



OMBUD for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being

ALL TOGETHER:

2019–2020 Annual Report to the Deputy
Ministers from the Office of the Ombud for
Mental Health and Employee Well-Being

The Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being



Office of the Ombud
for Mental Health and
Employee Well-Being

We are:

A passionate team of informal conflict management and harassment prevention professionals who provide an accessible, safe space for ISED employees to address difficulties in the workplace. As part of our team, we also have dedicated employees supporting the programming of the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace.



Canadian Innovation
Centre for Mental Health
in the Workplace

Our Principles:

- Confidentiality
- Independence
- Impartiality
- Informality



Conflict Prevention and
Early Resolution

Our Mission:

We strive to create a healthy, positive and productive work environment for all ISED employees, at all levels within the organization and from every part of Canada, and to share our best practices in mental health and employee well-being throughout the federal public service.

Our Vision:

A federal public service that embraces authentic, open and stigma-free dialogue on mental health issues based on compassion.

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A Message from the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being

“All together, in work as we are in life”



In this year’s Annual Report – my second since becoming Ombud for Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) in October, 2018 – I am pleased to see how the Department has responded to our findings and recommendations from fiscal year 2018-2019 and the actions taken to address them.

In this regard, I am especially pleased to see the creation of the Workplace Accommodation Centre (WAC) at ISED. Issues raised with the Ombud regarding Duty to Accommodate (DTA) situations almost doubled between the 2018-19 and 2019-20 fiscal years; it is therefore quite gratifying to see such a concrete

action taken to address this important need. Not only does this demonstrate the Department’s commitment to fostering a healthy and productive workplace in ISED offices from coast-to-coast-to-coast, it highlights the collaborative nature of the relationship between the Ombud and senior management, as well as the openness of our leaders to respond to employee-raised issues.

I am also pleased to see that efforts have been made in all Sectors to make ISED a more respectful, healthy and safe workplace and that such efforts have been collaborative, with management and employees working together to address issues and improve the working environment.

There is no doubt that events of the past year, at home in Canada and around the world, have irreversibly changed the ways in which we live and work and interact. The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on the workforce and on how we work, as well as on employees’ mental health. This crisis has added a whole new dimension to how we address both mental and physical health in the workplace and in our lives overall – neither will ever be the same again.

For me, as the Ombud for ISED, it is important that we create an environment in which we can regularly engage in open dialogue on mental health, where everyone can speak freely about their feelings, how we should eliminate the stigma around mental health, and how to take care of each other.

This year, mental health issues are compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, with people feeling lonely and isolated, stressed by the unknowns, and trying to adapt to the new working realities. We must recognize that each of us is not living this crisis in the same way. In my view, in the months to come, we will have to be alert and use our social and communications skills to provide even more psychological and social support to our colleagues, friends and families. We collectively have a huge role to play in how well we psychologically recover from this crisis. Agile organizations and perceptive managers will make the difference in the recovery phase. The more we speak about the future of work, how

we will organize that work, establish priorities, manage the workload, and promote healthy workplace best practices, the faster the recovery will be.

I personally try to avoid using the expression “new normal,” as if the working realities of the future will be “normal.” I think our messaging to our employees and colleagues should be more about “the new working realities.”

In my view, this expression is more aligned with a positive vision of the potential new opportunities for working better together, delivering more efficiently, innovating, and creating space for employees to offer their advice, expertise, vision and influence every single day of the year. We will need highly engaged employees who think outside the box and offer new ideas and perspectives. We all know that effective employee engagement rests on these important factors. Talented managers will be more like “coaches,” bringing out the best in their employees. We basically need to unleash the talent that we have around us. Finally, we need to recognize the importance of what we used to call the “open door” policy, in opening up our doors to employees seeking not only guidance and direction on their deliverables, but who are also seeking moral and psychological support when things are not going well.

At the beginning of last year’s National Mental Health Week (May, 2020), I shared part of a Q&A I had conducted with the Conference Board of Canada’s Chief Researcher, Dr. Bill Howatt, on maintaining positive mental health during this COVID-19 crisis. He stressed the importance of social connections right at the beginning. “Social connections,” he said, “are one pillar of mental health. Having a plan for how employees can stay socially connected is important for supporting mental health during and after COVID-19. Isolation and loneliness were a problem before; if this pandemic has done anything positive, it has shone a light on the importance of social connections for positive mental health.”

To me, the keys to “social connections” are talking, listening, caring, and looking after one another. We have shown, and continue to show, that “social connections” are more important now than they have ever been. When it comes down to it, we are ultimately “All Together,” in work as we are in life.



Mario Baril
Ombud for Mental Health
and Employee Well-Being

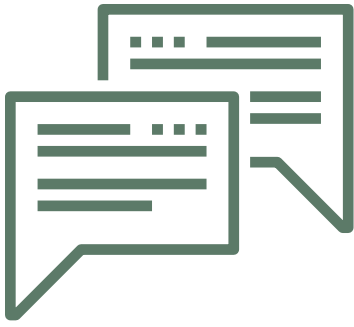
From “Ombudsman” to “Ombud”

The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being at ISED will now be known as the Office of the **Ombud** for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being.

While the term “Ombudsman” is Swedish for “representative” and is gender neutral, it has not always been interpreted as such. The term “Ombud” not only reinforces the gender neutrality of the term,

it is also a reflection of how our language evolves to keep pace with societal norms and values. In this case, it is in keeping with an international movement towards greater inclusion and diversity, as well as increased gender equality.

All references to “Ombudsman” in documents and online will be updated with “Ombud,” including our new confidential email: ombud@ised-isde.gc.ca.



2019-2020 Annual Report to the Deputy Ministers: Executive summary

An unparalleled year of change – and need for support

“The Ombud’s Office is another ISED tool for both managers and employees to access for informal advice and guidance. In my instance, they were able to offer unbiased advice on how to deal with a difficult situation, but mostly they made me feel like I was not alone in dealing with this particular matter. Very appreciated, and I would recommend them as a resource.”

**– A client of the Ombud
in 2019-2020**

Since the Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being was created at Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada (ISED) in October 2018, we have held 159 confidential consultations with ISED’s employees and managers. We have also participated in many team meetings, town halls and regional visits, during which we learned about a variety of issues and situations affecting the psychological health of our organization and our employees.

In the 2019-2020 fiscal year (FY), we conducted 119 individual confidential consultations with ISED employees. During the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic, however (March 16 to June 30), we conducted 45 such consultations – that’s five more than during our first six months of operation in the 2018-2019 fiscal year, and 11 more than in the same period the previous year.¹

The majority of confidential individual consultations held in FY 2019-2020 were with ISED employees who were seeking advice on options available to them for addressing workplace situations, as well as coaching support and some who just wanted an opportunity to be heard. Many of the clients were referred to internal services to resolve their issues, including the Ombud’s Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution (CPER) team and other sections of the Human Resources Branch, such as Harassment Prevention, Values and Ethics, and Internal Disclosure.

This past year, alleged harassment and/or bullying remained the top two issues raised by ISED employees during their individual consultations with the Ombud and Associate Ombud, followed by interpersonal work issues. The 2019 PSES results indicate that some 14% of ISED employees responded in the affirmative to having “been the victim of harassment on the job in the past

¹ This report covers the period from April 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020 in order to reflect the COVID-19 outbreak and initial lockdown.

12 months.” While that figure is the same response rate public service-wide, it represents a 2% increase over findings for ISED in the 2018 PSES. The 2019 results also indicate that those employees who used an informal conflict resolution process to address the harassment increased to 11% from 8% over the previous year. The use of this service demonstrates progress as informal conflict management mechanisms are a proactive way to solve issues early on; they reduce the risk of long and costly formal processes, such as harassment complaints.

Our findings for this year are based on issues raised during our confidential consultations throughout the year, and are linked to the 13 Psychological Factors that comprise the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. When linked to these factors, we find four main areas of vulnerability to our organization. They are:

- Civility and Respect
- Psychological and Social Support
- Organizational Culture
- Psychological Protection

Issues discussed with the Office of the Ombud related to Civility and Respect accounted for 26% of our consultations in FY 2019-2020, with 20% related to the Psychological and Social Support factor, followed by, in equal measure, issues related to Organizational Culture and Psychological Protection at 11%.

The first two factors reflect that the main issues raised were related to interpersonal conflicts between employees or between employees and their supervisors and managers, as well as issues related to a perception of harassment, which is of particular relevance to the Civility and Respect factor.

The third factor, Organizational Culture, indicates evidence of a workplace culture that is not aligned with the Public Service values, or the values of the Department. Such situations could be specific to individual work units or within a directorate. In addition, issues raised also related to a lack of transparency in applying staffing rules, or potential conflicts of interest, which the client did not know how to address, or they wanted to disclose the case to the Ombud. We recommend that employees re-visit both the [Values and Ethics Code for the Public Service](#) and the [ISED departmental Values and Ethics Code](#).

With respect to Psychological Protection, it appears that some clients did not feel free to express their opinions, ask questions, seek feedback or share ideas out of concern for being labelled troublesome, or left out of the group. This shows us that the emotional well-being of employees has not been taken into consideration in a way that takes all the necessary steps to minimize their mental health risks. When psychological safety exists within a team, better team spirit, greater commitment and improved work performance can be observed.



Findings resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic

During the first three months of the coronavirus pandemic, from March 16 to June 30, the Ombud's Office experienced an increase of 32% of employees and managers reaching out for confidential services over the same period last year (2019).

One thing came across loud and clear during these conversations: employees were not only distressed by the workplace issues they were already facing, but these issues were compounded by some level of anxiety and distress related to the COVID-19 crisis.

Adapting to the new ways of working was of key concern to many ISED employees. Spending the day working entirely from home, with some employees caring for children and elderly family members at the same time, increasing use of email as a means to communicate with managers, colleagues and clients, and learning to use new or unfamiliar technologies, are just a number of issues that affected ISED employees during this period. Many managers found themselves having to modify their management style as well, impacting not only their own work (and their self-awareness), but also their relationships and interactions with some of their employees. It is no wonder, then, that we saw an increase throughout this period in the need to identify and address mental health issues.

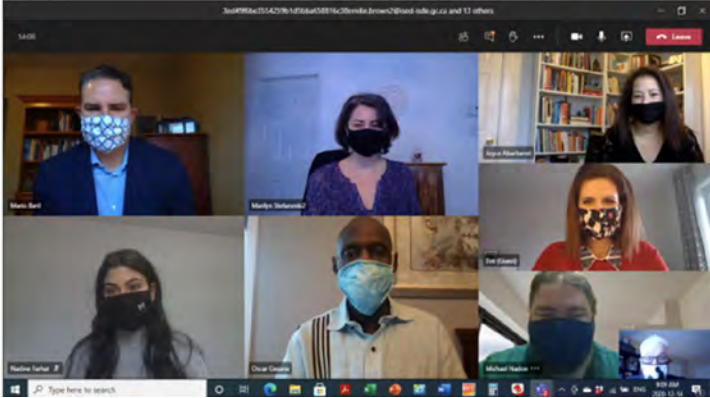
According to Health Canada, the number of ISED employees and their family members who contacted EAP during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, decreased slightly from 5.8% (334 users in 2019) to 4.8% (296 users in 2020) over the same period the previous year. As stated above, however, there has been an increase of 32% of ISED employees reaching out directly to the Ombud on work-related issues. The top three reasons why ISED users called Employee Assistance Program (EAP) relate to "psychological health" (26%), "anxiety" (18%) and "family-couple" (13%). Anxiety replaced "work-related issues" as one of the top three reasons in 2020 compared with 2019. The figures also show a slight increase in the use of EAP by women in 2020 (67.3% vs 66.2%) and a slight decrease in use by men (32.7% vs 33.8%).

The COVID-19 pandemic forced ISED and most of the Government of Canada to make drastic and sudden changes to our work environment and in so doing,

created a new set of work challenges. We shifted to a virtual working environment, which caused us to radically alter our traditional ways of working and interacting with our colleagues and stakeholders. By the end of June 2020, some 98% of ISED employees were working from home.

Despite the challenges that COVID-19 presented, ISED employees rapidly adjusted to the new work environment, demonstrating their agility while continuing to be purpose-driven, committed and focused.

2019-2020: The year in pictures



2019-2020: The year in numbers



119

of consultations
with the Ombud:

10,000+



of public servants participating
in events via the Canadian Innovation Centre
for Mental Health in the Workplace:



730

of employees addressed
by the Ombud:

ATLANTIC Region: 68
(September 2019)

WESTERN Region: 77
(October-November 2019)

PRAIRIES Region: 58
(November 2019)



QUEBEC Region: 183
(February 2020)

PACIFIC Region: 101
(February 2020)

ONTARIO Region: 67
(March 2020)

Regional visits made by the Ombud and employees addressed / met:

How we're helping: Our purpose, programs and services

Applying “The Fairness Triangle” in our consultation process²

ISED employees and managers who are struggling with a workplace issue want to ensure that their situation is addressed fairly. During confidential consultations with clients, the Ombud explores the workplace situation through “substantive, procedural and relational” lenses in order to help guide the discussion and provide helpful options. These lenses make up what is known as “The Fairness Triangle.”

But what does that mean? What is “fairness” anyway?

Fairness is not always easy to explain, and it does not always mean that everyone gets the exact same thing. There are many situations, relationships and events that come into play. Sometimes, generally accepted principles of fairness will apply; sometimes the law will apply. Although there is no single answer, there are some basic principles and practices, which the ISED Ombud applies, that can help to describe fairness.

Substantive fairness

What was decided?

- What was the basis of the decision taken by the other party and which is affecting the Ombud's client?
- Was the decision based on relevant information?
- Does the client perceive the decision to be biased or unfair and, if so, for what reason(s)?

Procedural fairness

How was it decided?

- Was the client given sufficient information to know what they were required to do?
- Was the client given an appropriate forum to present their views?
- Did the other party take the time to listen to the client?
- Did the other party provide reasons for their decision(s)?
- Does the client feel that the decision-maker was impartial?
- Was the explanation delivered within a reasonable timeframe?

Relational fairness

How was the client treated?

- Has there been a turning point in the client's relationship with the other party?
- Did the client try to establish communications with the other party?
- Was the other party open to a discussion?
- What has been attempted so far to solidify the relationship?
- Was an apology offered if a mistake was made?



A transparent, accessible and impartial process – because building a fair environment is building a healthy, safe and inclusive environment.

² The “Fairness Triangle” was developed from the concept of the “Satisfaction Triangle” in: Moore, Christopher (2003). *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict* (3rd edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

What the Ombud does and does not do

How we can help you

What is the mandate of the Ombud at ISED?

The Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being at ISED is a designated independent official whose mandate is to provide a safe space for all ISED employees to discuss workplace issues in a confidential manner, and to explore options to resolve them through an informal mechanism, without any fear of reprisal.

Why should I contact the ISED Ombud and what should be expected?

You may choose to consult the Ombud at any time in order to bring your concerns forward safely and effectively before considering formal complaints mechanisms. The Ombud offers this safe space to explore options in addressing issues in the workplace, including harassment. Even if you have consulted the ISED Intranet in order to learn about the range of (formal and informal) options available to address your issues, you may still want to consult the Ombud to help you navigate these options. Employees are encouraged to consult early on when an issue arises in order to increase the possibility of an outcome that will respond to their needs.

How confidential is a consultation with the Ombud?

The Ombud holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and takes all possible steps to safeguard confidentiality, including the

following: the Ombud does not reveal, and must not be required to reveal the identity of any individual contacting the Ombud's Office; nor does the Ombud reveal information provided in confidence that could lead to the identification of any individual contacting the Office, without that individual's express permission. The Ombud takes specific action related to an individual's issue only with the individual's express permission and only to the extent permitted; and, in some situations, at the sole discretion of the Ombud.

“I have had several meetings with the Ombud and the Associate Ombud so far. I was impressed with the analysis and depth of thought they gave to what I am going through. I was impressed by their availability and extraordinary listening, by the advice provided. They explained very well to me the path to take to succeed in solving the problem I was experiencing, and that was very reassuring, making all the difference for me. The Ombud and his mandate are essential to our organization to ensure a healthy work environment, marked by respect, free from intimidation and harassment. I recommend without hesitation to all those who feel helpless in the face of the difficulties of their professional life to call on this service, and this, in all confidence.”

– A client of the Ombud in 2019-2020

The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) is the umbrella professional association for organizational ombuds, which, in addition to supporting the Ombud function within institutions, provides training and establishes standards of practice. The ISED Ombud adheres to the professional standards set by the IOA governing the principles of confidentiality, independence, informality and impartiality:

- **Confidentiality:** The Ombud holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and takes all reasonable steps to safeguard confidentiality. The Ombud may take specific action related to an individual's issue only with the individual's express permission and only to the extent permitted.
- **Independence:** The Ombud is a designated "neutral party" reporting to the Deputy Minister and is independent from the organizational reporting structure.
- **Informality:** The Ombud does not make binding decisions or formally adjudicate issues for the organization. The Ombud does not replace any formal channels. The use of the Ombud's Office is voluntary and is not a required step in any process. The Ombud helps people develop new ways to solve problems themselves.
- **Impartiality:** The Ombud strives for impartiality, fairness and objectivity in the treatment of people and the consideration of issues. The Ombud advocates for fair and equitable processes.

What does the Ombud NOT do?

While the Ombud empowers individuals and organizations to overcome disputes, conflicts and barriers that stand in the way of reaching their full potential, there are a few things that the Ombud at ISED does not do, such as:

- Receiving notice of claims against an organization
- Conducting investigations
- Making management decisions or policy
- Advocating or taking sides
- Substituting for formal channels
- Testifying or producing documents in legal or other proceedings

The Ombud consultation process

Here's how we work

The client reaches out to Office of the Ombud through the confidential Ombud email address to schedule an appointment to discuss any workplace issue they may have

The Ombud and/or Associate Ombud meets with the client and will:

1. Explain the mandate of the Ombud
2. Explain the Standards of Practice : “informality, confidentiality, impartiality, independence”

Client communicates their objective and what they expect prior to explaining their situation. The Ombud evaluates if the mandate can meet the client's expectations.

The Ombud service is an informal mechanism. If the person is already part of a formal process that is underway, the Ombud cannot be used for the same issue, at the same time.

If the client needs assistance in using available mechanisms...

- We help identify main issues and the client's objectives
- We clarify next steps and guide the client to various mechanisms (formal or informal) as needed
- We clarify rights and responsibilities
- We explain policies, regulations and procedures
- We offer communication and conflict resolution tools

Ombud and/or Associate Ombud provide options, information and referral to resources, in order for the client to be successful in resolving the issue.

If the client is not successful in using the mechanisms chosen or needs help in using them.

Client takes action based on options discussed.

Ombud and/or Associate Ombud can take action in the following ways (at their sole discretion and with the client's consent).

Possible interventions:

- Referring the client to the Informal Conflict Management System (coaching, mediation, etc.)
- Liaising with any ISED Human Resources services
- Discussing the situation with Senior Management (at the Ombud's sole discretion and only with client's consent).
- Offering facilitated conversations

Meet your Ombud team: Oscar Gasana

Conflict resolution – His Life Mission



BY GARY WARNOCK, OFFICE OF THE OMBUD AT ISED

When I asked ISED employee Oscar Gasana what it was that attracted him to work as a conflict resolution practitioner, I did not expect the answer he gave me: “My life history as a Tutsi genocide survivor.”

