unacceptable situation. People who are doing important work and who are working full-time should not be food insecure. And I think what it really reflects is that we know we have an affordability crisis. We know that housing has gotten more expensive. We know that food has gotten more expensive. And because of that and because of the inflation that accompanies it, everything has gotten more expensive. And if wages do not increase, at the same pace, then they collide.

What we're seeing is that for, especially entry level workers and the lowest paid workers in organizations, they are really just in the crux of this, right now, and they are really, really struggling and that's what's contributing to that food insecurity.

And it's really a shocking situation when somebody works at a food bank and then has to use that food bank or has worked a portion of their career and then retired from a food bank, and then needs to go back there, in retirement. So, it's really just a pretty crazy situation.

**Steven Ayer:** The key thing I was really trying to get like, what are the frontline service workers feeling? What are their needs? What's the state of their mental health, their burnout, their food insecurity? What do they feel about their jobs?

**Mary Barroll:** That's Steven Ayer, President and Founder of Common Good Strategies, a social purpose consultancy that helps clients use data and evidence to make meaningful and lasting social impact. Steven Ayer worked with Future of Good on the 2025 Changemaker Wellbeing Index report. The biggest challenge was to connect with frontline and community service workers who have much less time and resources to fill out surveys. When they were able to connect with the frontline service workers, what they learned was shocking and disturbing.

**Steven Ayer:**

When we look at the results from our surveys, about a third of nonprofit workers, in the survey, were food insecure. And that rose above 50% among some of the service workers, particularly frontline service workers. And so, when you think about some of their perspectives, I mean, half of people who were doing service work in the nonprofit sector say they're food insecure. For a lot of people, like, that is an utter crisis, and that is their day-to-day lives. In terms of their, you know, day-to-day, sort of, emergency needs to have enough food to be able to eat, to feed their families. Like, these are really pressing issues that I think a lot of people, their predominately concern is, like, they're

not being addressed. When you have a 50% food insecurity rate, that is a gigantic number and one that is going to be people's predominant concern. For a lot of people, maybe even a huge portion of the small organizations, like, that is their day-to-day reality. They're wondering if they're getting paid, nowhere near adequate for what they need to thrive. So, this is their day-to-day concern, where folks who are, you know, in the most vulnerable positions, their basic needs are not often being met.

**Mary Barroll:** When frontline service workers – paid employees, at the vast number of small community based nonprofits and charities who toil on the frontlines to serve their marginalized, impoverished, unemployed, disabled, drug addicted or homeless clients, in our society – when a full 50% of those workers report that they themselves are food insecure and struggle to make ends meet and feed their families – is it any wonder their mental health and wellbeing are impacted as well?

**Akela Peoples:** We do have extensive data on food insecurity. We've been collecting data on that for quite some time, since the middle of the pandemic. So, this is something that we've been paying a lot of attention to, and it's definitely tied to mental health. It absolutely is. Our data reveals that.

**Mary Barroll:** That's Akela Peoples, the CEO of Mental Health Research Canada. Thanks to their research, we now know – definitively – that food insecurity is one of the factors that directly influences mental health and wellbeing. The organization has been identifying and evaluating this and other factors, since the Covid-19 pandemic. Here's Akela Peoples to give us an overview of the findings they reported in their publication, Poll 24.

**Akela Peoples:** Food insecurity's increased in the last several years, post-pandemic, and while the rate of food insecurity has improved in the last six months, it still remains higher than pre-Covid. So, this is something that we all need to be paying attention to, in society. You know, it's difficult to bring your best self to work if you're worried about what food is going to be on the table for your family. So, this is definitely something that all of us and leaders and policymakers need to be paying close attention to.

**Mary Barroll:** All of this data on high levels of food insecurity among frontline community workers is extremely alarming. So, what do we do about it? Here's what Future of Good's Anouk Bertner has to say.

**Anouk Bertner:** This is the value of having data. We know, now, that this is not an isolated circumstance and we have some data around it, so that, when we do the same work next year, we can see whether this problem is getting worse or whether it's getting better. And I think what we do with bleak pieces of data is we change the system. We say that this is unacceptable, and we choose to do something about it.

**Mary Barroll:** Food insecurity is just one symptom of the bigger problem. Nonprofit workers, especially frontline service workers, are not being paid enough. The Future of Good's Changemaker Wellbeing Index also indicates that half of the workers in the

lowest income bracket report poor wellbeing. Anouk Bertner explains the correlation between wellbeing and income.

**Anouk Bertner:** This is something that we saw very strongly that income is correlated to wellbeing. And I think this makes a lot of sense. I think if somebody is concerned about survival, if we're talking about housing security and food, we really are talking about survival, these are not discretionary items, then it's very hard to have any good wellbeing. I see this as a bit of a bulldozer effect where, if somebody is really struggling with their financial survival, they're not thinking about their mental health, they're not thinking about their physical health, they're not able to support their kids. If their kids have special needs or even just regular things like soccer practice and dental work. So, it's really this one bulldozer element that then affects this whole host of other issues.

**Mary Barroll:** Steven Ayer agrees.

**Steven Ayer:** I think when we look at the nonprofit side of things, where the community nonprofit, a lot of the spaces might think about social services, like homeless shelters, food banks, some of these arts and culture nonprofits or recreation organizations. This is where we see a really big difference, with about 30% lower pay amongst that sort of, and that's one of the initial inequalities we see. A really striking difference, in terms of compensation for folks who are working in that community nonprofit sector. And of course, that is flowing from some of the choices around how they're funded. Community nonprofits, that are often smaller, don't have as regular funding. We see this number one, this really large disparity in terms of wages.

