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Voice-over: Welcome to our very first episode and the start of our podcast series. Our team of counselors are here to talk about relevant issues that matter to you. We'll give you ways to contact us at the end of this episode. Now, let's dive right in and meet our counsellors.

Constantine Cabarios: Well, what would you guys like to share with the audience today? Who wants to start?

Pablo Gonzalez: Why don't we start with a little bit of our like, educational background?

Constantine Cabarios: Sounds good.

Pablo Gonzalez: Okay, good. Go ahead.

Aarti Dhanda: I can go first so my educational background. So I'm a social worker. I have my masters in social work. I've been doing counselling or therapy with mostly youth. I don't think I found I have an interest in working with young people and it's been about almost 10 years. So yes.

Constantine Cabarios: Ten years. That's great.

Pablo Gonzalez: Wow. That looks impossible. But okay.

Constantine Cabarios: Yeah. You're just a baby. No, I'm kidding.

Aarti Dhanda: I know it helps make people think I'm younger.

Pablo Gonzalez: Hmm.

Constantine Cabarios: Well, I'm gonna, if you don't mind I'll go. I generally didn't want to work with youth only because I thought, I don't have the temperament for it. But, having said that in my private practice and in other places I've worked in, oftentimes some of the adults act like youth so, I thought, let's give George Brown the try and I've loved it ever since. I love working with you. I think they're an amazing bunch of people and I learn a lot from them and... like Aarti... it's about ten, ten years seven years, seven years I've been in the field now. Yeah and at George Brown since 2017, as I said earlier. Yeah.

Ann Bernardo: I can go. So this is Ann.

Constantine Cabarios: You sound great Ann.

Ann Bernardo: Okay good. So I also have a masters in social work and I've been working in this field for more than 25 years and I was initially in the hospital system for many years. I worked at CAMH and Toronto East General in inpatient/outpatient Psychiatry. And I think when the opportunity presented itself to work at George I thought it was a wonderful time to intervene in people's lives. They're young. This is when a whole bunch of developmental stuff comes up, leaving home, being on your own for the first time and I just thought that would be really a lovely, lovely time of one's life to work with them. So... and the other thing I do is adoption work. I do a lot of adoption work. I'm an adoption practitioner as well. So, I've seen a number of students who have been adopted and thinking about their identities and where they belong and how they fit in, and so that's another interest of mine. Yeah, that's, that's me.

Pablo Gonzalez: That's terrific.

Constantine Cabarios: Sorry guys. I forgot to add that I'm also social worker just like Ann and Aarti. So yeah.

Heidi Mehta: Hi there. My name is Heidi Mehta. I use she and her pronouns and I have a master's degree in social work. So like others here. I'm also a social worker and I am very passionate about working with George Brown students. I originally worked as a community organizer as well as worked in post-secondary and I went back to school because I wanted to combine the interest of working with students, working with mental health and also mental health as as a social justice concept and I love that I get that opportunity here at George Brown. I started out working in the human rights office, and I've been here since 2015 and And I realized that counseling really is my passion and that is the way that I wish to serve George Brown students.

Pablo Gonzalez: That's terrific. My name is Pablo. So I've been working at the college for a couple of years now. I was an adult learner. So I went back to school after a long absence from school and I got then, as a younger person, I got pretty great support at my college and then later on in University as an older student, I also got really great support. And so when I was thinking about placements and stuff during my practicum... I'm also a social worker. Yeah, I really wanted to see what it was like to work in the college system and supporting people in this really pivotal time in their lives when they're making big decisions and growing so much and so it's such a nice place to be, is to be able to support students in this transitional period of their lives. I really love it.

Constantine Cabarios: Ann, you've been in the hospital setting is that right?

Ann Bernardo: That's correct yup.

Constantine Cabarios: And you want you wanted to switch and maybe get getting into developmental start of those students? Is that what I heard a little bit?