Born into the Tutsi ethnic group in Rwanda, Oscar spent most of the 60s and 70s living his childhood in exile in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. Until he came to Canada in 1995, he studied and worked in Europe, Ethiopia and Libya, where he worked for the United Nations. His chosen field was socio-economics. That all changed in the mid-90s during what has become known as the “Rwandan Genocide,” during which time, more than one million of Oscar’s Tutsi people were systematically and brutally massacred.

“With the exception of my brother, my entire family and extended family – and those of my wife – were wiped out,” he says. “They were butchered.”

The experience left Oscar “completely devastated;” he could not work for some six months, fell into a “deep, deep depression” based on, he says, “a loss of faith in human beings;” he did not know what to do. “There was no life in me,” he says of that time.

He came to realize that he needed to get as far away from Africa as he could; he could no longer see integrating life on the continent. Oscar decided on Canada as the place to begin his new life and moved with his wife and family to Montreal. Apart from the fact that Quebec was French-speaking like Rwanda (a former Belgian colony), Canada, he says, “has different positive attitudes towards race.”

His experience volunteering in schools in Montreal, where he played with kids, confirmed his views of Canada. “Those kids didn’t look at me as a black man,” he says, “just as a person who wanted to play with them.”

“In Africa, there is a belief that the dead are not dead; they have changed the form of their existence. They look at you, a survivor, and they look at what you have done with your survival – if you do good, they feel happy and proud; if you do not, they feel ashamed.”

– Oscar Gasana

Furthermore, Oscar believes that Canadian Major-General Roméo Dallaire, who headed the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), was “one of the heroes, if not the hero, of that genocide. Thanks to God he was there.” Dallaire warned the UN of the impending plans by the Rwandan government to conduct the genocide but his request to act on the information was denied; his 2,500-person military contingent was subsequently withdrawn from Rwanda but Dallaire remained behind with others to attempt to protect the Tutsi people.

Oscar is confident that coming to Canada was the right decision.

His experiences had raised what he calls “existential questions.” So, to try and discover their answers, he began taking courses in theology at the Dominican pastoral college in Montreal. “Meeting people who were interested in listening to my pain and showing interest in what I went through – this was the best cure I could have imagined for me,” he says. “It transformed me.”

As fate would have it, his wife got a job with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in Ottawa and so the family relocated to Gatineau, Quebec. It was at St. Paul University in Ottawa while working to complete a degree in theology that Oscar met Dr. Vern Redekop, a professor in conflict studies, who would go on to become his PhD supervisor and mentor. Oscar completed his Master’s in Conflict Studies and a further PhD in Applied Social Sciences. His field of research: understanding genocide and resistance to it.

Oscar says that working in conflict resolution was the only activity that could give meaning to his life as a survivor of genocide.

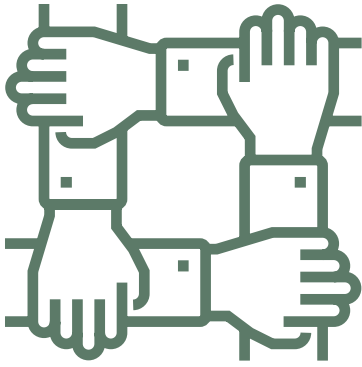
“In Africa, there is a belief,” he says, “that the dead are not dead; they have changed the form of their existence. They look at you, a survivor, and they look at what you have done with your survival – if you do good, they feel happy and proud; if you do not, they feel ashamed.”

But Oscar also warns that Canadians should not be complacent nor take for granted our value of human rights and freedoms; we should not be fearful of teaching our children that human life is sacred. “The fact that the genocide took place in Rwanda does not mean that Rwandans are evil or that we are inherently violent or criminal – we are no different from other people. What happened there has happened before and can happen again elsewhere – even in Canada.”

The other question I asked Oscar was: “What makes you happy in your work?” After hearing about his life, his answer to this question did not surprise me. He said: “Watching parties to a conflict embrace and share a cup of tea after months, and sometimes years, without talking to each other.”

Oscar Gasana is a Senior Conflict Management Practitioner with the Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution (CPER) team, part of the Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being at ISED. You can reach him via email at oscar.gasana@canada.ca.

Gary Warnock is Director of Communications for the Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being at ISED. You can reach him via email at gary.warnock@canada.ca.



A healthy and productive workplace

What does it look like?

Since the Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being was created at ISED in October 2018, we have held 159 confidential consultations with ISED's employees and managers. We have also participated in many team meetings, town halls and regional visits, during which we learned about a variety of issues and situations affecting the psychological health of the organization and the employees.

The issues reported from our consultations in FY 2019-2020 are as follows (in order of frequency of reporting):

1. Alleged harassment and/or bullying
2. Interpersonal and/or work issues
3. Conflict of interest and/or Lack of ethics
4. Management style
5. Mental health issues, performance management, and Duty to Accommodate
6. Staffing issues
7. Emotional intelligence
8. Flexible work arrangements, sexual harassment, and Phoenix (pay issues)
9. Organizational structure

These issues, individually and in various combinations, can contribute to stress in the workplace, something borne out by the findings of the 2019 Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) in which 14% of ISED employees who responded to the Survey indicated experiencing high to very high levels of work-related stress. While the number is down from the 2018 PSES findings (18%) and is less than public service findings as a whole in 2019 (16%), it remains important to track and analyze both the numbers and the issues being reported.

Our analysis from the last year has led us to develop an organizational health analysis model. Our **Workplace Well-Being Holistic Analysis Model** comprises three main components: (1) The Individual, (2) The Work, and (3) The Organization.

The individual

In this component of the model, we ask how the employee is doing as an individual human being and we look at the following factors:

- Mental health conditions
- Physical health
- Interpersonal relationships
- Family support(s)
- Social environment
- Values
- Inclusion / Diversity

How well a supervisor or manager knows their employees on an individual basis can have a significant impact on the work team and the workplace. It is important for managers and supervisors to be visible and accessible to their employees and to connect with them on a regular basis. Those employees who are physically located far from the manager's office – those on another floor, for example, or in a different part of the building, not to mention a different building altogether – would particularly benefit. Moreover, when there are employees who appear to withdraw from interactions and activities with the rest of the team, this can often be an indicator of someone needing the manager's attention.

Establishing and maintaining positive relationships with all employees is one of the keys to success, as a leader and as an organization. It is therefore critical to take the time to engage in chit chat, get to know them, find out about their interests, their backgrounds, their aspirations. Why would you want to do that? Because the more a manager is aware of the needs, aptitudes, aspirations and potential of their employees, the more they can take them into account in order to match tasks and individuals as accurately as possible. In this way, the full potential of the team can be reached and the organizational goals can be achieved as efficiently as possible and in the best interest of all.

The Work

Does the work given to an employee align with who they are as individuals? For example:

- Is their work meaningful?
- Is it stimulating?
- Are they knowledgeable and skilled enough for the work they're being asked to do?
- Are there visible outcomes and are the employees aware of the results of their work?
- Have they been given responsibility for their outcomes?
- Do you provide them with adequate growth and development opportunities?

When the answer to all of the above questions is yes, the employee's work is "meaningful," motivation becomes intrinsic, job performance, as well as job satisfaction, are high, and absenteeism and turnover rates are reduced.

The Organization

The third and final component of our **Workplace Well-Being Holistic Analysis Model** looks at how well the organization supports the individual in their work. Factors include:

- Climate / civility
- Psychological support (colleagues and services)
- Workload
- Processes and levels of approval
- Clear leadership expectations
- Constructive performance feedback
- Flexibility of work arrangements
- Disability management
- Rewards and recognition
- Psychological protection

“The coaching sessions have helped me to become more flexible in my management style versus imposing my agenda on my employees. I normally wouldn’t allow ad hoc arrangements, but in considering the big picture, the level of risk and my overall objectives, I am adopting a more flexible management style that has improved my relationships with employees.”

– A CPER – EQ-I training participant in 2019-2020

The 2019 PSES results show overall improvements for ISED as an organization. Some 76% of ISED employees who responded to the Survey reported being “satisfied” with the organization, a 2% increase over the 2018 results; the satisfaction rate for the public service as a whole in 2019 was 71%. Almost 80% of ISED respondents believe that the department has done a good job of raising awareness of mental health in the workplace, which is slightly more than in 2018 (78%), while public service-wide, the figure is 71%. And 66% of ISED employees reported in the Survey that their workplace is “psychologically healthy,” up one percentage point from 2018, compared with 60% across the public service in general.

With this Well-Being Analysis Model now in place, ISED has created a roadmap for ensuring an “agile, equipped and inclusive” workforce in keeping with the vision and direction for renewal in the federal public service. It includes:

- Providing leadership training for managers, with a focus on achieving agility and empowering employees
- Creating a centre of expertise in workplace accommodation (The Workplace Accommodation Centre (WAC) to improve the experiences of management and employees who are temporarily, or permanently, facing limitations and who need help to navigate through the disability management process
- Enhancing tools and processes to promote employee mobility
- Educating on the possibility of increasing flexible work arrangements (something that was quickly addressed and implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic)
- Allowing for electronic approvals
- Building up resources on preventing and addressing harassment in the workplace
- Promoting more access for employees to the Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being, as well as the activities offered through the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace.

Checklist for promoting and engaging in a healthy workplace

Putting the model into practice

The individual

- Support your employees who are facing workplace issues or mental health conditions – get equipped and knowledgeable on how to accommodate employee needs (training, ISED’s Workplace Accommodation Centre, etc.)
- Create an openness to discuss work-related issues during bilateral meetings and take action
- Ensure your employees are engaged and have access to growth and development opportunities

Their work

- Make sure your employees’ tasks/work have as high a Motivation Potential Score as possible and that they are able to adapt their skills to succeed in their tasks/work
- Analyze workload issues and implement solutions for equitable work distribution
- Deliver and accept performance feedback as part of a process of continuous improvement – develop a growth mindset

Your / our organization

- Discuss team values and ensure personal values are aligned with the organization’s values
- Assess your organizational culture and explore areas for improvement as a team – consider using the 13 factors as part of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health in the Workplace as your foundation and check out the series of videos on the 13 factors on YouTube (see other Mental Health Tools and Resources)
- Seek support through our informal conflict management mechanisms early on in order to solve workplace issues
- Get training on how to prevent harassment in the workplace by contacting the Ombud, CPER or the Corporate Occupational Health and Safety Office.
- Use the PSES dashboard/business intelligence (BI) tool and identify psychosocial factors that require improvement
- TAKE ACTION!

Making Work Matter: Calculating your job's Motivation Potential Score (MPS)

According to the 2019 PSES results, 74% of ISED employees who responded either “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” that they get a sense of satisfaction from their job, 83% feel proud of the work they do, and 81% like their jobs.

“How satisfied we are in our jobs, in our work, comes back to motivation,” says Eve Nadeau, ISED’s Associate Ombud. “We can actually gauge our individual motivation by following a formula that gives us a job’s ‘Motivation Potential Score,’ or MPS.”

$$\text{MPS} = \frac{\text{Skill} + \text{Task Identity} + \text{Task Significance}}{3} \times \text{Autonomy} \times \text{Feedback}$$

An element of what is known as “Job Characteristic Theory,” the MPS rates three elements which ascribe a value to the meaningfulness of the work – the variety of skills required for the job, when an employee can identify with the entire process of the work compared with just one part of it, and the significance of the job’s impact on the lives of others. There are also values assigned to the principles of autonomy and feedback associated with the work.

Eve says that this model, particularly when the scores are high – each element is rated between 1 and 7 – predicts that motivation, performance and job satisfaction will be positively affected, with the likelihood of such negative outcomes like absenteeism and high staff turnover, reduced.

“When a job has a high score on the five core characteristics (shown in the formula above), it is likely to generate three psychological states, which in turn can lead to positive work outcomes,” says Eve. Those three psychological states are: (1) experienced meaningfulness of work, (2) experienced responsibility for the outcome of the work, and (3) knowledge of the results of the work. Even if the highest recorded score was 300 for a consultant. The Hackman and Oldham model suggests that an average motivating potential score for jobs is around 128.

“So, the degree to which we experience our work as intrinsically meaningful, how accountable and responsible we are for the results of the work, and how well we know we are performing,” she says, “lead to improved productivity and performance, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organization, not to mention provoking a sense of creativity and innovation in employees.”

Find out the “motivating potential” of your job!

Meet your Ombud team: Marilyn Stefanoski

“A caring presence through difficult times.”



“Having a caring presence, listening in a non-judgemental way, coaching and teaching communication, helps people gain insight into their situation, feel better equipped to address an issue, restore a relationship, and learn about themselves.”

– Marilyn Stefanoski

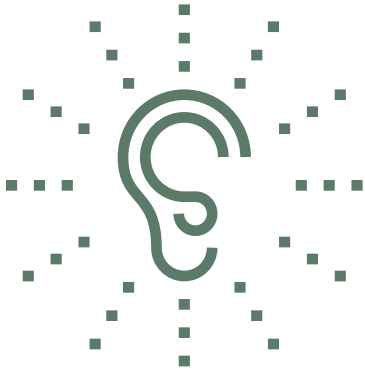
Meet Marilyn Stefanoski, the latest addition to the CPER team at ISED. In addition to her education in psychology, HR management and conflict resolution, Marilyn has 12 years of experience in the federal public service, including time working in the fields of harassment, conflict of interest, and disclosure or wrongdoing. Another experience from her professional life has given Marilyn a unique perspective on her work as a conflict resolution practitioner: she worked in a shelter for people with severe mental health disorders – schizophrenia and bipolar, eating and personality disorders.

“Having a caring presence, listening in a non-judgemental way, coaching and teaching communication, helps people gain insight into their situation, feel better equipped to address an issue, restore a relationship, and learn about themselves,” she says. “Accompanying and helping people get through difficult times is what makes me happy in my work; it is very rewarding to make a positive difference in people’s lives.”

During the COVID-19 crisis, Marilyn said that she developed a lot of sympathy for colleagues who have had to work from home while also caring for children. While she improved her technology skills (like most of us, in adapting to videoconferencing), she hopes to be able to offer her services in person again, whether for consultations, one-on-one coaching, mediations, or group work. In the meantime, she continues to develop herself professionally through training so that she can better answer her clients’ needs, as well as keep on top of the latest research and trends in conflict resolution. She also enjoys practicing yoga on a regular basis which enables her to remain centred and balanced.

“This crisis has brought to humanity an opportunity to reflect on what needs to be changed in our society,” she says. “Amongst other things, I hope it will lead us to a better work-life balance and a reconnection with nature, with more respect for wildlife and the environment.”

Marilyn Stefanoski is a Conflict Management Practitioner with the Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution (CPER) team, part of the Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being at ISED. You can reach her via email at marilyn.stefanoski2@canada.ca.



Our Programs and Services: The 2019-2020 Year in Review

There are three components to ISED's integrated model for supporting the mental health and well-being of our employees: The Office of the Ombud, the Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution (CPER) Unit, and the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace.

The Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being

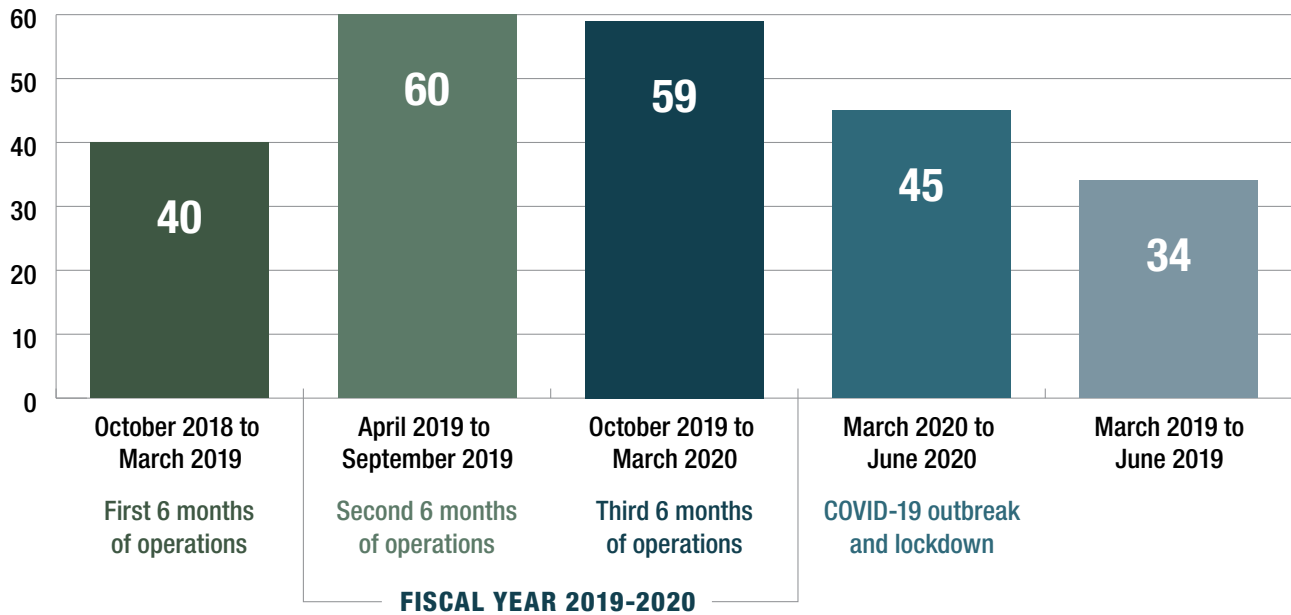
In our first Annual Report, we reported on the operations of what was then a new function within the ISED organization. This unique situation reflected our creation in October, 2018 and our activities over the course of our first six months of operation, which took us to the end of the 2018-2019 fiscal year (March 31, 2019). During that time, we undertook a series of consultations and presentations with employees, managers, and unions which allowed the Ombud to become familiar with the specific issues within the Department, in Ottawa as well as in the regions.

In this year's Annual Report, our second, we find ourselves again in a unique situation: we are reporting on our first full fiscal year of operations, from April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out just prior to the end of the fiscal year and the world changed rapidly the way it conducted business, including the ISED organization and the Office of the Ombud.

As such, you will find that in this year's Annual Report, we present two sets of findings: one covering the full 2019-2020 fiscal year, and another which reflects the impact of COVID-19 on our operations; this period (March 16 to June 30, 2020) covers the outbreak of the virus and the imposition of a lockdown on most Canadian workers, including ISED and the federal public service.

