

Helping and healing young minds: Cheryl Chorneyko profile

by [Ashlee Espenell](#)

As a Registered Psychiatric Nurse at the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre (MATC), Cheryl Chorneyko has spent almost 30 years working within the evolving youth mental health system. She's witnessed some significant shifts in the field of child and adolescent mental health. Cheryl has also seen differences between the systemic approaches to youth and adult mental health.

"From my experience, the youth mental health system seems to have more inherent wrap-around support than the adult system," said Cheryl. "It's almost taken for granted how much support there is available in the daily life of youth. School systems, family support, community clubs and other resources can step in and out as needed in the youth system. There are many layers of support for the youth themselves, as well as the systems around them that support their growth. A good many of the supports necessary in promoting, maintaining and in the recovery process from a mental health issue appear to be naturally occurring in the world around them."

She's worked with many clients over the years. Throughout some foundational shifts in approaches to treatment and the mental health system itself, she continues to see

strengths in the youth system that keeps her in the field.

"The youth system appears to perceive mental health issues from a developmental, evolving and malleable lens. These perceptions and an attitude of hope, optimism and resiliency really help when it comes to healing, growth and development," said Cheryl. "Overall, I feel this lens strengthens the youth and families to maintain an active engagement with collaborative partners in their journey."

That positivity plays an important role, keeping youth and families motivated while they learn to build skills to lessen the impact of a potential life-long mental illness.

Cheryl has also witnessed an increase in the overall understanding of mental health issues in the past three decades.

"We've seen a lot of capacity building, the strengthening of community awareness and the capacity to sustain children, teens and families living with mental health needs," said Cheryl. "Schools have expanded teams with more expertise and specialization when it comes to mental health supports. More resources are being developed and we're shifting towards a model that has community supports available outside of traditional hospital systems. We're also seeing an increase in mental health awareness throughout communities. These shifts are critical to addressing the stigma of mental health needs and in the promotion and maintenance of mental health wellbeing."

As someone who's had the opportunity to work with a variety of professionals, from a variety of disciplines, Cheryl is proud of the

essential impact RPNs make on the quality of client care.



“The role as a mental health clinician is very autonomous by nature and has always been the most enjoyable component of the work,” said Cheryl. “Navigating multiple systems on behalf of the client need can be a challenge and being trained within the bio-psycho-social model of care is important. From my experience, RPNs are absolutely well prepared in their training as a professional and regulated discipline to work systematically with folks of all ages along the mental health/illness continuum. I absolutely love my job and feel that it is my specific professional training as an RPN that has led to the positive outcomes of the kiddies and families I have had the opportunity to work with.”

Youth mental health doesn't exist separately from adult mental health. Like its adult counterpart, the youth system faces many of the same challenges—from reducing stigmas to the need for transition programming and even budgetary and staffing crises. Cheryl has never regretted her choice to build a career in this field. She

is optimistic that as community mental health awareness increases, RPNs will have increased opportunities to work within community systems such as school systems, recreation and leisure facilities and government and social service programs.

“It's been an uplifting career to have the privilege to be invited into a parent/caregiver's world, to journey alongside them in their child's growth through a challenging and potentially life-changing mental health need,” she said. “Through the challenges, working with youth and their families is always far more filled with hope, joy and optimism than any fear or worry.”