**Mary Barroll:** The disparity and inequities in wages, in the nonprofit sector, are systemic problems that aren't easy to solve, but there are ways to begin to address potential solutions. Anouk Bertner says it's time for funders to begin to ask an important question, as part of their grant application process.

**Anouk Bertner:** Are you paying a living wage? I think this is something that funders, especially, can do, is ask fundees, when they're doing the grant application. Are you paying a living wage? And if not, why? Because I think there are legitimate reasons why it might be difficult to pay a living wage. But I think that is a nuanced, interesting conversation to have between a funder and a fundee. And I think individuals can do this too. Anybody who is contributing to the nonprofit sector, ask this question, are you paying a living wage? Folks who are working in these spaces really deserve living wages also.

**Mary Barroll:** The current economic challenges are hard for any employer to navigate but particularly so, in the nonprofit sector, where budgets are low, cash is tight, and funding is uncertain. So, this distressing data on the current reality of sector workers raises some difficult questions about how the entire nonprofit system operates.

**Anouk Bertner:** This is not an easy issue to solve. I don't think any employer, any nonprofit anywhere wants to pay a sub-living wage. I don't think that's a choice that they

make. I think it is something that really comes out of desperation and comes out of those tight budgets. We oftentimes talk about business models, of any type of organization, how do we operate so that our costs are less than our revenues, that at the end of the year, we're not overdrawn. I think there's really an issue with nonprofits here, because there is a rising need for the services that they are providing, and then there is a decreasing pool of resources that's available to support that. When you look at those two lines coming together, like, that is showing us that, not only are we experiencing some of that right now, but we're going to continue to experience it. So, I think it's more than a budgeting exercise, I think this is really an overhaul of how we do a lot of this work.

**Mary Barroll:** Many of the real problems being faced by the nonprofit sector are systemic in nature. Anouk Bertner hopes that those who play a role in designing the system are listening.

**Anouk Bertner:** One of the other ways that we really hope that this report is used is by policymakers. So, you know, a lot of the issues that we see, whether it's a food bank, whether it's a tutoring service, different types of community nonprofits are dealing with, are oftentimes the result of poor policy. And I think if we can fix some of those upstream issues around poor policy and we build food security into our overall community planning, then we don't even need to deal with this. Food banks were never meant to be a permanent solution. And most nonprofits that I know, they eventually want to go out of business. They want the problems that they work on to be solved. So, I think that should always be foremost in our minds. It's not just about improving working conditions. I think that's definitely part of what we need to do. But there's also this bigger piece about preventing and ameliorating overall conditions.

## **SFX: news buzz**

### **News clip**

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/winnipeg/video/2025/03/20/financial-stress-social-media-taking-toll-on-canadians-mental-health-poll/>

“Financial stress, social media exposure, and difficulty securing healthcare is taking a toll on our mental health. Mental Health Research Canada just released its 23rd poll today, and it offers a critical snapshot of the challenges Canadians are facing. “We've been tracking that Canadians who are struggling to pay bills, are struggling with economic hardship, have significantly worse mental health indicators from anxiety, depression indicators, as well as suicide ideation. And there was this tremendous threat of economic warfare and tariffs, and how it manifested itself was a significant spike in the number of Canadians who indicated economic hardship was driving negative mental health indicators.””

**Mary Barroll:** There's no question recent economic challenges brought by the Trump tariffs and rising costs of living are dramatically impacting many Canadians. But frontline nonprofit workers, even in well-funded nonprofits, are even more vulnerable to

mental health challenges. Anne-Marie Newton is President and CEO of CAMH Foundation, where she leads efforts to advance mental health through philanthropy, in support of Canada's leading mental health hospital. I asked her what mental health challenges she sees her frontline workers experiencing.

**Anne-Marie Newton:** I can really only speak from the foundation side for CAMH. Obviously, CAMH, the hospital, has a whole, additional, enhanced set of frontline worker concerns. They have thousands of employees who work directly with patients in a frontline care situation. But for us, what we see is twofold. So, working at CAMH Foundation means that we are championing mental health, and trying to bust stigma and really telling a lot of very emotional stories that can be very personal to ourselves and our staff. Mental illness is pretty ubiquitous and most people who work here can point directly to either an immediate family member or someone very close to them, if not themselves, who experiences mental illness. So, it can be heavy, heavy work. Add to that that we're, first and foremost, a fundraising organization that supports the hospital. So, we're in a sales environment where it can be fairly high pressure. We have very specific, hard targets we need to be hitting. So, the pressure and the expectations of delivering on what the hospital needs is are a very real present thing all the time. So, when the world feels very heavy and there's a lot going on that people are experiencing both professionally, but also in their personal lives, with community groups they belong to, it can be a lot. So, really thinking about everything that someone is bringing to work and how we can really support them to be their best here, but also be healthy and happy outside their work.

**Mary Barroll:** When it comes to being healthy and happy while at work, the reality is nonprofit workers are struggling. The 2025 Changemaker Wellbeing Index reveals that 45% of young nonprofit workers under 30 report poor wellbeing, more than triple the rate amongst those aged 65 and older. 37 percent of entry-level workers, regardless of age, have poor wellbeing, compared to just 29% in senior leaders. And 44% of employees, aged 18 to 29, are food insecure. For those in direct service roles, on the front lines, it's even higher, at nearly 50%.