Ann Bernardo: A little bit. I think that you know development never stops, right so working with mature, kind of 45 or 50 year olds, or 70 year olds or you know, they're in a developmental stage as well. But I just thought intervening at early onset of whatever symptoms happen to arise or if somebody's getting depressed or anxious or early psychosis that kind of thing. I think getting that 18, 19, 20 changes one's trajectory on their life, right? Instead of seeing somebody when they're 55, when they finally get the opportunity to come in and talk about themselves, yeah, I saw it as an opportunity to like, really intervene earlier.

Constantine Cabarios: And nine years being with George Brown and you must have seen a lot of changes at George Brown. And this is to the general counsellors here, like what have you seen as far as trends in student life? Whether developmentally, or just issues that they've been going through. Anyone can jump in.

Aarti Dhand: Yeah. I'd like to also say that, just like Ann was talking about. Um, you know, I find that youth, when they're going to school regardless of what age they're at, it's still a time in their life where they're forming a new identity and that's part of that work, I find really is very meaningful and interesting, right? If they're choosing to come to college and form a new career, whether it's earlier or later, right? And I think that during that time a lot of other challenges can come up too.. When a person is trying to figure out a part of who they are, they also may be re-evaluating other parts of themselves as well. And so I think you know, it's so nice that here George Brown we get to work with our students and we have the opportunity to kind of work with them as a whole person and I really love that.

Constantine Cabarios: I like that, whole person.

Ann Bernardo: You know, you're making me think about mature students who come back to school and you know, they're leaving their salary and their job and I know we have a few matures, you know, people came back to school as mature students even among us and the difficulties and the adjustments in the transitions. You know, your friends are still making money and they have an income and you're living off of a student's income. Who am I now? I'm this, you know, I'm a student. I'm older than everybody in the class. How do I... Where do I fit in? Like, Aarti you bring up a lot of good points about that. And so we welcome our mature students during this adjustment period as well.

Constantine Cabarios: Speaking of mature students, Pablo, Heidi and I count myself in there as coming into the education or postgraduate system late in life. Maybe Pablo and Heidi can talk about that because you mentioned that in your intro.

Pablo Gonzalez: I'll go ahead just briefly, and talk about, yeah, as a mature student to be in first year classes at the age of like 32 with 17 and 18 year olds was definitely something to experience but I found that as a mature student like I was setting such a different place than

when I was in my 20s trying to go to school. I was much more focused and able to... I appreciated being a student and having that identity. It was such a time of growth for me, when I thought that maybe my growing days were behind me, you know, you're kind of thinking that you've reached a level of maturity but I it was, I was so happy to know that you continue to learn and grow throughout your life. And so, now I'm thinking of myself as a lifelong student.

Constantine Cabarios: That's a great way to put it. Heidi?

Heidi Mehta: I mean, I definitely found it different working as a mature student or a studying as a mature student than I did when I was younger. One of the things, and it inspires me around to be around both, right? Because I think working with youth or emerging adults, one of the perspectives that I really appreciate is the ways in which youth can change the world right? And that's really powerful and inspiring for me to see and I also appreciated that when I was a mature student to be around young people and to be challenged to think out of the box and not get stuck in my ways. I went back to do my Master's Degree when I was 35 and it was quite a different experience, you know...the same thing, you know, I was you know, we're say...

Constantine Cabarios: Okay. We'll edit that.

Heidi Mehta: Thank you. Please.

Pablo Gonzalez: Or we won't.

LAUGHTER

Heidi Mehta: As a mature student. I found that I had a, I had a strong direction in which I wanted to go in from having worked for many years and that was empowering as well to take the knowledge and experience I had and put it together and to make it into something meaningful. And I really love again, working with mature students as well as first-time students.

Constantine Cabarios: Yeah, it seems like the developmental thing struck, struck to at me because I feel like developmentally, I'm delayed. I went back to school late in life too, and then it's what Heidi was saying about having to adjust to both worlds. Right? And I appreciate what Heidi had said about appreciating mature students coming into our offices, while what Anne said, I'm catching them at the same time early on from high school and we get see both perspectives. Anyone want to talk about the trends that I as I said earlier, if there are issues that are coming up that you've seen, Aarti?