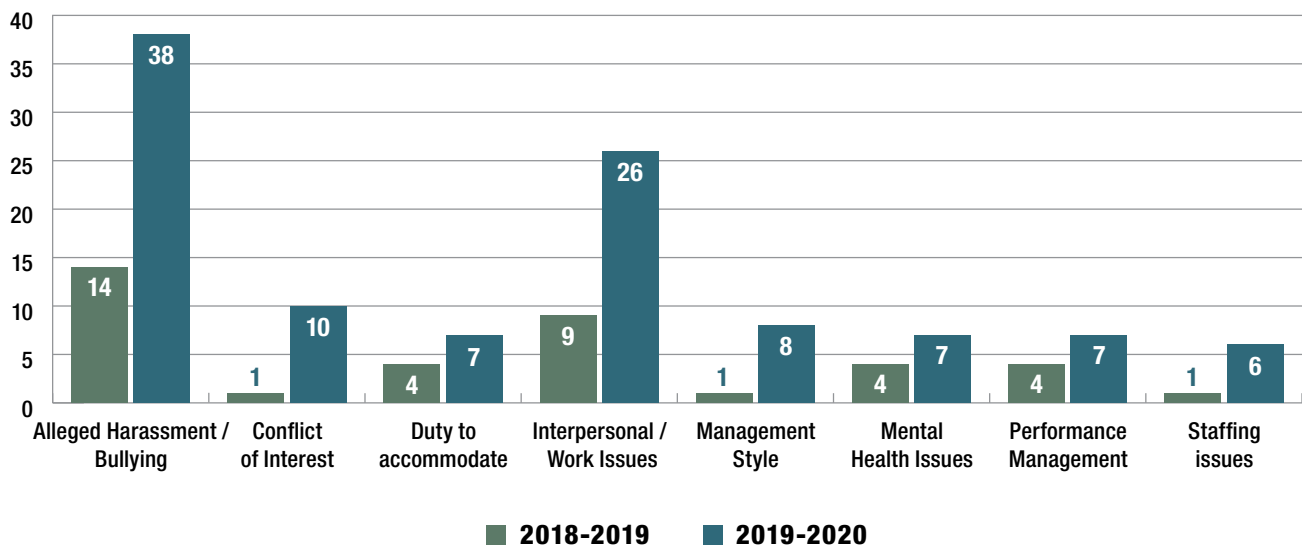
Since our creation in October 2018, the Office of the Ombud has seen a progressive increase in use of our services, as the following chart shows:

Number of Individual Confidential Consultations with the Ombud Since Opening (2018)



In FY 2019-2020, we conducted 119 individual confidential consultations with ISED employees. During the first three months of the pandemic, however (March 16 to June 30), we conducted 45 such consultations – that’s five more than during our first six months of operation in FY 2018-2019, and 11 more than in the same period the previous year.

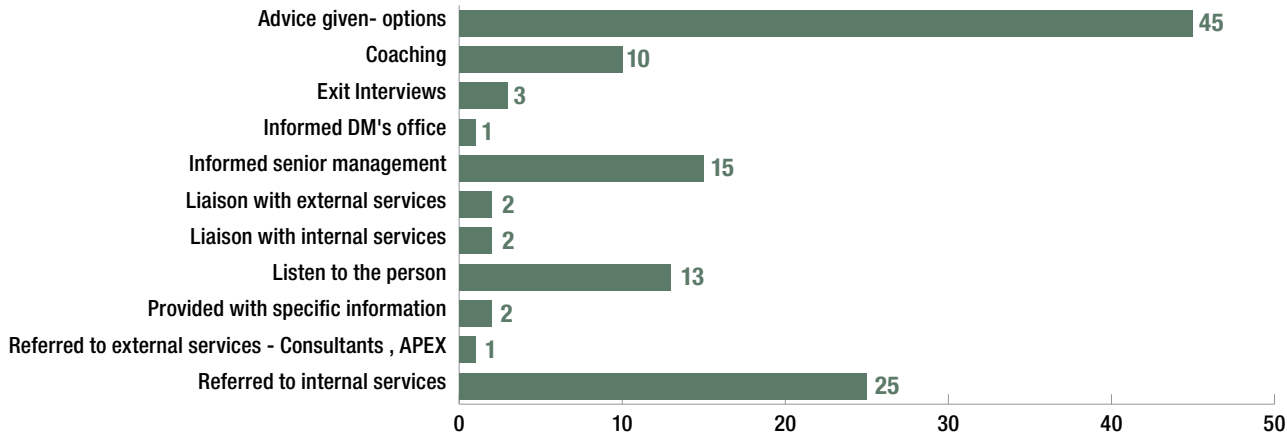
Main issues raised per fiscal year



In 2019-2020, alleged harassment and/or bullying, followed by interpersonal work issues, remained the top two issues raised by ISED employees during their individual consultations with the Ombud and Associate Ombud. The 2019 PSES results indicate that some 14% of ISED employees responded in the affirmative to having “been the victim of harassment on the job in the past 12 months.” While that figure is the same response rate public service-wide, it represents a 2% increase over findings for ISED in the 2018 PSES. The 2019 results also indicate that those employees who used an informal conflict resolution process to address the harassment increased to 11% from 8% over the previous year. The use of this service demonstrates progress as informal conflict management mechanisms are a proactive way to solve issues early on; they reduce the risk of long and costly formal processes, such as harassment complaints.

In the following graphic, you will find all the possible actions that the Ombud can take, when required, in order to resolve a situation, and of course, according to the wishes of the clients.

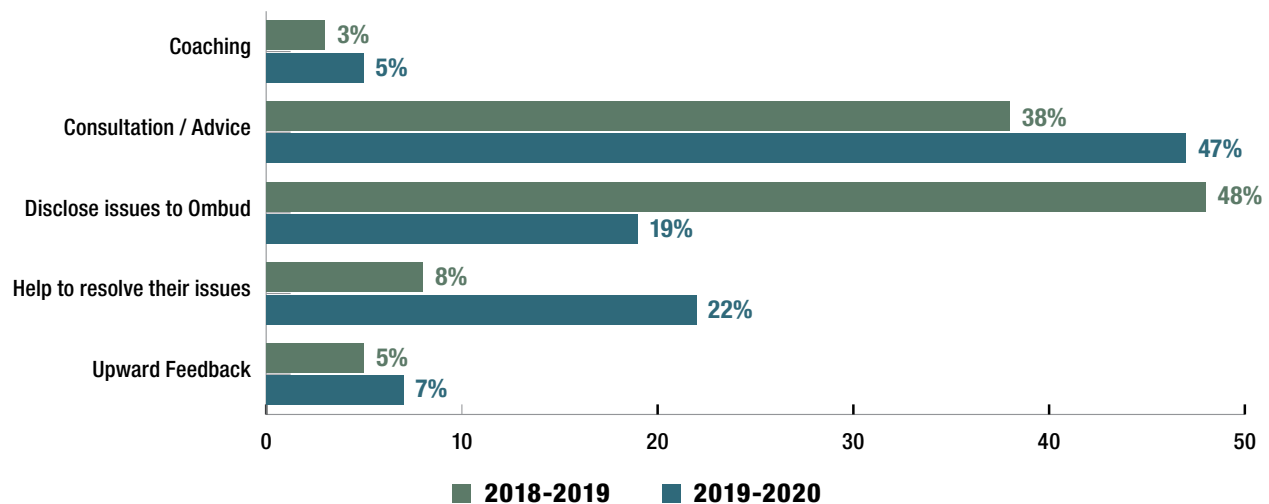
Actions Taken by the Ombud in FY 2019-2020



In fiscal year 2019-2020, the majority of confidential individual consultations were with ISED employees who were seeking advice on options available to them for addressing workplace situations, as well as coaching support and some who just wanted an opportunity to be heard. Many of the clients were referred to internal services to resolve their issues, including the Ombud’s Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution (CPEER) team and other sections of the Human Resources Branch, such as Harassment Prevention, Values and Ethics, and Internal Disclosure. Of the 119 Ombud consultations, 15 led to informing and discussing options with senior management, while only one was discussed with the Deputy Minister’s Office – all with the consent of the clients. It is important to highlight the fact that the Ombud and Associate Ombud always seek the consent of clients to bring their situations to the attention of senior officials. The standard of practice of confidentiality is one of the cornerstones of the Ombud’s Office operations; it is diligently being applied to all Ombud clients.

The following chart compares the services sought from our first to our second year of operations. As the Ombud’s mandate and role has become more understood, clients are seeking more advice and support to **resolve** their issues, as opposed to the first year when clients only wanted to **disclose** their issues.

Reason for Ombud Services by Fiscal Years



Ombud services during COVID-19

During the first three months of the coronavirus pandemic, from March 16 to June 30, the Ombud's Office experienced an increase of 32% of employees and managers reaching out for confidential services over the same period last year (2019), resulting in 45 confidential consultations with ISED employees in that short timeframe.

One thing came across loud and clear during these conversations: employees were not only distressed by the workplace issues they were already facing, but these issues were compounded by some level of anxiety and distress related to the COVID-19 crisis. The table below shows how the issues changed in importance between the fiscal year and the pandemic period.

ISSUES RAISED WITH THE OMBUD DURING FISCAL YEAR 2019-2020 (April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020)	ISSUES RAISED WITH THE OMBUD DURING THE COVID-19 PERIOD (March 16 to June 30, 2020)
1. Alleged harassment / bullying	Interpersonal / work issues
2. Interpersonal / work issues	Alleged harassment / bullying
3. Conflict of interest / Lack of ethics	Management style
4. Management style	Mental health issues
5. Mental health issues	Staffing issues

Adapting to the new ways of working – spending the day working entirely from home, with some employees caring for children and elderly family members at the same time, increasing use of email as a means to communicate with managers, colleagues and clients, and learning to use new or unfamiliar technologies – are just a number of issues that affected ISED employees during this period. Many managers found themselves having to modify their management style as well, impacting not only their own work (and their self-awareness), but also their relationships and interactions with some of their employees. It is no wonder, then, that we saw an increase throughout this period in the need to identify and address mental health issues.



Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution (CPER)

The Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution (CPER) team's purpose is to support the capacity of all ISED employees, in all roles and at all levels, to address conflict promptly and constructively, in a safe and accessible environment, with a spirit of respect, and using a collaborative, interest-based approach. This informal conflict management system is an efficient, fast and cost-effective way to solve issues in the workplace through the delivery of considerable expertise in the field. Employees and managers are encouraged to reach out quickly to CPER when an issue arises to seek a consultation and discuss specific options.

Reporting to the Ombud, ISED's conflict management practitioners provide confidential and impartial conflict resolution services to individuals and groups, which helps to prevent and manage conflicts, and more broadly, supports the creation of a cohesive, respectful, healthy and inclusive workplace. Services provided include consultations, one-on-one coaching, facilitated discussions, mediation, workplace assessments, and group interventions, as well as workplace restoration following formal complaint processes.

During a visit to the CPER office, an experienced practitioner listens to the client without judgement and assists them in exploring and articulating their needs. Based on the information shared and the client's objectives, the practitioner will explore with the client the range of service options available to address the issue. Where appropriate, the practitioner may also refer clients to other services, including to the Ombud.

Issues brought to CPER generally deal with damaged interpersonal and work relationships (between peers, employees and management, and within and between groups), lack of civility and respect, management practices, performance management discussions, negotiations on accommodations, human resources and organizational issues, and harassment/bullying.

CPER team members served 3,335 clients in 2019-2020 by providing 734 professional service sessions (consultations, coaching, facilitated discussions, mediations etc.) and delivering 51 learning activities. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the team has developed three (3) new training workshops: helping employees and managers with tools on the new

working realities of virtual team management; delivering performance feedback in a virtual context; and building trust in a way that optimizes organizational effectiveness.

The CPER Team also launched an Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ-i) leadership development pilot program with 21 managers (at EX minus-1 levels). The objective was to support managers in gaining greater awareness of their emotional intelligence strengths, identifying areas for improvement, and appreciating how EQ-i affects their individual leadership capacity. The EQ-i 2.0 program consisted of administering an EQ-i assessment and coaching managers in one-on-one sessions to improve their leadership skills. Participant evaluations rated the program a success as 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the assessment and coaching were valuable; they recommended that the program continue and be expanded to others in their branch/sector. Participants also reported that the EQ-i 2.0 assessment and coaching gave them new tools and new approaches to improve their EQ-i as it relates to leadership competencies. A full 98% of participants indicated that, since receiving their coaching sessions, they have applied their learning by taking concrete measures to improve their EQ-i and managerial skills in the workplace; they also report that the measures they have taken have had a positive impact on work relationships and/or work situations.

“I am now better able to recognize how my feelings of personal inadequacy can impact a situation with employees and [how I can] choose to have a more productive reaction. I have been able to implement this a number of times with great success,” says one participant. “I have made a stronger effort to be more open with my team; I have practiced being more assertive and sharing ideas with my colleagues; and I feel that my self-confidence at work has improved,” says another.

One participant indicates that they “applied measures discussed with [the] CPER practitioner with [their] team and observed improvements regarding [their team’s] engagement,” adding “It also enabled me to be more efficient in interacting with colleagues.”

Providing individualized EQ-i coaching and conflict coaching in general better enables employees to address and resolve their own conflicts, and it is an effective and efficient way to ensure dispute resolution. It also builds the Department’s internal capacity to resolve conflict. Through coaching, the earlier a conflict is dealt with, the greater the likelihood that it will be successfully resolved and not escalate further.

COVID-19 and EAP

According to Health Canada, the number of ISED employees and their family members who contacted EAP during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, decreased slightly from 5.8% (334 users in 2019) to 4.8% (296 users in 2020) over the same period the previous year. As stated previously in this report, there has been, however, an increase of 32% of ISED employees reaching out directly to the Ombud on work-related issues.

The top three reasons why ISED users called EAP relate to “psychological health” (26%), “anxiety” (18%) and “family-couple” issues (13%). Anxiety replaced “work-related issues” as one of the top three reasons in 2020 compared with 2019. The figures also show a slight increase in the use of EAP by women in 2020 (67.3% vs 66.2%) and a slight decrease in use by men (32.7% vs 33.8%).

	EAP Bi-Annual Report from April 1, 2020 to September 30, 2020	EAP Bi-Annual Report from April 1, 2019 to September 30, 2019
EAP Usage	296 Employees Family Members 4.8%	334 Employees Family Members 5.8%
Top three reasons users called EAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological Health (26%) • Anxiety (18.2%) • Family-Couple (12.8%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological Health (26.6%) • Family-Couple (14.4%) • Work Related Issues (12.9%)
Female:	67.3%	66.2%
Male:	32.7%	33.8%

Government-wide, however, in the first six months of 2020, pandemic-related concerns raised during first contact with callers included:

- having trouble adjusting to remote work
- feeling anxious about the uncertainty of the situation
- feeling overwhelmed by homeschooling responsibilities, and later anxious about return to school
- feeling worried about the health of aging parents or sad they couldn't visit their loved ones
- losing their regular support networks
- worsening of existing family conflicts due to prolonged periods at home.

Since the start of the pandemic, EAP has also seen a large increase in distress calls from clients across the federal public service who need immediate mental health support over the phone. For example, in June 2020, EAP received 334 crisis calls from employees in various departments compared to 151 in June 2019.

You and/or your family members can reach EAP free of charge, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, by calling

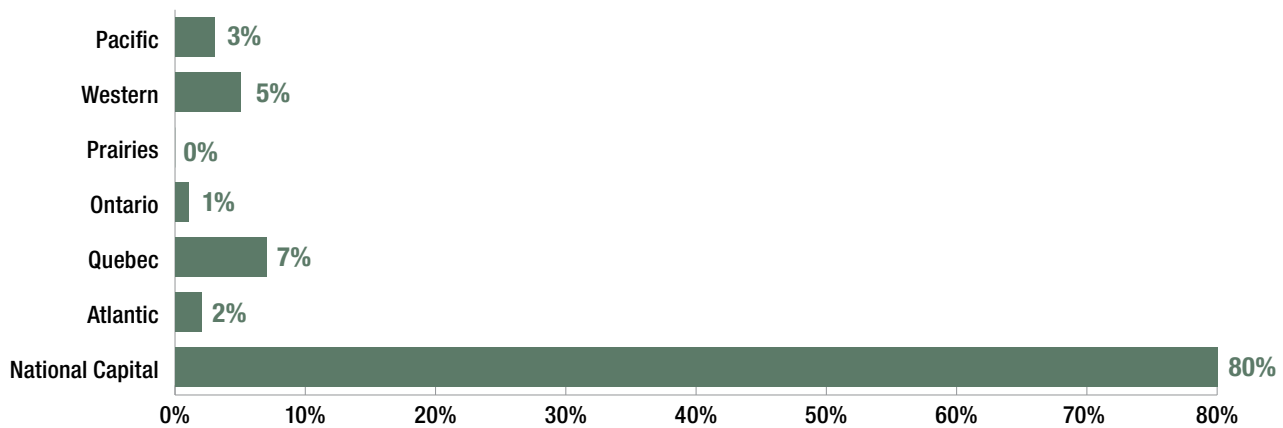
EAP Toll-free: 1-800-268-7708

EAP Telephone Device for the Deaf: 1-800-567-5803

CPER Clients per activity per fiscal year

Activities	# of Activities per FY 2018-2019	# of Activities per FY 2019-2020
Consultations	381	361
Coaching Sessions / Pre-mediations	405	340
Mediations / Facilitated Discussions	15	25
Group Facilitations / Group Interventions	15	8
Training Sessions	31	51
Services Awareness Sessions / Events	34	17
Total number of services provided	881	802
Total number of people reached	4,710	3,335

CPER clients per region in 2019-2020



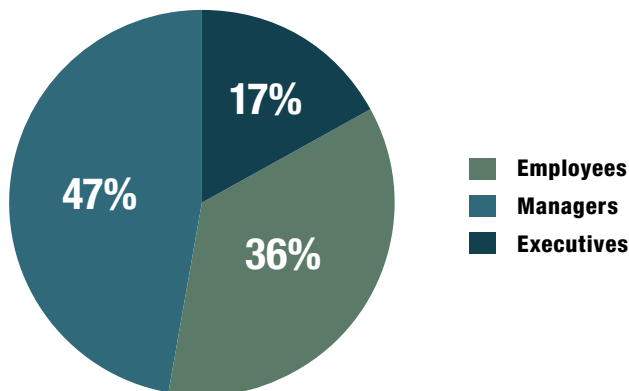
CPER conducted 25 mediations during FY 2019-2020, compared with 15 the previous year, of which 22 were successfully resolved, two (2) were partially successful and in one case, understanding was not reached. The overall success rate of mediations is 98%.

Following its longstanding commitment to respond to the needs of ISED regional employees, CPER delivered 19 training sessions in the regions during the year, with a total of 287 employees participating. We also provided other core CPER services to employees in the regions, including consultations, coaching, and mediations/facilitated discussions.

The team will continue to pursue the development of responsive interventions and training for regional employees, in keeping with the Ombud – and the CPER team’s – findings during regional visits. We have given special attention to revising training modules in order to tailor the courses to the most urgent departmental needs, such as virtual management, virtual performance management discussions, creating cohesive virtual teams, building trust for organizational effectiveness in virtual teams, and return to work challenges.

Critical to employee well-being is providing access to psychological support services. During the year under review, CPER continued to coordinate the EAP and to ensure that this service remains responsive to the needs of ISED employees. CPER, in collaboration with Strategic Communications and Marketing Sector (SCMS), conducted an EAP Client Satisfaction Survey, which provided critical information and statistics on EAP utilization by ISED employees.

CPER Client Groups for FY 2019-2020



Key findings from the survey indicate that:

- 97% of respondents were aware of the Employee Assistance Program
- 83% said that they would likely or very likely recommend EAP to a colleague
- 71% noted that they would likely or very likely use the EAP again
- 68% of respondents said that the quality of the services offered was good or excellent
- 40% learned of EAP through their managers, followed by 35% through @ISED, and 34% through a colleague.

The Department has since signed a new Interdepartmental Letter of Agreement (ILA) with EAP to cover fiscal year 2020-2021.