## **SFX News buzz**

### **News Clip**

<https://globalnews.ca/video/11091548/cost-of-living-impacting-youth-mental-health>

“Across Canada, the issues of rising inflation and costs of living are top of mind for many. And according to a new poll, it's especially become a concern for young people. A new survey by the Policy Institute at King's College, London and Ipsos shows nearly two thirds of Canadians say the increase in youth mental health problems are due to the rising costs of living.”

**Mary Barroll:** If two thirds of Canadians report that the increase in mental health problems among youth are due to the rising cost of living, and the Wellbeing Index

indicates that nearly half of nonprofit workers under thirty are reporting poor wellbeing and 44% of them are food insecure, rising to 48% among those working on the frontlines, it's an emerging existential threat for both the workers and the sector itself. These numbers raise a crucial question about the sector's long-term resilience. How can the sector attract the leaders of tomorrow to drive positive change, and deliver on its mission if it fails to support those young workers who are just beginning their career path? It's a talent attraction and retention challenge that threatens the future of the nonprofit sector. Here is Anouk Bertner's perspective.

**Anouk Bertner:** Every sector, every workplace needs bright young people to work on big, systemic issues. We know that the issues that we face are significant and a lot of them are worsening and they're also becoming more interrelated. So, we're seeing how climate change affects housing.

**SFX:** Sounds of fire

Right now, in Canada, we have forest fires across the country. And what that does is people have to evacuate from their homes and then they're moving to other communities, and they suddenly need housing. So, as we see these sorts of crises intermingling, that's gonna take a lot of energy and new thinking and problem solving to figure that out. And if we don't have that next generation of bright young people who want to take on these roles and see themselves in the sector, not just this year, but really building a career in this space. And that creates a lot of problems for nonprofits. So, I hope this is really a warning call to a lot of folks.

**SFX:** buzz

**News clip**

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/audio/9.6799147>

"A rise in discrimination and harmful rhetoric against 2SLGBTQ+ people is taking its toll. Changes to gay and transgender rights in the U.S. means concerns are growing about the treatment of people in Canada. And Statistics Canada is reporting a 63% spike in hate crimes targeting sexual orientation, between 2022 to 2023."

**Mary Barroll:** In addition to young people in general, a specific demographic in the sector that's experiencing significantly higher levels of stress is the LGBTQ+ community. An Anti-Defamation League survey noted a sharp rise in online hate and harassment recently. Here are some thoughts from Akela Peoples.

**Akela Peoples:** Young people, in general, across the country, are suffering more with their mental health than any other demographic and more than ever before. And there are a lot of young people employed in the charitable and nonprofit sector. This is a demographic of particular interest. Also the LGBTQ community, also, has been at risk, for a long time, in terms of mental health and wellness. So, anyone leading in an organization that has these two demographics on their staff team, they should lead with

that in mind and also lead with a focus on avoiding trauma where possible in the workplace.

**Mary:** Anouk Bertner advises nonprofit leaders to pay more attention to the youngest workers in their organizations to really find out how they are doing and if they need more support.

**Anouk Bertner:** There's a huge opportunity to look at young workers and not see them as disposable and really think about how to support them. So, there is a financial piece to it about cost of living increases annually. There's also a piece here around mentorship and autonomy and mastery of their work. But I think what it's indicating to me is that we really need to be thinking about younger workers, because they're really struggling right now.

**SFX: News buzz**

**News clip**

<https://globalnews.ca/video/10347144/whats-driving-burnout-in-canadas-womens-shelters>

“A new report is highlighting a lack of funding and overwhelming workload as major reasons behind burnout amongst frontline staff at women's shelters right across the country.”

**News clip**

<https://globalnews.ca/video/9714710/canadian-women-report-experiencing-high-levels-of-burnout>

“A new study is revealing just how many Canadians are feeling burned out. The results show three out of four Canadian women have considered acquitting their jobs due to burnout.”

**SFX:** sound of dissonant piano chord

**Mary Barroll:** Young nonprofit workers aren't the only ones in crisis. The nonprofit sector also needs to pay more attention to how its female workforce is doing. The Changemaker Wellbeing index indicates that women make up 70% of the nonprofit sector's workforce and nearly 40% of these women report poor well-being, a full 10 percentage points higher than men. Kate Toth, the Director of Learning and Development at YMCA Workwell sums it up:

**Kate Toth:** When you see generally statistics around mental health, around burnout, etc. women report higher levels of those types of things, as well. We are being disproportionately impacted. And when you look at a sector that is very highly women, it's a sector we need to pay particularly close attention to.

## SFX: News buzz

### News clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tyNuhPigmq>

“Harassment, threats, and location tracking are the three most common forms of tech facilitated gender-based violence, and that there are really high rates of co-occurring abuse happening with experiences of tech facilitated gender based violence.”

### News clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtA4UHmXeEg>

“One point that really stuck with me from one of our focus group participants was, when she said, simply existing online, as a woman, trans or gender-diverse person, is seen as an invitation to hate.”

**Mary Barroll:** And it’s not just burnout, stress and depression that women, and other marginalized groups experience in the nonprofit sector, it’s also threats of harm, harassment and hate speech, on the job and online.