Aarti Dhanda: Yes. So I think that you know, I will only be able to speak a little bit in terms of George Brown, but just generally having spent time working with individuals from the ages of 16 to 25 most of the time. I think I've been noticing different trends as well. And I think there's always challenges that come with, like we talked about, with being in a place where you're developing your identity, figuring out who you are, but also more anxiety and more stress. I think like a lot of pressure is something that students often share with me, not always feeling like they

have the time, and I notice and I wonder if this is different now the maybe when I was a student, how much pressure people feel to keep up with a lot of things right? Like it's not just school, work, social media, they have to have projects on the side and I wonder how much pressure they feel and what they need to do to be marketable and employable as a worker but then also as an individual do they have more higher expectations of themselves to be an advocate, to do more things. And that may not always be the case, but it's one thing that I've noticed. And also at the same time, I also wonder if there is an increase in loneliness as well.

Constantine Cabarios: Those are great points. Ann, did you want to add to the conversation?

Ann Bernardo: You know, I think, I think it's true like there's I think a lot more people are coming in. I think that's partially, hopefully anyway due to a bit of destigmatisation around mental health. I think that the conversation is open wide and there's lots of, what do you call it like not a program, but there's like there's a lot of stuff in our culture saying, you know trying to destigmatize it, I'm rambling on here, but in any case, yeah, I think you know, there's all sorts of social pressures. I mean, they're different right there different social pressures, like each kind of generation has different social pressures, but I think with the onset of technology and the booming gig economy and everything's you know, everybody's unsure of what their next move is, I think that contributes a lot. But what I what I wanted to say is well just talking about everybody's going back to school after you know making these fairly big life changes is, we're talking a lot about hope and optimism, like being optimistic about it. And you know, I think, I hope that that gets across, like regardless of what developmental stage you are in your life, things can shift and change, you know, and we have a group of counsellors here who, who talked about that very nicely, you know, and I just, anyway just to, just to comment on optimism and you know the value of that.

Constantine Cabarios: I love that. I love that. Yeah.

Hedi Mehta: Speaking of resilience, I also just wanted to nod to our International students. There's this myth out there that International students somehow are wealthy and you know, I see a lot of students who are coming here by themselves for the first time as very young adults and managing pressures of studying and working and trying not to like, not, not to ask for more from their families back home and doing a fantastic job in succeeding, but really really having a lot of barriers to overcome in order to do so.

Constantine Cabarios: Pablo. What would you like to say about students?

I think of this podcast down the road, I think definitely that's going to be one of the topics we must discuss is the barriers that International students face, but barriers that all of our students are facing in terms of financial pressure. These days is just tremendous.

Heidi Mehta: Yes. Domestic as well. Yeah.

Pablo Gonzalez: Yes, so that's definitely something that I see a lot of in counseling sessions is people just dealing with the everyday pressure of their finances, and the not knowing what the job market is going to look like in the future and things like this and is this something that everyone else has had? I'm sure, has had conversations.

Aarti Dhandra: Yes. Yes.

Constantine Cabarios: There's tremendous pressure. I find.

Aarti Dhandra: And I'd like to add that, you know, given the circumstances right now with programs being virtual and everything that's going on, we hear a lot about uncertainty and just acknowledge that. I think that's the issue right now as well for a lot of people feeling more anxious, feeling even maybe more helpless, but I think that was another thing that was coming across to me as everyone was talking, is the positivity and it's one of the things that I love about the work we do is you know, people think that we just deal with people's problems, but we got an opportunity to really see how amazing human beings are how resilient they are, how strong they are, how insightful... and I think that's just something I really love about my job and it always makes me feel more positive in my personal and professional work.

Constantine Cabarios: Well put Aarti.