CPER worked with the Federal Informal Conflict Management System (ICMS) network and the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, hosted by ISED, to deliver a day of events during the annual International Conflict Resolution Day (October 17, 2019). The purpose was to promote the availability of conflict management services within ISED, as well as to inspire public servants to improve their workplaces, “one conversation at a time.” Under the theme for 2019, “Conflict Isn’t Trivial,” one of the events centred on a new conflict trivia game which tested people’s knowledge of conflict. Participants chose their answers to questions using Menti, an online voting application, while a panel of experts discussed the results and addressed questions related to conflict. The event highlighted the fact that when workplace conflict is left unresolved, it creates a stressful environment and negatively affects the mental health of all involved. Over 100 federal public servants participated in the Day’s activities in person at the Mental Health Centre, as well as by WebEx and teleconference.

Thank you, CPER!

“I want to thank you for coming out to our office. It really made things easier for me and my team! I think our session really helped me see outside my own state of panic and crisis and that others were also in the same state.”

– A CPER client in 2019-2020

“The service I received was excellent! The CPER practitioner was very professional and personable. All my questions were answered clearly and the advice provided was very helpful. Regardless of your level of knowledge or experience, the service provided by CPER is extremely valuable. It helped me focus my conversation on a few key messages by identifying what works well and presenting solutions to problems that I thought needed to be addressed. I would highly recommend this service to others.”

– A CPER client in 2019-2020

Mental Health Centre Receives “Notable Practice” Recognition

The Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, hosted by ISED, has received recognition as a **“Notable Practice”** under the People Management Component of the [Management Accountability Framework \(MAF\)](#). The MAF is a framework for management excellence, accompanied by an annual assessment of management practices and performance in most departments and agencies of the Government of Canada. It is a key tool of oversight that is used by the [Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat](#) to help ensure that federal departments and agencies are well managed, accountable and that resources are allocated to achieve results. The [People Management Component](#) provides a portrait of people management in federal organizations participating in the assessment.

ISED was recognized in the “Health, Safety and Wellness” category for having contributed successfully to creating “a workplace that is healthy, safe and inclusive.” The indicator question (#13) asks: “Did your organization identify psychosocial hazards in the FY 2018-19?” It reveals if organizations have assessed psychosocial hazards that have shown to impact an employee’s mental health and well-being and if they have aligned their responses to [the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#). ISED’s response was the creation of the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace.

The “Notable Practice” citation reads:

“[ISED] launched the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace on May 7, 2018. The Centre will host events for all government, and ISED-specific events will also be offered. Each month, ISED will feature one of the 13 workplace factors known to affect psychological health in the workplace.”

MAF results, contextualized with findings from employee surveys, support deputy heads in planning and implementing their people management practices by identifying the strengths and potential risks in their organization in relation to their corporate commitments including:

- talent management
- official languages
- diversity and inclusion
- well-being.



Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace

The Mental Health Centre at ISED was launched in 2018 to support the mental health and well-being of all federal public servants across Canada. By applying the [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#), the Centre operates as a collaborative forum that equips employees with relevant mental health and well-being skills, with the aim of mobilizing employees and managers to break down the stigma that has become associated with mental health.

Since opening in 2018, approximately 18,000 public servants have benefitted from the Centre's activities, either in-person or online via WebEx.

In 2019-2020, the Centre delivered 23 awareness and learning sessions and 84 wellness activities, with additional events hosted by the Centre but delivered by other government organizations. Some of the topics presented include:

- Resilience and coping skills
- Neuromanagement and moving from feeling overwhelmed to flourishing
- Eliminating rumours and gossip in the workplace
- Dealing with difficult personalities
- Civility and respect in the workplace
- Delivering high-impact performance feedback
- Inclusion and diversity

“THANK YOU! My family doctor has given me numerous referrals to therapists these last two decades and these webinars are the first step to getting help, as far as I am concerned. Thank you!”

– A Mental Health Centre event participant in 2019-2020

The Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace (ISED) builds productive and healthy workplaces by offering workshops with expert speakers and sharing tools, resources and best practices, to empower federal public servants to eliminate the stigma associated with mental health in the workplace:



Flexible formula for innovation (Innovation Centre turnkey)



Design day with departments in February 2019



Support the departmental strategy for mental health



Program delivery 2019-2020



Partnerships with government departments (agreements)



Calendar of events 2019-2020

The Centre also engages high profile speakers and experts in these fields. In FY 2019-2020 some of those speakers included:

- **Dr. Bill Howatt**, Chief of Research, Workforce Productivity, with the Conference Board of Canada
- **Dr. Carlos Davidovich**, a Forbes Coaches Council executive coach and keynote speaker specializing in neuromanagement
- **Don McCreary, Ph.D.**, an independent senior consultant in men's health with a focus on workplace stress, health and resilience

In surveys of event participants, a majority reported finding the learning to be “practical and easy to apply to the workplace.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, the Centre delivered a range of online activities, including an innovative series of inclusive yoga videos. Presented in partnership with the Accessibility Directorate of Shared Services Canada and led by yoga instructor Laura D'Alessandro, the sessions provided vocal cues, ideal for individuals with low vision or visual impairment.

The Centre helps all federal organizations support the continuous improvement of people management practices across the public service and provides a forum to discuss government-wide opportunities and innovations in mental health; it also helps them demonstrate their engagement in the [Federal Public Service Mental Health Strategy](#) by fostering a culture that enshrines psychological health, safety and well-being in all aspects of the workplace through collaboration, inclusivity and respect.

Thank you, Mental Health Centre!

“Through training, workshops and awareness sessions, I have truly benefited from this beautiful space. I have learned so much about myself and grown as a person and employee. I feel truly thankful for ISED's commitment to psychological health and safety in the workplace by offering this facility to us. I know for a fact that many employees have been impacted in life-changing ways by means of the valuable content presented. I am proud of this Centre, it's employees and all the achievements they have accomplished.”

– A Mental Health Centre event participant in 2019-2020

Meet your Ombud team: Mireille Cyr

“OK; this is all worth it.”



Mireille Cyr is the new Manager of the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace. She comes to us from the [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#) (MHCC) where she was the Manager of Business Development, Mental Health First Aid and Opening Minds.

Mireille is looking forward to working with the ISED team, although “transitioning out of one job and into another in a whole new organization during a pandemic was a challenge,” she says, “not to mention working with the team at the MHCC and our clients to pivot all of our face-to-face training to a virtual world.” She also says that while having to say “goodbye” to her team virtually was “tough,” working virtually with them did have some benefits.

“When I hear that it was because of a training session that I was in some way part of, that I helped someone get the help they needed, or helped them to better understand mental health, I think to myself ‘OK; this is all worth it.’”

– Mireille Cyr

“Being able to see their faces during video calls was crucial to assess how physically and mentally we were all coping,” she explains, noting that she and her colleagues all seemed to go through a similar process when the COVID crisis hit – although they did so at different times. “It started with some excitement about working from home, moved to uncertainty about the future, then to a period of mental fatigue because of prolonged isolation, and finally to a sense of hopefulness,” she reflects. “And the hope was nice to see because all of a sudden, there was that ‘ah-ha’ moment where we all realized that together, we can get through this.”

A self-proclaimed introvert, Mireille says that she does not “require socialization to feel re-energized,” so she has enjoyed working from home and being able to wake up later, taking the time to savour her coffee instead of running out the door to catch her bus. But this introvert admits that she also loves it when her work makes a difference in peoples’ lives – whether in a small or in a big way. “When I hear that it was because of a training session that I was in some way part of, that I helped someone get the help they needed, or helped them to better understand mental health,” she says, “I think to myself ‘OK; this is all worth it.’”

Mireille has a Bachelor of Science degree in Physiotherapy and a Master’s degree in Health Administration and has worked as a physiotherapist, a case manager in homecare, in various positions at Accreditation Canada, and as a Team Lead at the Canadian Institute for Health Information. You can reach her via email at mireille.cyr@canada.ca.



COVID-19 and ISED

Impact on ISED and our employees

The COVID-19 pandemic forced ISED and most of the Government of Canada to make drastic and sudden changes to our work environment and in so doing, created a new set of work challenges. We shifted to a virtual working environment, which caused us to radically alter our traditional ways of working and interacting with our colleagues and stakeholders. By the end of June 2020, some 98% of ISED employees were working from home.

“ISED Office of the Ombud is a valuable front-line resource and service for all employees who find themselves in a difficult situation. It helped me to diagnose the situation, and provided me with the tools and coaching to move forward towards informal resolution.”

– An ISED employee
in 2019-2020

According to the **COVID-19 Employee Check-in Survey** conducted in April-May 2020, in which over 3,400 ISED employees responded – that’s 50% of the department’s total workforce – most employees reported being well-equipped to make the shift to a remote work environment: 81% indicated that they had effective access to IT and remote work tools, 87% said that they knew what resources were available to them if they needed help with their well-being, and 89% reported having the information they needed to operate in this environment. A further 80% indicated that their needs for tailored work arrangements were supported by their managers.

However, employees also acknowledged that COVID-19 had affected their well-being: a quarter (26%) felt that that pressure to deliver work affected their well-being; 50% noted a decrease in their energy level; and 67% reported feeling comfortable having a conversation about their well-being with their managers.

Psychological factors, such as stress, anxiety and mental health, were reported by 71% of employees as having affected their ability to deliver on their work. More than one-in-three indicated that their work was affected to a small (35%) or moderate (21%) extent, while 15% of employees indicated that psychological factors affected their work to a large (11%) or extreme (4%) degree.

Despite the challenges that COVID-19 presented, ISED employees rapidly adjusted to the new work environment, demonstrating their agility while continuing to be purpose-driven, committed and focused. The survey showed that seven-in-ten reported having clearly laid out priorities and deliverables, agreeing that their work contributions were appreciated, and understanding how their teams were contributing to ISED's pandemic response. Furthermore, 64% of employees indicated their willingness to be engaged in helping to shape the vision of the future of work at ISED.

“What has been most striking throughout all the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has been the resilience and sense of duty displayed by ISED employees in getting the job done for Canadians,” said Associate Deputy Minister and Champion for Mental Health, Paul Thompson. He added: “As we acknowledge employees’ incredible efforts in taking care of our fellow Canadians, we want to remind our people to take good care of themselves. We recognize the strain, stress and concern that these unusual times have caused.” Speaking to ISED employees directly, he said “Please continue to stay connected with, and watch out for, each other. And rely on the resources that are available to support your mental well-being.”



Departmental support to ISED employees during COVID-19

The Virtual Workplace Hub

One of the ways in which ISED helped employees adapt to working in a virtual environment was by creating The Virtual Workplace Hub, a one-stop on-line shop for information, tools, resources, best practices and guidance. The Hub is organized into three sections:

- Tools, technology and information sharing
- Mental health, well-being and safety
- Leadership and engagement

The Hub is a central repository of information from key information sources and is aimed at enhancing employees' work environment and easing access to ISED's network. The Hub's user-friendly navigation makes it easy to access relevant information. With one click, employees can find everything they need to know about their work smartphone, connectivity, collaboration tools, GCdocs, mental health services and programs, HR issues, second language assessments, and more.

To develop the Hub, research and consultations took place with relevant sectors, including HRB, CIO and Renewal at ISED. Results and feedback received from the COVID-19 Employee Check-in Survey were also taken into account to ensure the Hub was relevant to employees' needs.

Everyone has been encouraged to explore ISED's Virtual Workplace Hub on a regular basis to access the most up-to-date information on key subjects and areas of interest to ISED employees.



My Wellness Plan for Working from Home

One of the key resources available on the Virtual Workplace Hub is a “Wellness Plan for Working from Home.” This plan, which only takes about 30 minutes to complete, helps identify to a supervisor an individual’s needs to telework successfully, such as the necessary digital tools, workstation components, pre-scheduled check-ins, and flexible hours. The plan also helps employees set weekly personal, professional and physical activity goals and think about how they might deal with feelings like anxiety and loneliness, and suggests creating a schedule to support healthy habits in this new virtual working environment.



Wellness Together Canada

Wellness Together Canada is a collaborative platform that was funded by the Government of Canada in response to the unprecedented rise in mental distress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. People have been challenged like never before due to isolation, physical health concerns, substance use issues, financial and employment uncertainty, and the emotional dialogue around racial equality. It is important for all of us to establish our own “mental health benchmark.” It is not until we are self-aware of the issues we are facing that we can take concrete actions. The Wellness Together Canada web application is one of the tools available, free of charge, to establish our mental health benchmark. Wellness Together Canada was created to support all Canadians on their mental health journeys by providing connections to mental health and substance use support resources, as well as counselling with mental health professionals. The site, which has been widely promoted to employees throughout ISED, provides a five-minute self-assessment, individual health metrics, self-guided courses and apps, access to an online community of support and coaching, as well as access to one-to-one counselling.



Response from the Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being

As the rest of ISED rallied to adapt to working differently and to supporting clients and stakeholders in new and innovative ways during this time, the Office of the Ombud worked in concert with our colleagues in HR and the **Corporate Mental Health Program** to ensure that our employees – at all levels and in all sectors of the organization – received the support they needed to maintain their mental health and well-being through the Coronavirus pandemic.

During the COVID-19 crisis, we increased the promotion of all of our professional services through sector town halls, the ISED virtual all-staff meeting on June 18, 2020, and multiple communications vehicles within the department. From mid-March to the end of June, 2020, we saw an increase of 32% in the use of individual confidential consultations by ISED employees over the same period the previous year.

The **Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution (CPER) team** developed a new workshop entitled “Trust and Organizational Effectiveness.” It explores the importance of developing trusting relationships in the workplace, something which is not only key to personal well-being and mental health, but is also an essential ingredient for successful and thriving organizations. Other training developed by CPER to support ISED employees during the crisis included sessions on “Virtual Management,” “Having Virtual Performance Management Discussions,” and “Team Cohesiveness.”

The Office also developed specific resource materials to support employees during the pandemic. These were posted on various social media platforms, including on the **Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace** page on GCconnex and the personal blogs of the [Ombud](#) and [Associate Ombud](#) on LinkedIn. Furthermore, we took a series of actions to support employees and managers through the delivery of workshops at the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace throughout the pandemic breakout and lockdown.

National Mental Health Week, May 4-10, 2020, acted as a focal point for concentrated communications and information-sharing initiatives from the Office of the Ombud which addressed the COVID-19 crisis specifically. These included:

- A series of interviews between the Ombud and **Dr. Bill Howatt**, a mental health expert and the Conference Board of Canada's Chief Researcher, on workplace best practices and how to remain productive and healthy during COVID-19; and
- Presentations and products through the Mental Health Centre at ISED that delivered practical advice and activities such as:
 - **Shane Spice**, an expert in the field of mediation and dispute resolution for over 18 years, exploring "Anxiety and COVID-19." Shane said that in order to build our individual and collective resilience coming out of this crisis, we need to talk about stress and anxiety, change the way we respond to them, and start to focus on the things we can control in our environment.
 - **Rachel Caven** delivering an interactive presentation on the top five foods for mental health, how to boost our immune system, tips to get a better sleep when we're not as active as we used to be, ways to drink responsibly, how to improve our concentration while working from home, and easy tips for making healthy meals at home. Rachel is a nutritionist and clinic director with Caven Nutrition Group in Ottawa and she specializes in healthy and sustainable weight loss, digestive issues, hormonal health and stress.
 - Our Associate Ombud, **Eve Nadeau**, providing advice and guidance on "How to restore a working relationship in a virtual context." Eve notes that, despite the fact that many of us are now working virtually, it is important that we continue to humanize our conversations, even though we

may have challenges associated with using new technologies.

- **Judy Mouland** asking "Are you feeling overwhelmed?" and presenting her six-step plan to help us get our days under control. Formerly the CEO of the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, Judy is now a hands-on Accredited Life and Workplace Coach for "brilliant people who are struggling under the surface."
- **Jenalynn To**, a Bankruptcy Analyst with the Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy (OSB) in Toronto, sharing her first meditation video, [Calming in the Storm](#), which she developed to help others cope with the uncertainty of the crisis, and as an opportunity to connect with her family and friends while physically distancing. Jenalynn started practicing yoga two years ago to better manage her mental and physical health.

We also launched **CaféOmbud**, a monthly initiative using MSTeams, that allows ISED employees to express concerns and issues they are facing in the workplace, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis, and while working in a new virtual environment. It is also a platform for sharing new and innovative ideas and best practices for building a healthy workplace of the future.

During our first session, held on June 30, 2020, we heard gratitude for the Office of the Ombud for providing a safe space for employees to share their concerns without fear of reprisal. However, we also heard about situations where some managers were not allowing employees to exercise special leave during the pandemic. This suggests a need for more clarity for managers to help them better and more effectively address the needs of their employees, particularly during a crisis, and for more information regarding use of special leave provisions. For example, some employees were granted special leave because of the impact of the crisis on their capacity to work from home **and** care for their children.

“Social connections are one pillar of mental health. Having a plan for how employees can stay socially connected is important for supporting mental health during and after COVID-19. Isolation and loneliness were a problem before; if this pandemic has done anything positive, it has shone a light on the importance of social connections for positive mental health.”

**– Dr. Bill Howatt,
Chief Researcher,
Conference Board of Canada**

Please see “COPING AND CARING THROUGH COVID-19: Something had to give” by ISED employee Robbyn Plumb on p. 74. Over the course of the pandemic, we noticed more clarity and guidance on the policy with regards to these provisions, avoiding misunderstanding from employees and managers.

It was also suggested during our first CaféOmbud that managers could use more tools and advice to support their employees’ mental health and well-being virtually, while also balancing their own workload pressures and making sure that neither they nor their employees end up experiencing burnout. This is an ongoing issue that needs to be considered in how we support managers in supporting their employees.

Furthermore, we were reminded that the Coronavirus pandemic was not the only crisis confronting Canada and Canadians this past year. The increased focus on and reaction to the ongoing deaths of black and Indigenous peoples at the hands of police forces raised questions about systemic racism within federal organizations. Some employees were not comfortable discussing their concerns about this with their managers and suggested that the department may want to look at ways to make managers and employees more sensitive to race-related issues, and to be more proactive in addressing them.

We will continue to hear the voices of ISED employees through CaféOmbud, because it is only through this kind of open dialogue that we will be able to affect positive change in our workplaces.



ISED and the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

Commissioned by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and developed by Le Bureau de normalisation du Québec and the CSA Group, the [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) “is the first of its kind in the world. [It] is a set of voluntary guidelines, tools and resources intended to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work.”

The Office of the Ombud is using the Standard as a reference in the provision of our services and the delivery of activities through our Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution team and the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace. Applying the Standard has allowed us to:

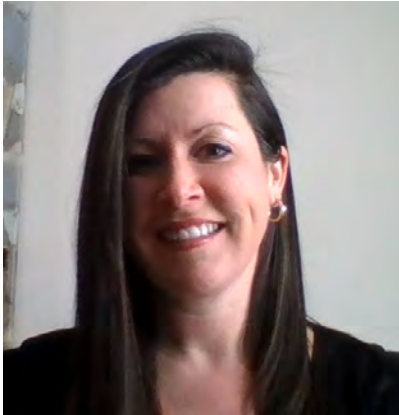
- **Identify areas** that pose a risk of psychological harm to our employees
- **Provide advice to employees on how to control the risks** associated with hazards that cannot be eliminated, such as stressors related to organizational change or job demands
- **Propose best practices** that promote and facilitate psychological health and safety in the workplace
- **Foster a culture** that promotes and embraces positive psychological health and safety throughout the ISED organization

There are 13 psychosocial factors outlined in the Standard that enable organizations to measure the level of psychological health and safety within our workplace. These factors are:

1. Organizational Culture
2. Psychological and Social Support
3. Clear Leadership and Expectations
4. Civility and Respect
5. Psychological Demands
6. Growth and Development
7. Recognition and Reward
8. Involvement and Influence
9. Workload Management
10. Engagement
11. Balance
12. Psychological Protection
13. Protection of Physical Safety

Meet your Ombud team: Nathalie Maria Gagné

“The pandemic taught me to focus on the positive.”