Mitzie Hunter is the president and CEO of the Canadian Women's Foundation. Her organization recently published *Challenging Gendered Digital Harm*, taking a look at how people and particularly women and gender-diverse people, experience online harm in Canada. The report reveals that over 60% of women, girls and gender-diverse people in Canada have experienced gendered digital harm, including harassment, unwanted sexual images, and identity-based abuse. 70% of this harm has occurred in the past three years alone. Here is how Mitzie Hunter puts it:

**Mitzie Hunter:** By this report, we are able to call it what it is, online digital harms. We now have a phrase that is really naming what this issue is, that we're seeing on the rise, and how it is affecting the lives of people. And from our research, there are really an imbalance in who is impacted. Racialized people, Black, Indigenous people, 2SLGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, those visible as well as invisible disabilities are disproportionately affected online in a harmful way and are being targeted, in fact. And so, this online safety is as important as physical safety. We know that 71% of people experience some sort of online hate, and that's a huge number. One of the key findings, is that half of women reduce their online presence and self-center to avoid harm.

**Mitzie Hunter:** 88% of gender equality organizations face digital threats. Hacking, harassment, we've all heard of those Zoom bomb moments that happen online, and 82% focus on gender-based violence. So those who are focused on, those who are most vulnerable, are facing those threats online. And yet more than 60% don't have the resources to address this. You need to consider the impact on our organizations of this online harm. Staff members who have to interact with this negativity and this hate, this vitriol, that affects their mental health and their wellbeing. And so, organizational leaders have to really ask that question how are we protecting people online? I have spoken to

organization leaders who have opted out of some platforms because they were not able to protect their staff from all of the hate. Oftentimes, staff are the ones that have to go in and take down different posts and that exposes them to that type of harm. Sometimes our research has shown that people just took an approach of really putting on armor or numbing themselves to those threats online. And that doesn't last forever. At some point, it's gonna affect people's wellbeing. And from our research, we see that, that it's the mental health and the wellbeing that is so impacted.

**Mary Barroll:** The Canadian Women's Foundation's digital harms research indicates that 56% of women and gender-diverse people in Canada think online content threatening physical violence against women and gender-diverse people is increasing. Mitzie Hunter says it's time for nonprofit leaders to take action – to advocate and educate.

**Mitzie Hunter:** We have to continue to advocate. We also have to take our own responsibility for learning. And we have an online course that's available at CanadianWomen.org. It's free for those to access. I've signed up for it myself. I'm doing the modules and really learning about the terminology, learning to identify it. And I really encourage others to go on and access this resource, this tool, to keep themselves and those around them as safe as possible while online.

**Mary Barroll:** Whether online or offline, women, LGBTQI+, gender diverse, BIPOC people, and young workers are all increasingly putting out distress signals. They're feeling increasingly stressed out and sometimes, even unsafe in their workplaces. If leaders in the nonprofit sector are listening, how should they react? Kate Toth hopes the data compels nonprofit leaders to ask more and better questions to seek solutions.

**Kate Toth:** I think the key question here is why? Why do some equity-seeking groups report greater harm? And so, one of the things that I find most valuable about data is when it leads us to ask better questions, the questions that really matter. And talking to groups that experience greater impact is the first step to deeply understanding those experiences. And then we can co-create solutions that actually help and support.

**Mary Barroll:** The challenges of economic hardship, food insecurity, low wages, funding uncertainty, online and on the job harassment and harms -- all of these experiences lead inevitably to burnout – a seemingly chronic condition for many nonprofit workers. Couple that with increasing demands on nonprofits and decreasing funding, this should hardly be surprising. But the recent data is stark and worse than many thought.

The Changemaker Wellbeing Index indicates that 34% of nonprofit workers feel burned out or exhausted often or always, and 70% feel burned out and exhausted at least some of the time. Women, food insecure workers and those considering quitting are all substantially more likely to report frequent burnout. And burnout is highest among service roles, at 42% and lowest in executive or management roles, at 33%.

When you scale that up to the 2.5 million Canadians in the sector, this means that roughly 850,000 nonprofit employees experience burnout regularly, often or always, which is an enormous segment of our workforce just struggling to stay afloat. An even greater 1.75 million nonprofit workers feel burned out and exhausted some of the time. What's going on here? Anouk Bertner shares her insights.

**Anouk Bertner:** I think burnout occurs in a lot of different ways. And I think it's an issue far beyond the nonprofit sector. I think there are a lot of folks who are struggling with this. And I think there are parts of this that are happening at work, and they have to do with wellbeing and being able to take care of yourself. But the world is a hard place to be in right now. We have the existential threat of climate change, and now we have an additional existential threat of a neighbor who is trying to annex us and bring us under their authoritarian regime. So, it's really hard to just read the news and participate in community and not feel that. So, I sort of think of the James Bond scene, where all of the walls are coming in.

**Music:** Burned Out by Jordan Rabjohn  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKg9OZivyGo>

"I'm so burned out / my head's a mess / I'm breaking down / I can't remember what it feels like to be alright / I need someone to come and fix my brain"

**Mary Barroll:** Akela Peoples outlines some of the underlying structural factors that contribute to poor worker wellbeing and burnout.

**Akela Peoples:** I think lower pay and job security, no surprise, is a big issue. And this is a challenge across this whole sector. Resources are always difficult to find and that shows up in terms of income. Emotional burnout is something, I think, we need to be careful about and mindful of. Workers in this sector can be very emotionally invested in their work. And it's sometimes hard to leave work at work and come home without the emotions attached to your work.

**Mary Barroll:** On a positive note, the report shows that 93% of nonprofit workers in the sector feel their work has a meaningful impact. So, how do we reconcile this element of job satisfaction and emotional commitment with the burnout and the financial strain that also shows up in the report? Here are Anouk Bertner's thoughts.