Pablo Gonzalez: That's awesome. And for me too, I think that that's the best part of my job is when students and you know, we all come to different places in our lives with so many lessons that we've learned and so many strengths that we have, but we don't sometimes recognize them as strengths, and so just be able to bring awareness to somebody's strengths or when they're discounting themselves and how much they've actually accomplished in their lives is so satisfying to me and I think is a big part of our work.

Constantine Cabarios: Did we talk about what got us into counseling?

Pablo Gonzalez: What brought you into counselling Constantine?

Constantine Cabarios: Well, I'll share. It's because I had a therapist that was great and I was going through something of a transition in my life and I was in marketing previously, and I was helping people buy things they didn't really want, so there's a psychology to that. I was interested in psychology. And then when I got into social work, everything fit for me politically and as Heidi was saying in activism. So, it just felt like a perfect fit for me, and then I quit my job and then here I am. And I love what I'm doing at George Brown because, as everyone was saying today, they're just a dynamic group that I work with and also a dynamic group of students that we are privileged to help. Yeah. How about... who wants to add to that, Aarti?

Aarti Dhandra: Okay, I can go. So for me, what brought me into this work is very interesting. I actually decided in my fourth year of University that I was no longer going to do what I thought I was going to do, which was to be a speech therapist, ...Yeah...I really I thought that I had an

interest in that and I did, but I also have an interest in helping people, both because of experiences of people I know or personal experiences. I had lived in multiple countries growing up when I was young. So when I was very young I moved from Canada to India and then I really saw a lot of how the other part of the world lives and I think that at the age of 9 that really changed my view and I came back to living in Canada to recognize how grateful I was to have like running water and that I could leave them the home and not see so much poverty around right? So I think that stayed with me, but I thought when I was young, that I was too sensitive to do this job and then as I got older, I realized like everything I was doing in my spare time was social work. So when I realized I was no longer going to be a Bollywood choreographer (LAUGHTER) I decided I should go for my other passion and focus on helping people.

Constantine Cabarios: That's awesome.

Pablo Gonzalez: That's awesome. Don't give up on your original dream though of being a choreographer. That's great.

Heidi Mehta: You can be a counselor and you can be a Bollywood star.

Constantine Cabarios: That's true.

Ann Bernardo: Yeah, you can do a Bollywood podcast.

Aarti Dhanda: Yeah, I wanted to be a speech therapist, but I also really secretly wanted to be a Bollywood dancer and choreographer. So then when I thought about social work, well dance therapy is a thing. I haven't pursued it yet, but it's something I might pursue in the future.

Ann Bernardo: Nice

Pablo Gonzalez: Cool

Constantine Cabarios: Yeah. How about... who wants to go next? On what drew you... I even forgot the question now. This is what Covid does.

Pablo Gonzalez: I'll go. Yes, we all have soft brains. So in my 20s I had, and I didn't know what to call it the time, but I think I was going through a huge bout of depression and having a lot of anxiety and I didn't have the language for it and it so I didn't really understand what was happening to me, until I talk to a social worker who was a therapist and they kind of explained things to me and it was so helpful to know what it was, and what was the process that was happening inside of me and some of the things that I could do to address it. And one of the things I decided to do, was to go back to school and it helped me address a lot of different things. So for me going back to school was a kind of a therapeutic process. It was a healing process, a learning process. It helped me solidify some identity stuff and political ideology stuff. And so I learned so much and grew so much during that time, and what Aarti was saying about feeling maybe like you're too sensitive about this work. It's my theory that that actually makes

you a better, that your sensitivity actually makes you a better counsellor, makes you more receptive to people's pain.

Constantine Cabarios: i think they call that empathy.

LAUGHTER

Pablo Gonzalez: In some circles they may call it empathy. You're correct. And having that empathy, I think just makes us better at our jobs. Yeah, and I know from talking to everybody here that we, none of us suffer from a lack of, a lack of empathy.