“I am a strong believer in fairness, equality and inclusion, and as a person with an invisible disability, I am proud to self-identify with a hearing impairment.”

– Nathalie Maria Gagné

For over 20 years, Nathalie Maria Gagné has had the federal public service at heart. She joined ISED in 2006 and has a thorough knowledge of the Department, having served in a number of different sectors, from the Communications and Marketing Branch (CMB) and Human Resources (HRB) to Small Business and Marketplace Services (SBMS). Now, as the Marketing and Event Manager at the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, Nathalie brings both her experience and a passion for supporting the mental health of her colleagues.

“I am a strong believer in fairness, equality and inclusion,” she says. “As a person with an invisible disability, I am proud to self-identify with a hearing impairment.”

Nathalie has been at the forefront of pivoting the delivery of the Centre’s learning events and wellness activities from in-person to virtual as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. She also moderates the Centre’s events, something she is very comfortable doing as a former promoter and commercial broadcaster with Radio Canada and TQS/TVA in Gatineau, Quebec.

Being part of these events, which were aimed at supporting the mental health and well-being of public servants, particularly during the pandemic, also brought her new perspectives on how her friends and colleagues deal with life’s challenges. “It’s important that we get the help we need because we need to take care of ourselves first, or we won’t be able to look after others who may need us,” she says.

“In-person social connections are important to me,” she adds, “but this crisis also taught me to focus on the positive. So, while adapting to working virtually was a challenge at first, I now see it as a great learning experience.”

You can reach Nathalie Maria at nathaliemaria.gagne@canada.ca.

“I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the support you have provided. From my personal experience, I found your support and professional help, advice and coaching invaluable for two reasons: First, it creates a trusting and reliable relationship between me and someone who is professional and with whom I can share the painful experience I [had] or am [having]. Second, through your coaching and professional counsel, I was able to have a constructive and mature discussion with people directly with whom I have a problem. I felt supported and empowered in such a delicate situation.”
– A CPER client in 2019-2020

A Progress Report from 2018-2019

Actions taken across ISED in response to 2018-2019 recommendations

The following section identifies the findings and recommendations presented in the first Annual Report (2018-2019) of the ISED Ombud. It has been updated to show actions taken by the Department, including Regions, in 2019-2020 to address last year’s issues and suggestions.

Finding #1: Shortcomings regarding psychological and social support for employees

Definition:

“Psychological and social support comprises all supportive social interactions available at work, either with co-workers or supervisors. It refers to the degree of social and emotional integration and trust among co-workers and supervisors. It also refers to the level of help and assistance provided by others when one is performing tasks. Equally important are the workers’ perceptions and awareness of organizational support. When workers perceive organizational support, it means they believe their organization values their contributions, is committed to ensuring their psychological well-being, and provides meaningful support if this well-being is compromised.”³

What we heard from employees seeking support:

- Employees are reluctant to speak openly with managers about personal and professional problems, including mental health conditions, due to fear of reprisal, being judged, stigma and the potential negative impact on their career progression.

³ Factor #2, National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety: Psychological and Social Support.

- There is a lack of flexibility or timely action on the part of certain managers of employees who have a mental health condition with functional limitations and who require temporary accommodations in order to continue working, or to successfully return to work.
- A lack of openness has been shown by certain managers to letting employees take time off work to participate in completely confidential informal consultations, and sometimes, even reluctance in participating in conflict resolution processes, such as mediation.

Recommendations:

Communicate clearly to all supervisors, managers and executives the expectation from the organization that they:

- Create and foster an environment in which every ISED employee feels free to discuss a mental health condition or a workplace issue they are experiencing, without fear of reprisal;
- Provide their employees with unrestricted and confidential access to the Ombud, to any other informal conflict resolution mechanisms, and to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Equip managers to become more comfortable in proactively dealing with mental health conditions, including participating in training sessions such as “The Working Mind.”
- Encourage employees and managers to participate in learning events at the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace—learning about best practices, available tools and practical tips that can be leveraged to build healthy management practices. This is essential in a shifting culture that supports an agile, inclusive and equipped workforce.

Actions taken by the Department:

Human Resources Branch (HRB)

The **Corporate Mental Health Program (CMHP)**

offered a number of training initiatives and events during 2019-2020, including:

- SafeTALK training session on suicide alertness – this session helped participants recognize a person with thoughts of suicide and connect them with resources who can help them in choosing to live.
- The 13 workplace psychological risk factors – working with the **Corporate Occupational Health and Safety Program**, this session offered training to all workplace Occupational Health and Safety committees and representatives which included a module on the 13 workplace psychological risk factors as identified by the [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health in the Workplace](#) (for more information on the Standard, please see p.44 in this Report).
- Mental Health awareness and resources – training was offered to all ISED employees from coast to coast, which included: providing information to help increase mental health awareness; understanding the Mental Health Continuum; and identifying actions to take if employees or managers notice a decline in an employee’s mental health. Employees were also equipped with available resources, notified of training opportunities and provided with information on the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- The **Wellness and Inclusion Team (WIT)**, responsible for maintaining the Department’s Positive Space Initiative, provided in-person training (prior to the COVID-19 crisis) to ISED employees from across the country. This gave employees and management information on psychological support, tips, tools and resources for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, questioning and two-spirit (LGBTQ2+) communities. The overall goal of ISED’s Positive Space initiative is to enhance the work experience

of all employees by creating a safer, more open-minded work environment, which it does by creating awareness, safe space, and engaging volunteer ambassadors who promote diversity and inclusion of LGBTQ2+ in the workplace. During the 2019-2020 fiscal year, ISED's Positive Space Initiative welcomed a total of 150+ Positive Space Ambassadors representing all sectors of ISED from all regions and the NCR. Fiscal year 2019-was the last year for WIT delivery of this training within ISED; the Canada School of Public Service has developed a program that is now being provided to all federal government employees.

In the Regions

Atlantic

- According to a survey by Mental Health Research Canada, Nova Scotians were most likely to experience higher levels of anxiety and depression since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic than other Canadians. According to the survey, 27% of Nova Scotians reported experiencing high levels of anxiety since the pandemic started, a considerable increase from the six per cent reported pre-pandemic. It is worth noting that the survey was conducted at the end of April, which was a particularly difficult month in the **Atlantic Region**, and in Nova Scotia specifically: in April 2020, Nova Scotians faced the devastating shootings out of Portapique, a potential second shooting scare, and news of the HMCS Fredericton military helicopter crash, which claimed a Nova Scotian among its victims. Conscious of the impacts of these incidents on ISED regional staff, on top of the unfolding COVID-19 crisis, the Regional Director General reached out to all staff to address incidents as they arose, reminding employees that while we're all self-isolating at home, we're not alone. The messaging also promoted the confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and encouraged staff to reach out to their managers with any

concerns. In addition to the all-staff emails, during the first few months of the pandemic the Strategy and Innovation Policy Sector (SIPS) in the Atlantic region organized weekly virtual "tea-time" sessions to check-in with staff. Nathalie Auger, the Director of ISED's Corporate Mental Health Program, participated in one of the sessions (May 1, 2020) in which she discussed EAP services.

Quebec

- As part of its efforts to build healthy management practices and to shift the organizational culture toward building "an agile, inclusive and equipped workforce," **Quebec Region** implemented a "skip-level" meeting program which allows employees to meet with their director on a friendly and informal basis; each employee met their director at least three times over the course of the year.
- The Region also featured a number of presentations and discussions on health and well-being that covered topics such as the 13 psychological risk factors associated with the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace and the "Fairness Triangle," as well as an exercise session on mindfulness. (For more information on the "Fairness Triangle," please see page 11 of this Report.)

Ontario

- There was a noted increase in interest in promoting overall health and wellness in the **Ontario Region** over the course of the 2019-2020 fiscal year. Staff undertook a number of initiatives which included activities such as Lunchtime Health Walks and Lunch & Learns, all organized by the Staff Advisory Committee (SAC). The Management Team supported these efforts and continues to promote departmental initiatives related to health and wellness using tools like the digital screens on the 3rd and 4th floors of 151 Yonge St. in Toronto with local staff developing

content for the screen hubs; this messaging complements corporate messaging from Ottawa.

- Ontario Region also demonstrated its commitment to training as an important element of workplace well-being at ISED by organizing a number of learning events over the course of the year. These included a presentation on “Mental Health Strategies for the Workplace,” participation in Bell Canada’s “Let’s Talk” Webcasts, a series of staff consultations on the findings and final roll-up of 2018 Ontario Region PSES results, and a special Reconciliation initiative known as the Kairos Blanket Exercise (see side story) (see story on page 50).
- One of the training highlights of 2019-2020 in Ontario Region was regional participation in a national, all-day session addressing Positive Space, Duty to Accommodate, Mental Health, and Unconscious Bias.
- **Competition Bureau** employees in Ontario were particularly involved in the Guarding Minds at Work initiative, which includes a psychosocial survey and tools for creating psychologically safe workplaces.

Prairie and Northern

- The **Prairie and Northern Region** adopted in earnest the 13 Psychosocial Factors rolled out by the Human Resources Branch in 2019-20. At monthly Strategy and Innovation Policy Sector (SIPS) meetings led by the RDG, rotating staff presented to the branch on one of the factors. These presentations provided staff with an opportunity to hear from their colleagues and share stories in an open forum about the factor up for discussion.
- Spectrum and Telecommunications Sector (STS) in the Western Region have designated mental first aid staff, who are also members of the STS national mental health committee.
- The 2020 Vision newsletter distributed to all PNR employees across sectors also consistently featured a section relating to mental health and wellness with regular tips and links to more information and support.

- Prairie and Northern Region employees were encouraged to participate in training offered by the Canada School of Public Service and those offered by the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, while Measurement Canada and Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy employees attended “How to Deal with Difficult Conversations” and Conflict Management training in the Winnipeg office this year. One-on-one time with the CPER trainer was also offered to staff who wished to explore personal issues.

Pacific

- **Pacific Region** strives to promote a psychologically healthy and supportive environment for employees by encouraging open and collaborative communication. Regionally promoted mental health initiatives, like Mental Health First Aid and events from the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace were offered in the PAC region during 2019-2020 – pre-COVID-19. With the shift to virtual work, and taking into consideration the increased psychological stress brought on by the pandemic, managers in the region encouraged employee participation in virtual team building events, like weekly coffee chats and Friday afternoon virtual get-togethers. Tips and tools to deal with pandemic-related stresses, as well as the contact information for EAP, were also regularly shared with employees.
- Courses offered through the Canada School of Public Service related to breaking down barriers, Aboriginal awareness and support for LGBTQ+ employees, has helped the Region continue to promote virtual tools that provide social support to employees. In 2019, the Region had 17 employees take the Positive Space Training, which resulted in six Positive Space Ambassadors.

Kairos Blanket Exercise: Re-enacting our first piece of history together

A highlight of activities held in **Ontario Region** in 2019-2020 was a special Reconciliation initiative known as the Kairos Blanket Exercise. A teaching tool that shares the historic and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, it reaches both the mind and the heart in a very powerful way. The half-day program blends historical data and facts with personal accounts and stories, thus providing a deeper and more meaningful way to learn about truth and reconciliation.



Source: www.kairoscanada.org. Used with permission.

Each participant steps on coloured blankets lying on the floor. Each of these blankets represent the territories that Indigenous Peoples occupied before the arrival of European settlers. Participants hear and enact our first piece of history: Indigenous Peoples sharing the land, meeting the new settlers, and forming collaborative relationships with them. The exercise contributes to the movement for reconciliation through education across the country.

Finding #2: Issues related to successfully managing workload to promote work-life balance

Definition:

“Workload management is present in a work environment where assigned tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the time available. This is the risk factor that many working Canadians describe as being the biggest workplace stressor (i.e., having too much to do and not enough time to do it). It has been demonstrated that it is not just the amount of work that makes a difference but also the extent to which workers have the resources (time, equipment, support) to do the work well.”⁴

There is a direct link between workload management and psychological safety (addressed in the previous finding). In order to be able to better prioritize files and offer the necessary support for success, employees should feel free to discuss this issue with their supervisor.

According to the National Standard, “Balance is present in a work environment where there is acceptance of the need for a sense of harmony between the demands of personal life, family, and work.”

⁴ Factor #9, National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety: Workload Management.

What we heard from employees seeking support:

ISED employees are afraid to:

- Ask their manager for flexible work arrangements, particularly telework, when experiencing a difficult period
- Claim paid overtime for fear of being judged and/or scorned
- Address the lack of workload equity among employees for fear of being marginalized or sidelined by the manager

Recommendations:

- Supervisors, managers and executives should be open to the use of telework in order to accommodate employees who are temporarily experiencing a personal or work-related difficult time and that openness should be communicated to employees.
- Consider all flexible work arrangements, whenever possible, in order to provide work-life balance so that ISED continues to be a competitive employer in the labour market.
- Streamline or eliminate unnecessary administrative processes to reduce stress in the workplace and rebalance the workload within teams.

Actions taken by the Department:

Human Resources Branch (HRB)

- As part of the training program for managers in the area of Performance Management, modules addressing Labour Relations, including elements on flexible work arrangements, have been updated.
- Also, as part of a performance management response to these recommendations, executives' PMA commitments and measures included the following criteria:

- Culture: implement innovative workplace initiatives that have a positive impact on the culture of team, sector or department
- Agile and Purpose-driven: I will streamline approval processes within my team
- The centralization of non-EX data-entry related to staffing offers to the HR Express team decreased the chances of additional workload on those employees who would be impacted by data errors, including the employee's manager, HR coordinators and compensation advisors.

In the Regions

Prairie and Northern Region

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some regional staff were working from home on a part time basis in order to better manage their work-life balance. Most **Prairie and Northern Region** staff were equipped with laptops and so the transition mid-March was seamless.
- The Regional Director is committed to compensating employees fairly for overtime and values flexibility in scheduling.
- In order to balance workload in SIPS, the teams created a "Super PAC" model that brings together expertise from Policy, Analysis and Intelligence (PAI), Finance & Administration, and Communications in the development and delivery of VIP events.
- Staff in STS have worked between structural levels (District and Regional) to distribute work equitably among staff. They have developed a model to determine the percentage of incoming and ongoing work to staff, and when an imbalance is detected, the work is redistributed.
- Units in the Region have adopted GCDocs for file storage and version control; as a result, the administrative burden of information management has been lessened.

Ontario

- Following the **Ontario Region** All Staff Retreat in Fall 2019, flexible work arrangements and job opportunities were highlighted as areas for further consideration. The Senior Management Team reviewed Ottawa’s telework policy to determine how it could be adapted in the Region, and recognized that while not all positions are suited for alternative work arrangements given operational requirements and other factors, there may be some ad hoc, short-term situations where such arrangements could be approved in advance. Since the COVID-19 crisis, however, the Region has seen the majority of staff successfully transfer their “normal office” setting to their “working from home” setting. Managers and employees maintain regular team meetings and continue to participate actively with colleagues from different sectors through Zoom and MS Teams. Employees and managers remain engaged through the use of multiple technologies.
- Fostering an environment of engagement among staff has been a priority for Ontario Region, including hosting a wide range of events which provided opportunities for staff to step away from regular tasks, get to know and reconnect with each other, and shine a different light on the work we do as public servants. Staff led a number of celebratory events, including lunches, Lunch & Learns, tours, and the inaugural Official Languages Annual Forum. During 2019 National Public Service Week, there was an Opening Ceremony, Yoga, and Open House, with lots of ice cream and cake, which also featured during 2019 Canada Day celebrations. Similar events in 2020 took on a completely new dimension because of the COVID-19 crisis when most regional ISED employees – like their colleagues all across the country – were on lockdown. NPSW was celebrated with two “Jeopardy” games, a “Best Home Office Contest,” and “Healthy Tips” sessions on Zoom, while Canada Day saw another “Jeopardy” game via Zoom, this one with a Canadiana theme.

Pacific

- Before working from home became the new norm, **Pacific Region** already had some telework agreements in place with some employees. Managers were as flexible as possible with their employees if they needed to change their work-from-home day, or required an extended period of telework to accommodate temporary personal or work-related difficulty. That situation changed drastically as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, however. Most employees in the Pacific Region were already equipped with tablets, when telework became the default, which helped ease the transition from the traditional workplace. Since then, the Region has provided virtual opportunities for employee engagement by scheduling weekly morning coffee chats and social events. In addition, more formal learning events that focus on stress, coping skills and mental health, offered by the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, have been actively promoted in the Region and well-attended by employees.
- Maintaining a healthy work-life balance and supporting the mental wellness of ISED employees has always been a priority in Pacific Region. Managers encourage employees to take their annual leave during the year in which they accrue it, and work to ensure an equitable balance of work amongst employees. In situations where employees have expressed concerns about their workload – and they are encouraged to do so – managers have worked with their teams to find solutions such as reassigning some of the work or maximizing teamwork.

Atlantic

- During the pandemic, working from home went from being about work-life balance to the new normal in **Atlantic Region**. As a result, regional SIPS staff organized a presentation on stress and mental health while working from home. The presentation was led by Dr. Stan Kutcher, a Canadian Senator representing Nova Scotia who is also a professor emeritus with the Department of Psychiatry at Dalhousie University. The virtual session, which was held on June 18, 2020, was open to all ISED Atlantic employees.
- In the 2019 Public Service Employee Survey results, regional offices scored higher than the Public Service, ISED, and SIPS on the majority of issues raised in the workplace well-being section, such as believing that their immediate supervisor cares about them, that their workplace is psychologically healthy, as well as being recognized for their work. However, regional office employees also reported feeling

stressed at work because of unreasonable deadlines, compensation-related issues, and feeling emotionally drained after work. Executives and managers in the Atlantic region keep those results in mind as they continue to encourage their employees to reach out to them with any workload concerns.

Quebec

- Discussions on the implementation of a policy on telework were underway in **Quebec Region** long before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which made full implementation during the crisis relatively straightforward. A procedure had been put in place for “ad hoc” telework requests where employees could simply email their requests to an Outlook inbox after discussing with their team leads. Other flexible work arrangements, such as compressed work schedules, have also been implemented.

ISED Creates a Workplace Accommodation Centre

In support of the [Accessible Canada Act](#), ISED has established the Workplace Accommodation Centre (WAC). Phase I of the Centre’s work will be to increase support to employees with disabilities (temporary, long-term and permanent), and their managers. Phase II, beginning in FY 2021-22, will include coordination of sick leave, return-to-work, and remain-at-work plans.

The Workplace Accommodation Centre encourages a collaborative approach in addressing and supporting accommodation requests by employees. This multidisciplinary approach – facilitated by the Centre,

in collaboration with stakeholders – is to help ensure that subject matter expert advice and services are provided by the appropriate resources and in accordance with their relevant mandates.