**Anouk Bertner:** This is really about the passion that people bring to their work. They know that their work is important because they see how it is affecting the community and how essential it is. But at the end of the day, they need to pay their bills. They need to know that they have housing security. They need to know that they can purchase food. And these are really basic things, but also just all the discretionary things that make life worth living and a little bit more lovely. I think it's not about one or the other. It's really about exploring that tension. I think what we're seeing is that people are at the breaking point. So, they're being forced into making these choices about thinking about leaving because they can't afford it.

**Mary18:** The data showing the dichotomy of nonprofit workers being highly engaged and extremely burned out is reiterated in research report after research report. The YMCA Workwell's 2024 Insights to Impact Report showed that 76% of nonprofit employees were engaged, but 58% still reported experiencing burnout. Kate Toth tries to explain this seeming contradiction.

**Kate Toth:** You can be highly engaged and still burned out. So, in nonprofit spaces, particularly, we attract people who care deeply about the work. In fact, the typical pattern that we see in our data is high engagement scores and then lower organizational culture and wellbeing scores. So, these are areas that we need to support as nonprofits in Canada. Our people care, they are aligned with the values, but they need to be having a better day-to-day experience at work.

So, we know that work can support and protect our wellbeing or conversely, it can harm us. What kind of workplace are we creating in our nonprofit sector in Canada? So many nonprofit employees find a strong sense of purpose in our work, but do we have that sort of purpose portfolio approach, where we have that strong sense of purpose outside our workplaces as well? How do we set boundaries? How do we find purpose in areas beyond the work? Because the work can be all-consuming, especially in some sectors where we know that the care that we provide, we can't meet the needs of enough people. It's very high levels of care. Whether they have support or don't have support strongly impacts their wellbeing. If we think about shelter and crisis services, for example, developmental services, etc. So, we need to really have time to rest and recharge, to come back stronger. And part of that is the culture that we create and the practices that we normalize, inside those workplaces. And if we link this conversation back to retention, we know that nonprofits are challenged in competing with other sectors when it comes to compensation and total reward strategies. That makes it all the more important to work extra hard to ensure that the experience of work is outstanding. Otherwise, why would people stay?

So, this paradox tells us that love for the mission isn't enough. We need to protect the energy that employees bring to their work, with better systems of care inside our organizations, and then more broadly in the sector with policy work, etc.

## **SFX: News buzz**

### **News clip**

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/356234577167257>

“80% of frontline workers face some form of incivility in 2023. And that's translated into anger. 40% of the global adult workforce is mad at work. Now, I'm not a psychologist, but I can't imagine it's good when half of the adults are angry at their job, and that number has doubled from before Covid.”

### **News clip**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xfCHWJu8Zw>

“Nathalie Spadafora interviewed students and teachers in Ontario. 42% of teachers surveyed reported instances of classroom incivility happening daily, compared to only 6% before the pandemic. In Quebec, a French teachers union surveyed around 7,000 of its members. 83% said they believe that rudeness has increased over the last two years. “We're noticing um an increase in disruptive behaviors, disrespectful manners and lack of consideration.”” (1:00)

### News clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyzzijqVFuY>

“People who attack others are suffering from mental health issues. They may be attracted to negative social media streams. And this can lead some to believe the world is destabilized which can steal their hope for a better future. “People are getting knifed over accidentally bumping into somebody else or telling teenagers to stop being brats, throwing stuff around. That’s a very bad sign in a society. Concerns about the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the rising cost of living have affected the public’s mental health.”

**Mary Barroll:** According to the YMCA Workwell’s 2024 Insights to Impact report, one of the important factors leading to burnout is that frontline workers are often strongly impacted by negative client interactions or what is referred to as client incivility. Kate Toth explains the data on this phenomenon.

**Kate Toth:** Our Workwell data shows a clear urgent link between client incivility and burnout. And burnout is a very strong predictor of turnover. So, when our employees are deeply affected by negative client interactions, they’re nearly four times more likely to report frequent burnout.

And so, when we look at organizations with higher insights scores. So, we at Workwell measure organizational culture, employee engagement, employee wellbeing and performance and higher scores across those drivers, we find that those individuals report less incivility, if we have those high organizational culture scores. When you have those higher insight scores, it’s associated with lower rates of burnout. Only 4% of people in those cultures are reporting experiencing burnout often or extremely often. Lower turnover intentions, where we have 97% of people who still expect to be working at their organizations in six months’ time.

And we see the opposite is also true. So, where we have lower insight scores, demonstrating a less healthy culture, lower employee wellbeing, we see really high burnout scores. So, 66% of people in those cultures are reporting that they’re experiencing burnout often or extremely often. Turnover intentions are super high. Only 36% of people expect to still be working at their organization in six months.

**Mary Barroll:** Kate Toth elaborates on what exactly incivility might look and feel like.

**Kate Toth:** It can be everything from rude behavior to disrespectful comments. We're not talking about violence here, at this level, right? Although there's a continuum that leads in that direction potentially. It's just somebody maybe raising a voice or using impolite language with you.

And what's really interesting in this is when we think about frontline workers, particularly those who usually face that type of behavior first, there's a little bit of frustration or a power dynamic that shows up in that. I was talking with a senior leadership team at a nonprofit a couple of months ago, and they were saying it's really hard for our staff because they do everything right. They follow the policy. They communicate it clearly and respectfully. They're kind. They're polite. They're trying to find a solution and they're still faced with a very angry individual who calms right down when the leader tells them exactly the same thing. And so that level of frustration that can be felt, in that, is difficult to shake off.