Ann Bernardo: You know, I thank you for that Pablo. What came to mind for me is, we spend our whole lives trying to describe what we're feeling or what we're seeing or what like, you know language how important language is, and I always feel like when students come in they often don't have a language to describe what they're feeling. They often say, oh I feel weird. I feel weird or I feel just some big blanket kind of word and helping them tease that out and identifying what it is and giving them a language is a huge part of the healing process as well. And I do think we spend most, we spend our entire lives trying to be understood that way and in developing a language in which to explain ourselves. So you bring up a very good point.

Constantine Cabarios: That's well put Ann. Well put. Heidi.

Heidi Mehta: I mean, I just wanted to say that one of the things that I think is really incredible about this work is, I think that when I was younger, I was really doing a lot of work on a macro level around trying to fight systems of oppression and I thought that was the only way to do things and I realized that oppression has effects on people's daily lives. And there's a need for personal empowerment and resilience in terms of, and survival and going into social work, it really allowed me to have that analysis and also at the same time to empower or to work with, you know, people who are coming out as queer or trans and you know, creating a supportive environment, creating a space where survivors could tell their stories and feel safe and regain, you know confidence and rebuild their lives, where you know, racialized communities, and I identify as a woman of colour, could feel that there was a space for them to be themselves and I really recognized and now really really have come to appreciate the value of counselling as a space for those kinds of things to challenge oppression and do you help people survive and thrive.

Constantine Cabarios: So we're just going to be wrapping up and maybe we can go around and just to get a sense of what you thought of today. Today's podcast. Let's start with Ann. What did you think of today?

Ann Bernardo: I say it was terrific. I loved getting to know everybody a little bit better, you know. Personal stories and histories and experiences. So that was really delightful and I'm looking forward to what we have to offer in the future too. Mmmhmm.

Constantine Cabarios: And Heidi?

Heidi Mehta: I was really excited and about today as well. I learned awesome things about the people that I work with and that was really exciting and I'm very much looking forward to doing the next podcast with Aarti, and I want to just, just thank everybody for creating this space.

Constantine Cabarios: Aarti?

Aarti Dhanda: Yeah, I feel more lifted up, positive and inspired from this conversation. I think what really stood out is just that we all, as a team really, look, I know we all care, but I think when we talk about what brought us here and what we really hope for the students and how we can help them, that was really something that stood out. And also just talking about all the positive things we love about our work was really nice.

Constantine Cabarios: I appreciate you guys and it's unfortunate that we didn't have the other two counselors, but I am going to echo all of what's said so far, and I am thankful for you guys being here for sharing your histories perhaps, and some experiences and your hopes for this podcast and I'll throw it to Pablo my co-pilot for today.

Pablo Gonzalez: I'm really happy with the conversation that we had today. I feel uplifted as well and I feel more connected to my, to my colleagues here and I hope that whoever's listening to this also feels a little more connected to our department and to us as individuals. That's my, that was my hope from the beginning for this, is that you know, our job is all about communication, and this is another form of reaching people and I hope that we continue to reach people, and that we learn more about each other going into future episodes. I'm excited about that.

Constantine Cabarios: Okay, thanks everyone for joining us today.

Ann Bernardo: Thank you.

Heidi Mehta: Thank you.

Constantine Cabarios: And we'll see you at the next podcast.

Aarti Dhanda: Thank you.

Ann Bernardo: Bye everybody. Thank you.

Aarti Dhanda: Bye.

Constantine Cabarios: And we end.

Voice-over: Thanks for listening to our first podcast. If you're experiencing some challenges while enrolled at GBC simply book a virtual appointment, whenever you feel ready. If you have

any questions and feedback for this and future episodes or wish to book an appointment, please drop us a line at letstalk@georgebrown.ca or visit our website page under student services backslash counseling. Stay tuned and join us next month as we explore; "When Relationships Don't Feel Okay", with Counsellors Aarti Dhanda and Heidi Mehta. Have a great week ahead.