“Managers play a pivotal role in shaping the work environment for our employees, by setting the tone and creating a positive work culture,” says Jennifer Bard, ISED’s Project Lead on the Centre. “A supportive environment where everyone feels valued and has opportunities to provide feedback can significantly improve employee engagement and enhance performance. Every employee is

unique. Some employees may need adaptive tools or support measures to contribute to their maximum potential in the workplace.”

“Disabilities,” Jennifer points out, “is an umbrella term” covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, and she provides the following for clarification: an impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.

“In the vast majority of situations, informal and open communications between the employee and the manager can go a long way to identifying and addressing workplace adjustment needs,” she says. She recommends the following questions to help managers start a conversation with their employee:

- Do you need any tools (e.g., equipment or software, configuration of the work environment) or support measures (e.g., flexible work hours, telework, and written instructions) to support your success?
- Do you have any accessibility needs I can help with?
- What would the ideal work environment look like for you?
- Were any adaptive tools or supportive measures helpful in a previous job?

The objectives of ISED’s Workplace Accommodation Centre are to:

- Facilitate timely access to and ongoing support for workplace accommodations to enable ISED employees to succeed in the workplace
- Provide greater support and assistance to employees and their managers
- Increase access and consistency in the application of workplace accommodations
- Foster an inclusive culture by increasing awareness and reducing workplace barriers.

“Departments have been asking for more guidance, communication tools, and access to expert advice and support in this important area,” says ISED Deputy Minister Simon Kennedy. “Gaps exist between knowledge and perceptions – which may lead to unintended outcomes for our employees; there is also a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities. The ISED Workplace Accommodation Centre will not only help our employees, but by centralizing expertise and support, it will also provide increased assistance to managers, who have generally not been well equipped to successfully address DTA issues.”

You can reach the ISED Workplace Accommodations Centre at ic.WAC-CAMT.ic@canada.ca.

Finding #3: Shortcomings regarding interpersonal relationships and lack of civility and respect in the workplace

Definition:

“Civility and respect are present in a work environment where workers are respectful and considerate in their interactions with one another, as well as with customers, clients, and the public. Civility and respect are based on showing esteem, care, and consideration for others, and acknowledging their dignity. An organization with good civility and respect would be able to state that:

- a) People treat each other with respect and consideration in the workplace;
- b) The organization effectively handles conflicts between stakeholders (workers, customers, clients, public, suppliers, etc.);
- c) Workers from all backgrounds are treated fairly in our workplace; and
- d) The organization has effective ways of addressing inappropriate behaviour by customers or clients.”⁵

What we heard from employees seeking support:

- Employees were humiliated or belittled during team meetings.
- Derogatory remarks were made towards employees, use of direct and aggressive language and inappropriate tones or even personal remarks were made during bilateral meetings, without witnesses.
- Employees were ignored by their supervisor and their colleagues and experienced stressful situations caused by isolation.
- Employees received highly negative feedback which was unrelated to their actual work performance.

- Some managers are not aware that they are using direct, offensive, and at times abrasive, language.
- Rather than rewarding employees for their successes, managers demotivate them with examples of poor performance, which are mostly irrelevant to their performance at work.
- Some employees seem to falsely take credit for the successes of others, or neglect to publicly recognize the significant contributions of their colleagues on certain projects.
- Some employees are not careful to respect a peaceful and productive work environment.

Recommendation:

- Communicate clearly to all supervisors, managers and executives the expectation from the organization that they:
 - create and foster a culture of civility and respect in the ISED workplace
 - more proactively promote and encourage access to the informal conflict resolution mechanisms (Ombud and CPER) at all times, without any barriers; employees should feel confident to use these services without providing justification, in order to preserve their confidentiality.

⁵ Factor #4, National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety: Civility and Respect.

Actions taken by the Department:

Human Resources Branch (HRB)

- On August 26, 2019 the Department launched the Addressing Your Workplace Concerns Portal, an intranet platform designed to help employees understand their options when they are facing an issue or decision that may have a potential negative impact on them, another person or the organization. The portal provides clear information on what employees can do if they:
 - Believe they are being harassed
 - Have information on, or have witnessed, a situation that they perceive as unethical
 - Have been injured or feel unsafe at work
 - Believe their workplace accommodation needs are not being respected or met
- In addition to hosting events which promoted civility and respect, HRB also created events promoting a diverse, safe, respectful, healthy and inclusive workplace. These were timed to coincide with a number of national and international health and cultural promotion days and events, such as:
 - Day of Pink is the International Day Against Bullying, Discrimination, Homophobia, Transphobia and Transmisogyny
 - National AccessAbility Week
 - National Indigenous History Month: Explore Indigenous Culture!
 - Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie.
- HRB also implemented a “Did You Know Series” to help increase awareness of religious diversity. The **Wellness and Inclusion Team** developed the series to provide ISED employees with information on various religious and secular celebrations throughout the year.
- The **Employment Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EEDI)** team hosted consultation sessions to help gain

insight into some of the employment equity issues that were identified by ISED employees through the 2018 Public Service Employee Survey. Feedback received from these consultations was shared with management and helped in the development of subsequent departmental strategies.

- The Department also created the **Intergenerational Workplace Challenges Working Group** for the purpose of proposing and examining recommendations on challenges such as:
 - Dealing with generational differences in learning and communication
 - Addressing issues around collaboration and team spirit
 - Managing a diverse ISED workforce while meeting everyone’s needs.

In the Regions

Pacific

- In addition to having an “open door” policy for employees to discuss and deal with managers on matters concerning respect and civility in the workplace, the **Pacific Regional Office** fosters a culture of civility and respect in the workplace by actively promoting events that enhance the development of interpersonal relationships amongst colleagues and between managers and their employees. These events included diversity awareness initiatives like: A Celebration of Vaisakhi (April 13/19); National Acadian Day (Aug 15/19); Indonesian Fest (Sept 21/19) and Rendez-vous de la Francophonie (every March). Other events included anti-bullying initiatives like International Day of Pink (every April); and Aboriginal Reconciliation on Orange shirt day (every September).
- The Pacific region also has an employee-driven Team Spirit Committee that continues to promote events like Chinese New Year, St. Patrick’s Day, NPSW activities, and fundraising for the GCWCC.

Quebec

- **Quebec Region** took a number of steps in 2019-2020 to ensure employees maintain civility and respect in the workplace, including:
 - Providing reminders on what constitutes “civil communication” throughout offices and meeting rooms
 - Reminding staff that disrespectful communication is unacceptable
 - Including a commitment to creating a respectful, diverse and inclusive workplace in Performance Management Agreements
 - Providing training on civil communication and preventing harassment in the workplace, as well as on communicating within a team
 - Referring employees who were experiencing conflict in the workplace to CPER and the ISED Ombud

Prairie and Northern Region

- With the arrival of a new Regional Director General in early 2018, the **Prairie and Northern Region** took an opportunity to reset and renew relationships throughout the Region.
- The SIPS team enjoyed an annual in-person meeting where staff from three provinces and one territory had an opportunity to meet and deepen relationships, share in joint learning activities, and interact on a social level.
- At the monthly SIPS team meetings, managers often highlight achievements of individuals or teams, an opportunity to provide recognition of good work in a low-pressure environment.
- Other sectors in the PNR also hold annual or bi-annual “coffee with the director” style meetings to provide feedback and build a team atmosphere.

- The 2020 Vision newsletter allocates space each month to feature an employee; either their work at ISED, their volunteer work, or some personal interest aspect. In this way, employees are offered insight into their colleagues, building a sense of team.

Ontario

- In the **Ontario Region**, managers and staff remain united in creating a culture of civility and respect. The Region fosters an environment of open and timely communications and staff have been attending management meetings on a rotating basis. The Regional Director General (RDG) provides regular email updates and holds three all-staff meetings a year. Most teams have an “open door” policy, so if staff would like to attend another group’s regular meetings, they can make arrangements with the appropriate manager.
- One important step in removing barriers between managers and staff was the creation of the Staff Advisory Committee in 2018. The Committee is composed of volunteers from each sector and continues to play a key role in setting the agenda for the all-staff meetings, planning the annual All Staff Retreat, as well as identifying group training options that promote personal and professional development for all employees; responsibilities rotate among each member – everyone takes their turn minute-taking, polling for and posting the agenda, and logistical set-up of the next meeting.
- Stemming from 2019 All Staff Retreat, some staff identified a need/desire for building and improving relationships with HQ groups. In 2019-2020, the Ontario Region continued to provide opportunities for staff to meet their colleagues in Ottawa, in particular, those in the communications, finance and policy areas. Staff are also encouraged to attend the ADM’s bi-weekly teleconferences with all SIPS staff to hear about initiatives across the Sector.

- Another example of how the Ontario Region promotes respect and civility in the workplace is “Coffee with the RDG,” a casual morning “coffee-break” type session during which RDG spends an hour discussing topics of employees’ choosing. Staff are encouraged to suggest improvements to the workplace and “out of the box” brainstorming is welcome.
- **Workplace Accommodations:** Providing information about workplace accommodations and why they are important to the success of an organization.
- **The Positive Space Initiative:** Helping build and support a more diverse, safe, respectful, healthy and inclusive workplace for people of all genders and sexual orientations.

Atlantic

- SIPS in the **Atlantic Region** organized in-person **Diversity and Inclusion Training** sessions led by Christine Mao, Wellness and Inclusion Manager with the Human Resources Branch, on October 8, 2019 (Dartmouth, NS), October 9, 2019 (Halifax, NS), and October 10, 2019 (St. John’s, NL). The sessions delved into a range of topics including:
 - **Defeating Unconscious Bias** (Mandatory ISED training): Helping better recognize and defeat the unconscious bias we may have by using five strategies.
 - **Corporate Mental Health Program:** Providing an overview of the Corporate Mental Health Program and departmental services available to everyone.
- SIPS in the Atlantic region also organized an in-person **Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution (CPER)** training session on March 12, 2020 that was led by Michael Nadon, a conflict resolution practitioner with the CPER team. The session was open to all ISED Atlantic employees and was presented through two workshops:
 - **Civility and Respect in the Workplace** explored what is meant by respect and civility, and the diversity of expectations in the workplace.
 - **Fearless Feedback** introduced a model for giving and receiving feedback.

“I was going through a difficult time at work, where I felt bullied, harassed, not appreciated by my manager. Confidence in myself went down and depression took over. At my first meeting with the Ombud, I found the support I was looking for. I was heard, understood, guided, and being helped. I left with a peaceful mind as I felt reassured that there was a solution to my situation. Much appreciated it.”

– A client of the Ombud in 2019-2020

Meet your Ombud team: Francine Labarge

“Providing the highest possible quality of service.”



“While I enjoyed spending time with my family, particularly my grandchildren, and friends, in retirement, I knew that I could make a difference supporting the Ombud and his team. Providing the highest possible quality of service is what I did for 20 years – that’s not something that goes away once you retire.”

– Francine Labarge

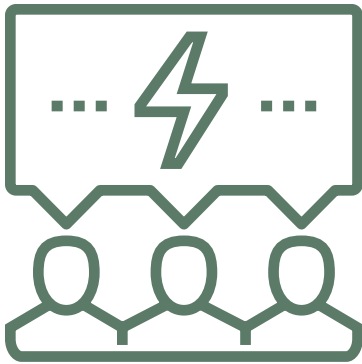
Francine Labarge probably had one of the shortest retirements in federal public service history: she left her 20-year full-time career on June 28, 2019 and came back to the federal fold on March 2, 2020. Moreover, it was the Ombud at ISSED who brought her out of that short retirement.

“While I enjoyed spending time with my family, particularly my grandchildren, and friends, in retirement,” she says, “I knew that I could make a difference supporting the Ombud and his team. Providing the highest possible quality of service is what I did for 20 years – that’s not something that goes away once you retire.”

Francine is a Program and Administrative Officer with the Office of the Ombud and she provides not only service of “the highest quality,” but also a service that is invaluable in ensuring the success of the whole Ombud team. She has directly worked with CPER and the Mental Health Centre staff on a range of products, services and processes; she is responsible for such important functions as providing monthly budget updates, creating surveys on SurveyGizmo, and tracking team projects and workloads. She also helped with the restructuring of the Ombud’s Office and the creation of a new administrative procedures manual covering a range of processes.

Francine has enjoyed working remotely from home during the pandemic. “It has successfully allowed me to better focus on high priorities,” she says, despite the initial isolation from family and friends. She was impressed with how her colleagues worked during the COVID-19 crisis, saying, “They all coped extremely well – not surprising to me, though, given the nature of their role in mental health and employee well-being.” She adds, “They have helped me place a greater importance on my own mental and physical health as a result.”

You can reach Francine via email at francine.labarge@canada.ca.



2019-2020 Findings and Recommendations

Moving Forward Together

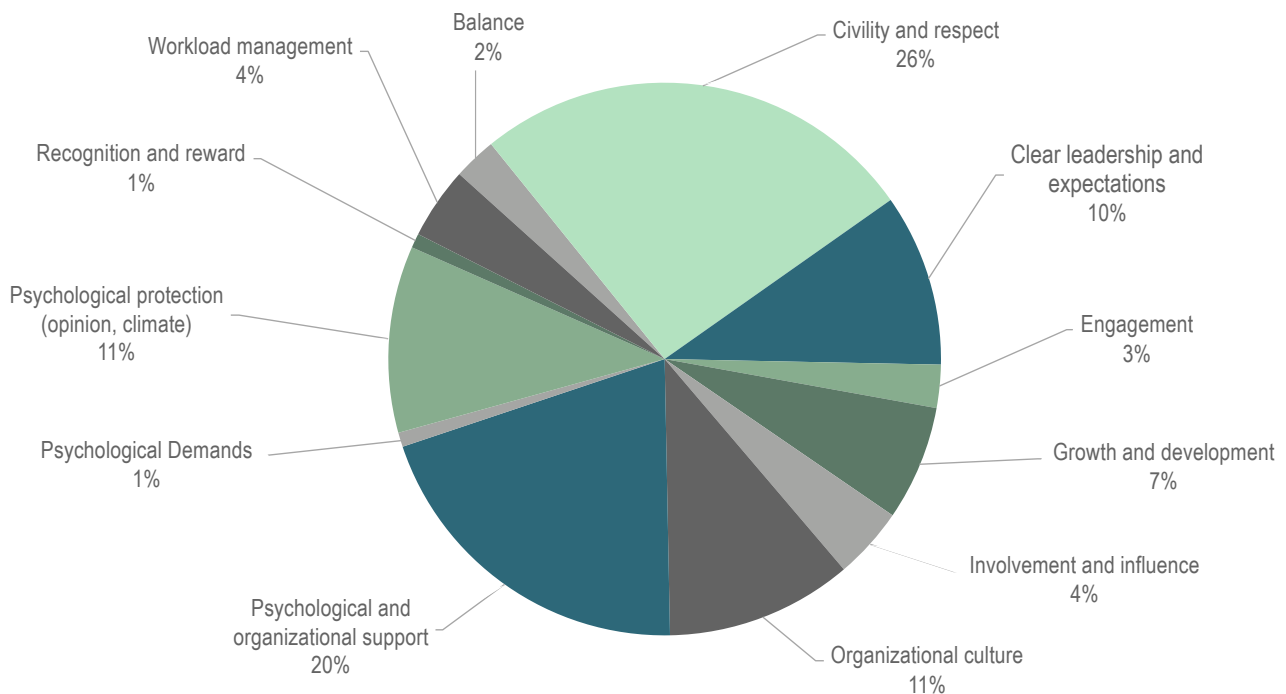
The coronavirus pandemic has had remarkable impacts on all aspects of life – home and families, work and colleagues, friends and associates – as well as on our physical, emotional and mental health and well-being. As noted above, it is for this reason that the period covering this year’s Annual Report has been extended to include the first three months of the COVID-19 crisis (March 16 to June 30, 2020). Our findings and recommendations in this Report reflect in large degree the new working realities and challenges in which we find ourselves as a result of these extraordinary times.

One thing came across loud and clear during our conversations with ISED employees during this period: they were not only distressed by the workplace issues they were already facing, but these issues were further compounded by some level of anxiety and distress related to the COVID-19 crisis.

We identified a need for “social connection” now, more than ever before, between employees, team members, and employees and management. The “Employee Pulse Survey” conducted in April and May of 2020 (see “COVID-19 and ISED” on p.37 for more detailed findings from the Survey) provided clear statistics that reinforce employees’ need to receive social and psychological support, clear leadership and expectations, and a better prioritization of work demands, to allow for better workload management; many clients of the Ombud’s Office indicated that they worked considerable amounts of overtime, with some teams and sectors doing so around the clock, in order to support the vision and mission of ISED in supporting Canadians through the crisis.

The findings which follow are based on issues raised during our confidential consultations throughout the year, and are linked to the 13 Psychological Factors that comprise the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (see p.44 of this Report for more details).

Issues Associated with Psychological Factors – FY 2019-2020



For the fiscal year 2019-2020, when linked to these factors, we find four main areas of vulnerability to our organization. They are:

- Civility and Respect
- Psychological and Social Support
- Organizational Culture
- Psychological Protection

Issues discussed with the Office of the Ombud related to Civility and Respect accounted for 26% of our consultations in FY 2019-2020, with 20% related to the Psychological and Social Support factor, followed by, in equal measure, issues related to Organizational Culture and Psychological Protection at 11%.

The first two factors reflect that the main issues raised were related to interpersonal conflicts between employees or between employees and their supervisors and managers, as well as issues related to a perception of harassment, which is of particular relevance to the Civility and Respect factor.

The third factor, Organizational Culture, indicates evidence of a workplace culture that is not aligned with the Public Service values, or the values of the Department. Such situations could be specific to individual work units or within a directorate. In addition, issues raised also related to potential conflicts of interest, which the client did not know how to address, or they wanted to disclose to the case to the Ombud.

With respect to Psychological Protection, it appears that some clients did not feel free to express their opinions, ask questions, seek feedback or share ideas out of concern for being labelled troublesome, or left out of the group. This shows us that the emotional well-being of employees has not been taken into consideration in a way that takes all the necessary steps to minimize their mental health risks. When psychological safety exists within a team, better team spirit, greater commitment and improved work performance can be observed.

Finding #1: Shortcomings regarding lack of civility and respect in the workplace

Definition:

“Civility and respect are present in a work environment where workers are respectful and considerate in their interactions with one another, as well as with customers, clients, and the public. Civility and respect are based on showing esteem, care, and consideration for others, and acknowledging their dignity.

“An organization with good civility and respect would be able to state that:

- a) people treat each other with respect and consideration in the workplace
- b) the organization effectively handles conflicts between stakeholders (workers, customers, clients, public, suppliers, etc.)
- c) workers from all backgrounds are treated fairly in our workplace
- d) the organization has effective ways of addressing inappropriate behaviour by customers or clients.”⁶

What we heard from employees seeking support:

- Some employees consulted with the Office of the Ombud regarding situations involving comments they received that may have been perceived as intimidating or harassing. For these employees, getting a second opinion about their perceptions enabled them to seek further support; this helped them talk to the person who made the comments, thus taking action to resolve the situation.
- Other employees faced more systemic issues that affected multiple members of their team, and they sought a constructive approach that would be in the best interests of all parties involved. They wanted an option that would resolve the situation collegially

and effectively. Some issues raised in this context related to recurring abrasive behavior, non-inclusive comments, or complex multi-issue situations.