**Mary Barroll:** Kate Toth explains that rude and disrespectful behaviour is on the rise, in general, and not just in the nonprofit sector.

**Kate Toth (09:33.669)**

I think we're seeing this at a societal level. If we think about pre-pandemic through the pandemic. I don't know about you, but I saw and experienced a level of polarization and then a change in behavior, in terms of what seemed to be acceptable, out in the world. So, we're talking about the general public here. And while it would be nice to think that we could just say to everyone, just be a little bit more kind, please, that isn't a practical solution. So, inside our organizations, we're dealing with a societal problem. And we have a duty, as employers, to provide a safe and healthy workplace for our employees. And that means dealing with these kinds of situations and hopefully it's stopping them or preventing them at all, but where that isn't possible or practical, how do we support them in dealing with the interaction itself? And then, in that post-incident recovery piece that I think is so important.

**Mary Barroll:** The report finding that stood out was that 83% of childcare workers report that client incivility affects their wellbeing. That's a huge number. Kate Toth comments on the particular challenges of these workers.

**Kate Toth:** We did a national survey in the nonprofit space just to try to get a sense of how high these numbers were. And what we found was startling, shocking, I think. In our Workwell data, we found that 75% of nonprofit workers say negative client interactions impact their personal wellbeing. And that number jumps to 83% among childcare workers.

So, just a tremendous impact on people. And that's talking about frontline staff, but it's important to know that it's not just a frontline problem. When we talk to people of all levels, inside the organization, they're reporting similar things. And it's hard to show up to work every day when we're worried about what kind of behaviour we might face from

the people that we serve in our communities.

**Mary Baroll:** Kate Toth says the data shows there are major benefits from providing a safe and supportive workplace, beyond improving recruitment and retention for the organization, and work experience for the employee – the product of workers' labour also improves, creating ripple effects into the communities they serve. There is a definite connection between a positive employee experience and client satisfaction. Kate Toth explains how improving staff wellbeing can actually benefit the people being served.

**Kate Toth:** There's that really strong link between how employees experience work and how our customers experience our services. You can't really separate the two. So, when staff feel burned out or disrespected, it shows in how they show up for their clients.

And investing in staff wellbeing is investing in service quality because humans serve humans. So, it's because feeling valued is contagious and it shapes how people show up: more energized, more invested, more connected and customers notice that they feel in the service, in the tone, in the follow-up. And so, when we have healthier teams, we have better retention, which leads to more consistency for clients. And then, staff who feel healthy, supported well, they're able to better emotionally regulate. Right. And so, they handle crises with greater skill and compassion.

And then people who feel supported, in dealing with the aftermath of a negative incident, are better able to let that incident go. And so, we can create a virtuous cycle where we care for our employees, they care for our customers, and we go around, or we can create a vicious cycle where the opposite is true.

**Mary Barroll:** What strategies can organizations implement in order to reduce harm and build resilience for their workers on the front lines, particularly in emotionally demanding environments? Kate Toth recommends the following.

**Kate Toth:** I think there needs to be a three-pronged approach to dealing with this societal problem of incivility. So, the first is working to eliminate it altogether.

So, what do we do when someone is disrespectful, rude or uncivil? Do we lean into that old, the customer is always right mantra? Or do we reinforce that that behavior is not tolerated here? How do we work to eliminate this altogether, where we show up and deal with each other every day with kindness?

Next, it's about training everyone in the organization on conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques, right? Give them the very practical skills that they need to remain calm and to diffuse a situation before it becomes really out of control. And then the last piece is supporting people in that post-incident recovery. I think we forget about that piece sometimes. So, to have practices in place for this. From a peer hotline, to a stress recovery area in the building, to leaders trained to support with empathy and support, in

the aftermath.

**Mary Barroll:** As organizations, already strapped for time and resources, search for ways to prioritize caring better for their employees, Anouk Bertner emphasizes that in this dizzying period of political and economic volatility, it's important to focus on what changes we can affect.

**Anouk Bertner:** I think what we need to do as change makers is figure out, what are the levers that we can control? We can work on climate change, but we can't fix it immediately. We can work on this issue with the U.S., but none of us, individually, can fix it. So, what are the parts that we can change? And I think a lot of that comes down to the local level. And this is one of the things that I absolutely love about community nonprofits and anybody who works hyper locally is that you can control what is happening in your community. You can control how you treat your employees, how you treat your volunteers and how you create that space. So, I think that is within the locus of our control.

**Mary Barroll:** Nonprofit leaders have a crucial role to play in creating a culture of care within their workplaces. I asked each of our guests to suggest strategies that organizations can implement to increase worker wellbeing. Here's some advice from Akela Peoples.

**Akela Peoples:** I could mention a couple of initiatives that we've started at Mental Health Research Canada as an example. When the workplace opened up again, we stayed hybrid because my employees said they loved not being in traffic. They loved being able to better manage and integrate their personal lives and family lives with work. And so, this is something I've been watching every six months. Just two weeks ago, I decided to close our office full-time. So, we are gonna be 100% remote and our employees are very, very happy about that.

We've also implemented a flexible day where employees are able to start and end at different times. Some start at 7 a.m. and end at 3. Others 8 to 4, others 9 to 5, just depending on when they bring their best self to their desk and what works best for them and their families. The hybrid and remote working, of course, that doesn't work for everybody, but for some organizations, perhaps a hybrid model would work.

We also have a work from afar policy too, where I've had a number of employees had to go see family or attend family functions or take care of relatives. They can work from afar for a certain period of time. We also have time off without pay, with no worry of your job disappearing. And, first of its kind in Canada, as far as I know in the charitable sector, we implemented a three-week paid sabbatical, we call it, after every five years of service. And we felt that was a great way, every five years, to reward our team for excellent work and commitment and contribution. And lastly, on occasion, I give bonus days off. Some of these are easy things to do that can really support wellness in the workforce, help employees feel appreciated and rewarded for good work. So, I think leaders can be creative.

**Mary Barroll:** Anne-Marie Newton describes best practices that nonprofit organizations can adopt to support the mental health of their teams, especially in these high stress community facing roles.

**Anne-Marie Newton:** One of the stressors in nonprofit can certainly be that systems and processes aren't always the best and we don't have private sector resources. So, something as easy as producing a financial report can actually be pretty manual and not terribly automated. Anything we can do, I think, to reduce friction or pain points in people's work, hopefully drives to better outcomes in terms of their mental health and feeling like they're focusing on the work that's meaningful and interesting and engaging. But I also think, there is a real culture and leadership opportunity and responsibility for organizations to address and think through what are the conditions we need to create in our workplace so that people are happy, healthy, engaged, and feeling good.

Part of that for me really is just setting clear expectations. I think when there's a lot of mystery around where people stand or how they're doing and what we're all driving toward, that can create a tremendous amount of anxiety that leads to a lot of stress. I think when people are very clear on what our collective vision is, what your performance expectations are, and just being very consistent and transparent about how things are going, really important.

**Mary Barroll:** Akela Peoples also shares information about some important resources available to help support wellness initiatives in the workplace.

**Akela Peoples:** The nonprofit sector is always challenged in terms of financial resources, but there's a great nonprofit organization called Workplace Strategies for Mental Health, and they have a vast array of only free resources on that website. And they're all accredited, evidence-based resources that any leader in any nonprofit or charity can go on there. Workplace strategies for mental health, they have all kinds of resources, easily downloadable, with next to no resources, the next day you can be implementing some strategies that can support your employees' mental health and wellbeing. Also Opening Minds, if a particular charity or nonprofit has some resources to spend on this. They are an organization that was created by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, and they've trained millions of people in workforces across the country on things like Mental Health First Aid and The Working Mind, which are accredited programs. So, two options there, free resources, and resources if you have some financial support to be able to put towards mental health and well-being.

**Mary Barroll:** Anne-Marie Newton also has a few resources to share.

**Anne-Marie Newton:** We have a toolkit for workplace mental health available, on our website, that was actually developed pre-pandemic but has endured throughout there and is really helpful in just thinking broadly around how you create a healthy workplace for your employees. We also have a website called camh.ca.

And if anyone needs specific targeted services, there's a phone number you can call. We call it Access CAMH, and that's a really great resource. And then we also have, for anyone who is a caregiver or someone who has someone they're worried about, a conversation guide, on our website, about how to address mental illness and mental health with someone you're worried about. And that is really helpful and extremely practical. You can print it out.

**Mary Barroll:** In addition to mindfully creating a culture of workplace wellbeing, there's another simple but powerful change that organisations can make to help their workers feel better. Simply to take the time to properly recognize their employees. Here's how Kate Toth puts it.

**Kate Toth:** Recognition isn't fluff. It's a buffer against burnout. Yet, only half of nonprofit employees feel appropriately recognized. So, recognition is about feeling like you matter, that you are seen, heard and valued for who you are inside the organization, not just what you do. No one wants to feel like they are just a cog in a wheel, easily overlooked, easily replaceable.

So, when dealing with client incivility becomes just part of what we need to do around here, or the implicit message is just suck it up when it happens, that emotional harm goes unacknowledged and it compounds. We know that there is a difference between recognition and appreciation in the workplace and both are important. And so, when you think about recognition, it's often, top-down, an organizational program that looks at what people do and rewards that behaviour inside an organization. And in our current state, often it's a one size fits all. So, we do staff appreciation days, we might do a summer barbecue, there's swag that everyone gets. We've kind of leaned into that space around recognition. But the appreciation happens in the smaller moments between people.

**Mary Barroll:** Just as nonprofit organizations need to invest more into their employee wellbeing, individuals working in the nonprofit sector also need to take their mental and physical health seriously. Akela Peoples describes some beneficial habits to think of integrating into your daily routine.

**Akela Peoples:** Simple activities like being outside, fresh air, taking a walk, know, experiencing nature. If you're an animal lover, be around animals. All of these things can have positive impacts on your mental health and wellness.

Our research also shows that engaging socially, that if people have good social supports and social networks and they spend time with family and good friends, this can really support their mental wellbeing as well. And being part of any community. So, whether you're a member of your church or you join the local community baseball team or your neighborhood network or whatever it is, that's also a good strategy.

I do want to underscore being mindful of and decreasing, if you can, your social screen time, not your work-related screen time because we can't do much about that. And

actually, that does not correlate towards poor mental health, but high social screen time, and we're seeing this especially in the youth demographic, really correlates towards poor mental health.

Lastly, I'd like to say consciously make it a priority, especially sitting at home, you're working remotely. Make sure you take a break, get up and walk around, go outside, just for a breath of fresh air. If you're consciously focused on, every day, supporting your mental health and wellness, get into those good habits that will become part of your daily routine, and you will end up coming to work being more refreshed each day.