Recommendations:

- We recommend that managers strongly encourage their employees to consult conflict resolution practitioners quickly, involving as few people as possible, and at the lowest hierarchical level; this allows everyone to maximize resolution opportunities (Managers should clearly communicate to the parties involved their expectations regarding the responsibility of employees to seek such help in order to effectively restore their working relationships. Management is expected to provide the parties involved with both moral support and the time during working hours to resolve the conflict).
- We recommend that managers communicate clearly the fact that consulting with any of the conflict resolution mechanisms **will never be reflected negatively** in the feedback provided through performance management. To the contrary, employees who find the courage to resolve their conflicts at work should be recognized by their manager for their initiative in exploring resolution and thus allowing for the maintenance of a positive working environment.
- When informed of issues in the workplace that may have a negative impact on the psychological health of another person, managers have a duty to act. Likewise, employees who witness situations that compromise the psychological health of another person, or their organizational unit, have a responsibility to speak up so that constructive means can be considered in order to rectify them. Such duty and responsibility should be communicated regularly to managers and employees.

⁶ Factor #4, National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety: Civility and Respect

Finding #2: Issues related to providing psychological and social support in the workplace

Definition:

“Psychological and social support comprises all supportive social interactions available at work, either with co-workers or supervisors. It refers to the degree of social and emotional integration and trust among co-workers and supervisors. It refers also to the level of help and assistance provided by others when one is performing tasks. Equally important are the workers’ perceptions and awareness of organizational support. When workers perceive organizational support, it means they believe their organization values their contributions, is committed to ensuring their psychological well-being, and provides meaningful support if this well-being is compromised.

“An organization with good psychological and social support would be able to state that:

- a) the organization offers services or benefits that address worker psychological and mental health
- b) workers feel part of a community and that the people they are working with are helpful in fulfilling the job requirements
- c) the organization has a process in place to intervene if an employee looks distressed while at work
- d) workers feel supported by the organization when they are dealing with personal or family issues
- e) the organization supports workers who are returning to work after time off due to a mental health condition
- f) people in the organization have a good understanding of the importance of worker mental health.”⁷

What we heard from employees seeking support:

- Employees and managers were seeking advice on how to communicate their distress regarding their capacity to deal with the work volume and priorities. They wanted to learn how to get support from their peers and supervisors. Professional and personal work-life balance is affected by the new working realities: there is less of a difference between the working day (at the office) and personal life (at home), as the vast majority of employees are now working remotely. There is a strong correlation between how we handle workload and priorities, and the psychological and social support to cope with high volume of work, which may not be sustainable in the long term. We have seen teams that were excellent in sharing the workload, and others that were not.
- There is a lack of social connection between some employees and their managers. There is a greater need for employees to have more frequent connections with colleagues, team members, and supervisors, in order to help detect anxiety and distress so that employees can be provided with the proper psychological support. The feelings of loneliness and isolation are exacerbated by the pandemic, with the need for psychological and social support now at the forefront.
- Some other Ombud clients indicated that they have never had any bilateral meetings with their supervisors. There are no conference calls to check in with them and electronic communications are being overused, sometimes lacking clear direction. Given the lack of “people management” conversations, it is impossible to detect employees’ emotional well-being and thus address their issues.

⁷ Factor #9, National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety: Workload Management.

Recommendation:

- We recommend that specific attention be given to watching for and discussing the psychological health of all employees, all of whom have been affected by the current situation in different ways. A regular “check-in” with employees, especially during the pandemic, should be established as a “best practice.” Management needs to determine the psychological

health status of each one of their employees in real time and engage in frank discussions about specific realities which may impact their capacity to deliver. Management also needs to clarify their work expectations and review priorities with their employees on an ongoing basis.

Finding #3: Shortcomings related to organizational culture

Definition:

“Organizational culture is a mix of norms, values, beliefs, meanings, and expectations that group members hold in common and that they use as behavioural and problem-solving cues. Organizational culture could enhance the psychological safety and health of the workplace and the workforce when it is characterized by trust, honesty, respect, civility, and fairness or when it values, for example, psychological and social support, recognition, and reward.”

An organization with good organizational culture would be able to state that:

- a) all people in the workplace are held accountable for their actions
- b) people at work show sincere respect for others’ ideas, values, and beliefs
- c) difficult situations at work are addressed effectively
- d) workers feel that they are part of a community at work
- e) workers and management trust one another.”⁸

What we heard from employees seeking support:

- Employees expressed confusion concerning behaviors, communication styles or situations they witnessed that seemed contrary to the Public Service Code of Values and Ethics and not aligned with the ISED organizational values and corporate messages. They sought the Office of the Ombud as a sounding board, as well as for options on how to effectively deal with their situation.
- Some employees feel shy to express new and innovative ideas, as they are told it is not an encouraged practice to do so. Some others attend meetings and/or conference calls and are specifically told they should not have expressed their professional opinion given their hierarchical level. In some specific areas of the department, the organizational culture is still very much aligned with the rank and level you occupy, with a non-written rule (culture) to stay silent. Some employees reported that this has impacted their level of engagement.

⁸ Factor #1, National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety: Organizational Culture

Recommendation:

- We recommend communicating clearly and frequently the expectations of work and team behaviour in support of organizational values. This may involve setting an example through actions, clear messages and activities associated with organizational values. The culture of an organization is first initiated by management and then supported and exhibited through the interactions of employees. However, when certain unusual behaviours occur in the

workplace and no-one intervenes, a new standard of behaviour can gradually begin to set in. In a short time, such behaviours, which were once unacceptable, become the norm. An intervention can have maximum impact yet involves the minimum of effort, even when the behaviour appears innocuous, and especially if it is repetitive. When in doubt, consult with the Office of the Ombud to discuss the situation and explore strategies.

Finding #4: Issues related to the psychological protection of employees

Definition:

“Psychological protection is present in a work environment where workers’ psychological safety is ensured. Workplace psychological safety is demonstrated when workers feel able to put themselves on the line, ask questions, seek feedback, report mistakes and problems, or propose a new idea without fearing negative consequences to themselves, their job, or their career. A psychologically safe and healthy organization actively promotes emotional well-being among workers while taking all reasonable steps to minimize threats to worker mental health.”

“An organization with good psychological protection would be able to state that:

- a) the organization is committed to minimizing unnecessary stress at work
- b) immediate supervisors care about workers’ emotional well-being
- c) the organization makes efforts to prevent harm to workers from harassment, bullying, discrimination, violence, or stigma.”⁹

What we heard from employees seeking support:

- Some employees indicated to the Ombud that they have never had any bilateral or team discussions about the general well-being of employees.
- There is no engagement in discussions on how to deal with stressors in the workplace. Discussions are sometimes more focused on the quality of deliverables, meeting deadlines and maintaining good standing/reputation.
- Some employees report being in a work environment where mistakes are not accepted or where providing new ideas that question certain business practices is not welcome; nor is asking questions or expressing opinions – there have often been consequences when doing so.
- Others have observed abusive comments, ways of doing things that are contrary to the organization’s values, and they have no one to talk to about this. Most of the time, these situations relate to hierarchical level, which weakens the psychological protection normally expected and offered by the

⁹ Factor #12, National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety: Psychological Protection

workplace. Not being able to speak frankly to one's immediate supervisor contributes to ongoing discomfort for the individual, which is often accompanied by a fear of reprisal.

Recommendations:

- We recommend that managers take timely action to maintain a healthy workplace, when informed of issues that may have a negative impact on the psychological health of anyone in the team. Likewise, employees who witness situations that compromise the psychological health of another person, or their organizational unit, have a responsibility to speak

up so that constructive means can be considered in order to rectify them.

- In order to increase psychological protection in the workplace and to encourage workplaces where employees are not afraid to express themselves, managers can ask their employees for their opinions and show consideration for receiving them. In order for employees to give their best and feel challenged at work, it is essential to have processes, policies and a culture that encourage employees to contribute new ideas and feedback. Managers can apply, reinforce and promote a work culture that will enhance employees' sense of security.

Additional Finding: Work after the coronavirus

The importance of clear leadership and setting expectations

While Factor #3 from the National Standard, Clear Leadership and Expectations, ranks as the fifth most discussed theme amongst clients of the Ombud over the course of consultations in FY 2019-2020, it took on increased importance and relevance during the coronavirus pandemic outbreak and lockdown. When looking at findings from our consultations, as well as results from the Employee Pulse Survey, and when considering intelligence gathered from managers and senior leaders during meetings throughout the first three months of the pandemic, Clear Leadership and Expectations emerged as the third most raised issue for ISED employees (16%) after Psychological and Organizational Support (30%) and Civility and Respect (23%). It is for this reason that we include our findings and recommendations based on this factor, particularly as we continue to work under different realities, in a new environment, and as we explore the future of work in the coming months, and indeed possibly years.

Definition:

“Clear leadership and expectations are present in an environment in which leadership is effective and provides sufficient support that helps workers know what they need to do, explains how their work contributes to the organization, and discusses the nature and expected outcomes of impending changes. There are many types of leadership, each of which impacts psychological safety and health in different ways. The most widely accepted categorizations of leadership are instrumental, transactional, and transformational. Of these, transformational leadership is considered the most powerful. Instrumental leadership focuses primarily on producing outcomes, with little attention paid to the ‘big picture,’ the psychosocial dynamics within the organization, and unfortunately, the individual workers. Transformational leaders are seen as change agents who motivate their followers to do more than what is expected. They are concerned with long-term objectives and transmit a sense of mission, vision, and purpose.

They have charisma, give individual consideration to their workers, stimulate intellectual capabilities in others, and inspire workers.

“An organization with clear leadership and explicit expectations would be able to state that:

- a) in their jobs, workers know what they are expected to do
- b) leadership in the workplace is effective
- c) workers are informed about important changes at work in a timely manner
- d) supervisors provide helpful feedback to workers on their expected and actual performance
- e) the organization provides clear, effective communication.”¹⁰

What we heard from employees, managers and senior leaders:

- Taskings to employees are not always clear, particularly when delivered by email; clear and specific deliverables, as well as the timelines in which to deliver them, should be included. Communications tools should be used properly to avoid overusing emails instead of virtual face-to-face (video) meetings.

- Employees expressed confusion with the shift between their pre-COVID priorities and their new ones, indicating a lack of clarity around what to put aside and what new priorities to address. Even prior to the pandemic, employees were struggling with the identification of priorities to the extent that some suffered from significant anxiety, along with an increase in the usual level of work-related stress, lack of sleep and difficulty with their work-life balance.

Recommendation:

- We recommend that management be mindful of the use of proper communication channels and mechanisms for tasking employees, and avoid the over usage of emails. The anxiety and confusion related to the lack of clarity, and the fear of asking for details and specifics, should be addressed. In these difficult times, we recommend regular meetings with every direct report, regardless of level. Giving direction contributes to reduced stress and clarifies expectations. It gives a sense of meaning to what employees are working on and contributes to their increased motivation.

Meet your Ombud team: Nadine Farhat

“A great and fun way to raise awareness about mental health.”



“Over the years, it has become more and more important to take care of our mental health and I feel like the Centre does just that by giving people access to all this information.”

– Nadine Farhat

If you participated in any of the online events hosted by the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace during the initial COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown, it was probably Nadine Farhat who helped make it happen. Nadine is the Project Coordinator at the Centre, a vital behind-the-scenes person who coordinates all the support required by the speakers at those events – from scheduling calls with the event coordinator and putting the contract paperwork together, to sharing relevant documents with participants and promoting the events on the Centre’s GCconnex page.

“It’s a great and fun way to raise awareness about mental health and how it is affected by our work; it helps people learn about how anything and everything can affect someone’s mental health and how important it is to know about it,” she says of her work at the Centre. “Over the years, it has become more and more important to take care of our mental health and I feel like the Centre does just that by giving people access to all this information.”

Nadine has a Bachelor’s degree in Conflict Studies and Human Rights from the University of Ottawa and a Diploma in Social Work from La Cité Collegiale in Ottawa. Her passion is human rights.

“Watching everything that’s been happening worldwide is fascinating to me,” she says. “I’m interested in what first world countries do to help those countries where human rights are being violated.” She cites war crimes and how the International Criminal Court intervenes as an example. “I am also interested in gender equality from the human rights policy perspective and how workplaces, such as the Government of Canada, implement such policies.”

Seeing the results of the work that she and her colleagues do at the Centre, hearing the positive feedback about how they have helped someone, and knowing that people are benefitting from the sessions they have been scheduling, are what makes her happy in her work at ISED.

You can reach Nadine at nadine.farhat@canada.ca.



Communications, Outreach and Engagement

Increased outreach led to increased uptake of services

In our first year of operations, 2018-2019, our two main goals were: (1) setting up the Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being, and (2) getting to know the ISED organization – its people, its business, and its culture. The warm reception and interest in our role, and the programs and services we were developing for ISED employees, enabled us to meet these goals both quickly and successfully.

This made it possible for us to focus on and expand our communications, outreach and engagement activities over the course of 2019-2020, thereby increasing awareness amongst ISED employees, partners, stakeholders, and indeed, even fellow public servants, about the role of the Ombud in helping address workplace issues. As a result, we are reporting a 50% increase in the use of our services during our second year of operations.

In addition to continuing to deliver in-person presentations, speak at management tables, participate in sector town halls and team meetings, and deliver learning, wellness and training activities, we also more fully embraced the department's internal communications vehicles with regular articles in @ISED, for example, and we created an Intranet page for the Ombud on ISED Central. We also took to social media using the LinkedIn accounts of the [Ombud](#) and [Associate Ombud](#). Furthermore, the Ombud began tweeting and we expanded our use of the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace GConnex page.

Much of our messaging centred on drawing attention to issues that form the basis of key national and international health promotion weeks and days. We were active throughout 2019-2020 in creating events, in sharing information, and in providing access to important tools and resources in support of such initiatives as:

- National Mental Health Week (May)
- National Accessibility Week (May)
- National Public Service Week (June)

- Mental Illness Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day (October)
- Conflict Resolution Day (October)
- Bell Let's Talk Day (January)
- International Women's Day (March)

We also responded during the COVID-19 crisis and adapted to even more use of technology, particularly in the delivery of events, including the creation of

a virtual CaféOmbud series. We report on activities during the pandemic (March to June 2020) on pages 41-43 of this report.

Partnerships and interactions with ISED regional offices also formed a key component of our communications, outreach and engagement activities in 2019-2020. Over the course of the year, we visited all five regions and interacted with almost 600 ISED employees outside the NCR.

Regional Rendezvous: Opening Doors in Pacific Region

Eve Nadeau presenting at Open Door for Leaders. Mario Baril is front-left.



From February 24-28, 2020, the Ombud and Associate Ombud visited Pacific Region and met with some 100 ISED employees in the Vancouver Lower Mainland and Kelowna offices. The meetings included individual confidential consultations, discussions at management tables, presentations to employees, and workshops on “Communication Styles” and “What Do Healthy and Productive Workplaces Look Like?”

A cornerstone of the visit was their participation in the second annual Open Door for Leaders in Mental Health workshop hosted by the Pacific Community of Interest in Mental Health, during which they made a

presentation, delivered a workshop and participated on a panel with their Ombud colleague from Public Services and Procurement Canada, André Latreille.

In creating the event, the organizers were responding to the needs of managers in the federal public service in Pacific Region who indicated feeling unsupported and under-educated around personal and team mental health. Over 100 managers and mental health champions representing more than 20 federal organizations participated in the event, which included a range of speakers and presenters from regional federal organizations, external consultancies, and not-for-profits.

In the words of Meghan Chen, Manager of the Pacific Community of Interest in Mental Health, “the speakers’ lived experiences of their own mental health challenges, and those of loved ones, reminded us that these are innately personal, complex issues, but we can’t just leave them at home when we go to work.”

For more information on, or to contact the Pacific Community of Interest in Mental Health, please reach out to Meghan at meghan.chen@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.

Thanks to Our Partners!

From everyone on the Ombud Team



Since the Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being opened at ISED in October 2018, our team has been privileged to work with many critical partners, both inside and external to the federal public service. We would like to recognize them here for their support and contributions to helping us help make ISED a safer, healthier and more positive workplace. So, a huge “Thank You” to:

ISED

- **Human Resources Branch (HRB)** for helping us ensure that when our clients need their help rather than ours, they are well-received and directed to the best possible resources in order to resolve their issues promptly and successfully.
- Our friends and colleagues in the **Corporate Mental Health Program** at ISED for working collaboratively with us to deliver comprehensive policies, programs and services in the areas of mental health and employee well-being at ISED.
- The **Strategic Communications and Marketing Sector (SCMS)** for providing communications advice, guidance and products that make our employees aware of our products and services, as well as how to access them (and us); and for helping promote the events hosted by the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace.
- The **Bargaining Agents** who ensure management and employees are working together in the best interests of everyone by sharing their perspectives and those of their members.
- **Members of the Departmental Audit Committee** for their insightful feedback, particularly during the COVID19 crisis.
- Colleagues on the **Senior Management Committee (SMC)**, including our ADMs and DMs, for demonstrating outstanding leadership in communicating their vision for a healthy organization and for supporting mental health and employee well-being issues and initiatives throughout our entire department.
- **Regional Executive teams** for providing us with their regional realities and for welcoming our team for visits and meetings with their staff, and for their contributions to building better ISED workplaces across the country.
- Our **CIO and IM/IT teams** for their unwavering technical support throughout the year and particularly during the transition from office to remote working because of the COVID-19 breakout and lockdown.

“I AM IN” – Marie-Geneviève Gravel Answered the Call



On April 8, 2020 the Department issued a call to all ISED employees from all fields of expertise to contribute their skills to ISED’s COVID-19 response. The Corporate Communications Message read: “We have been working around the clock to not only mobilize industry, science and innovation in fighting the pandemic, but also support Canadian businesses through these extraordinary times. It is crucial for us to focus our efforts to deliver for Canadians, and we need you!”

Processes were put in place for EX and non-EX employees interested in being considered for at-level assignments or micro-mission opportunities within ISED and other portfolio organizations. After receiving approval from their managers, employees who answered the call did so by sending an email to HRB with the subject line “I am in.”

Applicants were referred to managers based on organizational needs with the first wave of referrals giving priority to sectors that were most impacted by the COVID-19 response. Managers then contacted employees directly to discuss the support they needed and arrange the terms of their agreement.

Marie-Geneviève Gravel from the **Strategy and Innovation Policy Sector – Quebec Region** was one of those who answered the call, and we are thankful that she did. Marie-Geneviève works as a regional Communications Advisor in Quebec Region and did an extraordinary job helping support the activities of the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, as we quickly adapted our programming to the pandemic so that we could better support federal public servants across the country during the crisis.

We would also like to thank her manager, **Nicole Barsalou**, for allowing us to “borrow” Marie-Geneviève during the initial COVID-19 breakout and lockdown.

Government of Canada

- The **TBS Centre of Expertise for Mental Health in the Workplace** for their support and guidance throughout federal government organizations and for their coordination efforts to help us all align with both the Federal Public Service Mental Health Strategy and the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.
- The **TBS/OCHRO Centre for Wellness, Inclusion and Diversity** for their work in helping federal organizations address discrimination, harassment and bias encountered by employees from equity-seeking groups such as employees with disabilities, Aboriginal employees, ethnic minorities and members of the LGBTQ2+ community.