**Mary Barroll:** Akela Peoples makes the point that we all would benefit from, not only prioritizing our own mental wellbeing, but also in becoming more mental health literate.

**Akela Peoples:** We need to increase mental health literacy in this country. And if we can increase our literacy and our personal knowledge around how to differentiate between normal life or job stress, and stress that is getting in the way of our ability to function, either in our life or our job.

The latter is where we need to start to think about getting some help and support because many people wait far too long. We all talk about going to the gym, we're going to a yoga class, but we don't talk about our mental health in the same way. We've no trouble talking about our physical health, but we all must commit to working on our mental health and being conscious of our mental health. So, I think committing to decreasing stigma, and that means bringing mental health into conversations around your dinner table, in your network with your friends, in workplaces, make it okay to talk about it. Let's realize this is a part of our overall health, our mental health is. So, let's talk about it more.

**Mary Barroll:** We certainly hope that this focussed talk about mental health and wellbeing has provided some nourishing food for thought to help nonprofit workers build their own resilience and nonprofit leaders build safer, healthier, workplaces and work cultures. This brings us to the end of our episode about how Canadian nonprofit workers, especially those serving on the frontlines, are coping with the challenging times we find ourselves in. Here are some final words of advice from our guests.

**Anne-Marie Newton:** For me, a huge piece of my workplace mental health is really just knowing where I stand and what's expected of me. So, I try to translate that out to my team. And then of course, there are all of the efforts we make around inclusion and belonging and psychological safety and really modeling authentic leadership and opening the door for other people to be authentic as well, coupled with the regular supports of mental health benefits, EAP programs, peer support, those kinds of things. So, it's not one thing, it's obviously a multifactorial equation.

**Kate Toth:** I think the number one support strategy is around co-creating that supportive workplace culture, a place where you have high psychological safety, trust and community. And so, when those things are in place, you have the support around

you, people you can rely on. Those are huge protective factors. Beyond that, training our leaders to have the skills to provide that human-centered, empathetic care, creating policies that empower staff to set boundaries and the skills to deescalate conflict or negative incidents safely and successfully, and then support programs around people to support them in that post-incident recovery piece. So, a culture where we can talk about our experiences and recover together.

**Akela Peoples:** The fact that we're talking about mental health more and more gives me a lot of hope. It's a big step in the right direction. If you think about a theory of change, you first have to change individuals. And then because organizations are made up of individuals, then slowly organizations are gonna start to change. And then the longer game is systems are made up of organizations. And as organizations start to change, the whole system will start to change.

**Anouk Bertner:** I think the first thing is having the conversation. I think without data, we have our own experiences, and we have anecdotal evidence. And I think those are very powerful, but they don't help us understand how big a problem something is. So, the full scope of it. And then they also don't indicate which interventions could be effective. And then, over time is the problem bettering or worsening. And that's what I'm most excited about, because I've worked in the nonprofit sector for over 20 years. And I feel like anecdotally, I knew a lot of these things. There's very little in this data that is surprising to me. But I am just thrilled to have this tool to be able to use it. I think it's great for nonprofits individually because I think it validates their experience and it says, this isn't just you. It's not just because you're not running your organization properly or you lost a funder, or your board's not as effective as it should be. This is across Canada, this is happening.

**Steven Ayer:** When we do have crisis, I think is the one time that, we have seen some really successful results. If you look at the pandemic itself, federal government transferred unprecedented billions of dollars to every corner of the charitable sector, in a way that they'd never done before. And certainly, it was required. At the same time, it was also the result of advocacy from a lot of different organizations working together pointing to we need everything from ensuring that the programs that are being rolled out, to businesses are also rolled out to charities. Things like the emergency community support funds or a direct flow of funds that was distributed across almost every community in this country. The crisis allowed people to really prioritize initiatives and actually get things flowing across the entire country. It is an example that when folks are aligned in the same direction and understand the magnitude of a crisis, we can get successful results.

**Mary Barroll:** We're experiencing a time of great economic uncertainty. Many Canadians are struggling with homelessness, food insecurity and mental health issues, including the very workers whose labours form the backbone of the nonprofit sector. But as our guests remind us, a crisis can bring out the best in us: It can provoke innovation, galvanize action and lead to collaboration and unity. Perhaps, more nonprofit leaders will take step to prioritize safe and healthy workplaces, inspired by the

ideas shared by our guests, and motivated to advocate for more equity, better working conditions and wages for nonprofit workers, for the benefit of the sector and the communities it serves.

### **CharityVillage theme music**

Thank you to all our guests for their keen insight and wise advice. Be sure to visit our website and our show notes for more information on the resources, reports and programs mentioned in this episode. If you'd like to hear more of what our guests have to say, check out our full video interviews on our website. CharityVillage is proud to be the Canadian source for nonprofit news, employment services, crowdfunding, e-learning, HR resources and tools, and so much more. Please take a moment to check out our website at [charityvillage.com](http://charityvillage.com).

In the next episode of CharityVillage Connects, we'll explore how nonprofits across Canada are beginning to harness the power of artificial intelligence to advance their missions. Through real-world case studies and conversations with sector leaders, we'll spotlight tangible examples of how AI is being used today, from streamlining operations and enhancing donor engagement to improving service delivery. Whether you're just starting to explore AI or looking to deepen your organization's capabilities, this episode will offer practical insights and inspiration to help you navigate this fast-evolving landscape. I'm Mary Barroll. Thanks for listening.