- **Strategic Partners of the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace**, for their continued commitment to supporting healthy federal workplaces through their financial and programming contributions; they have helped us bring mental health awareness and wellness activities to more than 18,000 federal public servants since the Centre opened in 2018. Our strategic federal partners are:

- Public Services and Procurement Canada
- Office of the Ombudsman of Mental Health and Well-Being for Small Departments and Agencies
- Western Economic Diversification Canada
- Library and Archives Canada
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Transport Canada
- Statistics Canada
- Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat
- National Research Council of Canada
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada
- Shared Services Canada
- Veterans Affairs Canada
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Finance Canada

Private and Non-Governmental Organizations

One of the key activities of the Ombud team for 2019-2020 has been providing access to the wide array of tools and resources available in the mental health field. Through sharing articles, delivering learning events and activities, providing online links to support groups and

research organizations, we have been able to not only increase awareness of mental health amongst ISED and federal public service employees, we have also expanded our scope and range of private sector and non-governmental organizational partners. We owe all of them a great debt of gratitude. Below are just some of the organizations with whom we have worked in FY 2019-2020, and in particular during the coronavirus pandemic outbreak and lockdown in spring 2020:

- [The Conference Board of Canada](#), in particular, Dr. Bill Howatt, for his continued sharing of knowledge and research in the field of employee mental health and well-being
- [The Canadian Mental Health Commission](#) for ongoing access to their knowledge and resources
- [The Mental Health Commission of Canada](#) for their support, and in particular for agreeing to provide Mireille Cyr as Manager of the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace through Interchange Canada
- [The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction](#) for supporting a range of activities held by the Mental Health Centre, including the provision of key speakers

Volunteers

We also want to recognize those who contributed to our successful delivery of outreach, engagement, learning and wellness activities through willingly and freely giving us and our clients their time, knowledge and expertise in a range of subjects, and on their own personal time.

An ISED employee reports: Coping and caring through COVID-19

A real and tangible example of psychological and social support from ISED management



BY ROBBYN PLUMB, DIRECTOR OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY ADVICE AT ISED

I used to pride myself on being able to balance a successful career as a director in the public service with an active family life that includes a teenager who has a developmental disability, is non-verbal and has severe behavioural challenges.

With support from family and friends, I created a “village” where my son is loved and celebrated, and where my 16-year-old daughter, a superstar student and competitive athlete, is able to just be a big sister — not a caregiver like some are forced to be in families with a lack of support for special needs.

My son’s world became very small

My son Carson attends a special class at Ridgemont High School and has the support of a wonderful team, including one-on-one support given his needs and behavioural challenges. Not only that, but he had just got a new teacher who, in a mere matter of weeks, had turned things around for him. The teacher, Jeff Kerswill, helped reintegrate Carson back into his special needs class from a single learning environment, which was such a welcome turnaround – my son was happy and excited to be going to school.

This all came crashing down on March 23, when all schools and community supports and services were shuttered and Canadians were told to stay home. My “village” vanished overnight.

I spent years advocating for Carson’s rights and we finally found a school where he could be successful.

With its closure, my son instantly lost critical social interaction and learning opportunities. All his community-based activities, such as therapeutic

riding and hockey, ceased. Recreation facilities and respite services were closed, and friends and family were all self-isolating.

I realize that everyone has been impacted by the pandemic measures. But for my son and other kids with special needs, predictability is critical, and the change in routine leads to vulnerability.

My son does not understand “closed until further notice” and gets really agitated by always being at home. This usually manifests itself in aggression and property destruction. I am usually the target of his hitting, kicking and sometimes biting, and now that he is as big as me, it can really hurt. He will also hit walls and furniture and throw things or try to injure himself.

He cannot be out in the community, as physical distancing is a completely foreign concept to him, and personal hygiene is a challenge at the best of times.

The upshot of this is that my son’s world suddenly became very small, with him placing all his focus on me to not only be mom but also teacher, caregiver and playmate.



Trying to do both

In the meantime, I also had to continue to work and manage a team of professionals in this surreal work-from-home environment.

For four weeks I worked my job while supporting my son in his online learning and daily living, and I did my best to help my daughter to not stress about grades and school work.

Through all of this, though, I completely forgot about myself. I didn’t notice that I was walking a tight rope, with my balance increasingly teetering over the edge.

Finally, I was forced to have what was the most difficult conversation of my career — where I admitted that I could not do it all.

Something had to give, and that something was work.

My head was spinning; I couldn’t focus; I felt short-tempered at home and ineffective at work. I felt like I was admitting defeat, letting down my team and losing a big part of my identity. But as my doctor rightly pointed out: I was in crisis.

Thankfully, my team was fantastic and supportive – they even sent me a card and gift to cheer me up! And when I published [my story on CBC on May 8, 2020](#), my colleagues reinforced that support. This made a world of difference in how I felt about my decision.

I was reminded of a presentation that our Ombud, Mario Baril, made to our Sector during a panel on mental health

“I am a very private person and this process helped me to be more open in my communication. I have started exchanging in informal dialogue with my employees where I share more personal information which has helped me to establish a better connection with them.” – CPER – EQ-I training participant in 2019-2020



“Our conversations gave me different perspectives I hadn’t considered before. It was very comforting and I didn’t feel so alone. It was a very good process, especially exploring different avenues of actions.”

– A CPER – EQ-I training participant in 2019-2020

in the workplace. He spoke of his own journey and a decision he made to step away from work for a time because of health reasons. That, and a number of courses I attended at the Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, helped me fine-tune my knowledge about mental health and take some time for critical self-reflection on my own mental health.

Stepping back

I am fortunate to have an employer who “walks the talk” when it comes to mental health and valuing the well-being of myself and my family during this extraordinary time.

Within two days, my boss mobilized a plan for me to step away from my work responsibilities. And for that, I am eternally thankful.

Mine is a story of self-awareness and thankfulness. These are extraordinary times that will test the most resilient of people.

I am strong, but can only do so much and if I do not take care of myself, my loved ones will suffer. This is not failure; this is self-care.

Unlike so many others hit by this pandemic, I did not have to quit my job to care for my son. I did not need to worry about how I would pay the bills; I continued to be paid. I am fortunate to have sick leave benefits and can take short-term leave with a note from my doctor.

My “return to work” plan began with three days-a-week for a month, but the kids were still at home so this remained challenging. Then summer arrived, the social distancing rules relaxed and our bubbles increased; this meant that my son could spend much-needed time with others, which allowed me to ease back into full-time work.

Caring for a special needs child is challenging at the best of times. I don’t know what the future holds, but I do know that we will be stronger as a society and, I hope, more empathetic towards each other.

Meet your Ombud team: Joyce Abarbanel

No stranger to conflict



“Helping individuals and groups to engage in perspective sharing, better communicate what they want and need, to be clearer about their objectives and choose approaches to address conflictual situations so everyone benefits from better outcomes, is an honour for me. As such, there has never been a sharp distinction between my work and the rest of my life, between my interests, passions and job description.”
– Joyce Abarbanel

Joyce Abarbanel is a senior conflict management practitioner with the Conflict Prevention and Early Resolution (CPER) Directorate at ISED where she has been working since 2017. She says that what drew her to this line of work was being no stranger to conflict herself. “Both of my parents immigrated to Canada – to Quebec – from high conflict zones in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, and they did so during the period of Quebec nationalism,” she says. “And then of course there was family conflict...lots of it!”

During her training, which she calls “personally transformational,” Joyce appreciated learning that there are tools, processes and skills to prevent, mitigate and even resolve conflict and thus, a way to reduce stress and suffering for individuals and communities, a way to restore broken relationships and increase well-being.

“Helping individuals and groups to engage in perspective sharing, better communicate what they want and need, to be clearer about their objectives and choose approaches to address conflictual situations so everyone benefits from better outcomes, is an honour for me,” she says. “As such, there has never been a sharp distinction between my work and the rest of my life, between my interests, passions and job description.”

Joyce possesses a MA in conflict analysis and management from Royal Roads University and is a certified mediator, conflict coach and group facilitator. Before joining the federal public service, she lived in Africa and Asia for 16 years working for various international organizations including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), for-profit consultancy firms, and the United Nations (UN). She held senior management positions designing and implementing large peace-building and governance programs in conflict and post-conflict countries (including Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Mali, Myanmar and Yemen). Her work there focused on areas that supported decentralization negotiations, power and wealth sharing agreements, natural resource management, and community-based peace processes to promote economic development.

Joyce explains that federalism/decentralization has become an important tool of conflict-resolution in conflict countries in the past two decades. “In countries that face violent conflict between different territorially concentrated groups and the central government, federalism/decentralization has been used to ensure greater autonomy for different groups on one side and their inclusion through power-sharing mechanisms in central government on the other,” she says.

Part of Joyce’s role was to facilitate dialogue to help conflicting parties understand their options in renegotiating their political or constitutional arrangements so that regional, ethnic or linguistic groups would have greater self-determination while maintaining the integrity of the state. By way of example, she notes that in Sudan, the peace agreement required that a referendum on independence be held at the end of a six-year period, allowing the people of southern Sudan the opportunity to choose between perpetuating the power-sharing agreement or opting for full independence; they chose the latter in 2011 and eventually seceded from the north. Meanwhile, in other countries such as Ethiopia, Joyce notes that the shift from a unitary political system to a federal one has been effective in maintaining national unity as power is shared with different territorially recognized ethnic-linguistic groups.

“Whether working in international peacebuilding or as a conflict resolution practitioner, the work I do is in

alignment with my values and the things I believe in,” she says. “I meet, and have worked with, lots of different people from all over the world and have been inspired by their determination, ingenuity and resourcefulness.”

Joyce says that the work she does seems to have found her more than she went looking for it, but she says that it has been “a perfect fit;” living and working in different countries and cultures in particular has required her to learn and grow and expand as a practitioner. “It is quite different from being in a place as a tourist; it lets you get to know people and societies in a far more intimate way,” she explains. “There are few careers that give you such an opportunity to see things and work alongside the best and most inspiring examples of people working to overcome very difficult circumstances and situations. I can’t imagine any other work being as interesting, challenging or rewarding as some of the jobs I have held.”

Joyce believes deeply “in the value and work of peace, and in the full spectrum of alternative dispute resolution processes, which have a good track record overall for building and restoring relationships and helping people come together to dialogue and find sustainable solutions to difficult problems and complex situations.”

You can reach Joyce via email at
[*joyce.abarbanel@canada.ca*](mailto:joyce.abarbanel@canada.ca).

Mental Health Tools and Resources

Videos

Inclusion Starts With I

- A video to help foster a discussion around the importance of a positive, inclusive work environment. Starring a group of Accenture people, this video demonstrates that bias can appear in both expected and unexpected ways—and that each of us has the power to make a difference. (Available in English only)

13 Factors: Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace

- Reduce the stigma around mental health by using these videos to start an ongoing dialogue in your team—maybe one per team meeting! From the Mental Health Commission of Canada, these videos address each of the 13 psychosocial factors which comprise the [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) and include an introduction to the Standard itself.
- A [Facilitator Guide](#) is also available, explaining why each factor is important—and what you can do to promote them.

Depression at Work: An Employee Perspective

- A two-minute video in which an employee who experienced depression at work talks about what he needs from his manager(s) to stay productive. The video is part of “Workplace Strategies for Mental Health,” an initiative of the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace.

Managing the Mental Health of Others: A Manager’s Experience

- Follow John, who has just been promoted to manager, as he is exposed to the mental health issues of those who now report to him. This video is also part of “Workplace Strategies for Mental Health,” an initiative of the Great West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace.

Learning/Training

The Mental Health Commission of Canada

The Working Mind

- An education-based program designed to address and promote mental health and reduce the stigma of mental illness in the workplace, this training is offered in three versions: one for trainers, one for managers, and one for employees. The objective of the course is to give employees and managers the practical knowledge of mental health and mental illness so they can:
 - Use the mental health continuum to recognize change in their mental health, and that of others
 - Be prepared to use skills to improve their coping and resiliency
 - Reduce both public and self-stigma
 - Be willing to be a part of a supportive workplace

Mental Health First Aid

- Mental Health First Aid is a training course designed to give members of the public the skills to help someone who is developing a mental health problem, a worsening of their mental health problem, or experiencing a mental health crisis. The evidence behind the program demonstrates that it builds mental health literacy, decreases stigmatizing attitudes, and helps individuals identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness. The course teaches people how to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health problems, provide initial help, and guide a person towards appropriate professional help.

Canada School of Public Service

- The Canada School of Public Service offers a number of classroom and online courses, as well as videos, events and links to other resources. Once you have logged in via GCcampus, you can access materials covering a wide range of topics, including:
 - Mental Health
 - Occupational Health and Safety
 - Conflict Management
 - Harassment and Violence Prevention
 - Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)
 - Accessibility
 - LGBTQ2+ Inclusion
 - Diversity and Inclusion
 - Other training in support of Respectful and Inclusive Workplaces covering topics such as:
 - › Values and Ethics
 - › Coaching
 - › Emotional Intelligence
 - › Personal Balance
 - › Work/Life Balance

Online Resources

- [Canadian Innovation Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace on GCconnex \(available to federal public servants only\)](#)
- [The Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)
 - [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#)
 - [Building Mental Health into Operations During a Pandemic: Guidelines to Support Employers Through COVID-19](#)
- [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
 - [Mental Health in the Workplace: An Accommodation Guide for Managers and Staff](#)
- [The TBS Centre of Expertise for Mental Health in the Workplace](#)
- [TBS Centre for Wellness, Inclusion and Diversity in the Public Service](#)
- [The Conference Board of Canada](#)
- [Workplace Strategies for Mental Health/Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace](#)
- [The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#)
- [Wellness Together Canada](#)

Meet the Ombud and Associate Ombud

Mario Baril and Ève Nadeau



Mario Baril has been the Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being at Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada since October 2018. During his career in the Government of Canada, Mario has held several executive positions, including Chief of Staff in the Treasury Board Secretariat, Director of Strategic and Business Communications at Public Services and Procurement Canada, and Executive Director for the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX).

Mario demonstrates a profound interest in a committed, diversified, agile and productive public service. He brings extensive experience in developing strategic partnerships and initiatives to foster a healthy workplace, especially with the International Ombud Association, where he participates in a Working Group on equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Mario has a Master's Degree in Public Administration from L'École nationale d'administration publique (ENAP), a Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Public Administration from the University of Ottawa, and a college diploma in journalism. He also has an Ombud certification from Osgoode Hall in the Faculty of Law at York University, as well as training in mediation from the Faculty of Law at the Université de Sherbrooke and Saint Paul University.

In his spare time, Mario practices many outdoor sports, including downhill skiing, swimming, canoeing, cycling and mountain climbing, especially at Mont-Tremblant in the Laurentians. And his passion for travel has brought him to several countries, along with his wife Danielle, and his two sons, Alexandre and Samuel, allowing him to encounter amazing people and diverse cultures from around the world.



ISED's Associate Ombud for Mental Health and Employee Well-Being is Ève **Nadeau**, who has held the position since November 2018. Ève joined the Department after occupying the positions of Manager of the Values and Ethics and Harassment Prevention Programs at the Treasury Board Secretariat, and as the Manager of Respect in the Workplace at Justice Canada. For eight years prior to this, in addition to being the Manager, Ève was also a Senior Conflict Management Advisor at Public Services and Procurement Canada. In her role as a mediator, she developed a departmental harassment prevention initiative, she designed various organization-specific trainings, created group intervention processes and harassment and sexual harassment prevention tools.

In her role today, Ève continues to focus on raising awareness about mental health, harassment prevention, conflict resolution and workplace well-being.

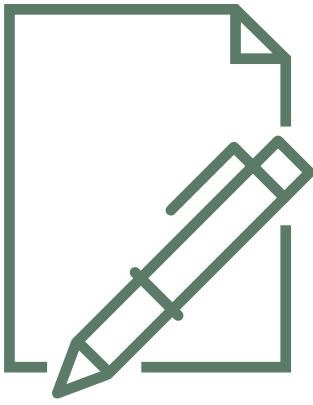
Ève joined the federal public service in 2006 and worked in the field of labour relations as a Senior Advisor at Public Services and Procurement Canada, Correctional Services Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency. Prior to this, she worked for ten years as a social worker and as a probation officer with the Government of Quebec.

In addition to being trained as a specialized coach in conflict management, certified as a group facilitator and a mediator by the Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution and holding an Ombud Certification from the Osgoode Hall Law School of York University, Ève has a Bachelor's Degree in Criminology from the University of Ottawa, a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from the University of Quebec at Hull, and a Master's Degree in Public Administration from L'École nationale d'administration publique (ENAP).

One of Ève's passions is the neuropsychology of human relations and the different culture-specific social behaviours.

“Before going to the Ombud, I wasn't sure that what I was experiencing was technically harassment or grieveable; I just knew it was wrong. I walked away from my meeting with the Ombud knowing what was right and what wasn't, with suggestions and next steps. Someone listened and empowered me to take the next steps without fear of reprisal. This is a great service for ISED employees.”

– A client of the Ombud in 2019-2020



“Support and compassion... from the Office of the Ombud” A Letter to the Deputy Ministers¹¹

Dear Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Thompson:

I wanted to take the time to acknowledge the support and compassion I have received from the Office of the Ombud for Mental Health and specifically, Mr. Mario Baril.

Due to what I believe is a lack of knowledge and understanding regarding policies and directives on the return-to-work process and mental health in the workplace, I sought the assistance and expertise of the Ombud for Mental Health.

I have had the opportunity and pleasure to discuss my on-going situation with Mr. Baril and Ms. Nadeau, and both have provided me with guidance and resources to assist me in my quest to return to work in a healthy and safe manner.

Mr. Baril was also instrumental in fast-tracking my request for a fitness to work assessment from Health Canada. Without his assistance, it would have taken at least three months for an assessment to have been scheduled.

Although the Department should be commended for its efforts to raise awareness and provide supports for employees with mental health issues, more needs to be done to ensure management has the training, support and access to appropriate information to assist employees experiencing these non-visible disabilities.

I have suggested to Mr. Baril that once my return to work has “stabilized,” I would be willing to discuss what worked well and what didn’t work well regarding my return-to-work after extended leave (for mental health reasons).

Melody Myers





The Department has since established the Workplace Accommodation Centre (WAC) to, amongst other things, provide greater support and assistance to employees and their managers with regard to workplace accommodation. For more information, please see “ISED creates a Workplace Accommodation Centre” on p. 53 of this Report.

¹¹ Used with permission of the author.




We're here to help

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Your Ombud Team: All Together!

Clockwise from top left: Mario Baril, Ombud; Marilyn Stefanoski, CPER; Joyce Abarbanel, CPER; Ève Nadeau, Associate Ombud; Gary Warnock, Ombud Communications; Michael Nadon, CPER; Oscar Gasana, CPER; Nadine Farhat, Office of the Ombud. Absent: Mireille Cyr, Mental Health Centre; Nathalie Maria Gagné, Mental Health Centre; Francine Labarge, Office of the Ombud; Sainaba Adayta, Mental Health Centre; Marie-Geneviève Gravel, Mental Health Centre.

