

How to Touch Grass; Remembering our Supportive 'Roots' in Supervisory Care Roles

There is a saying, “go outside and touch grass,” metaphorically serving as a reminder to close the distance between where you came from and where you ended up. Sometimes people forget they have come a long way, they forget how they felt in their own shoes, in what feels like a million miles back and how the grass felt. Some of the largest ‘distances’ I notice in supportive care are the stagnation of support plans, and often the separation between supervising support teams and the person they are supporting.

Many people retain BSP/PSP strategies over years, sometimes decades, despite signs of a changing brain or body, despite the fact that those ‘shoes’ might not even fit them anymore, or have holes in the soles. From personal experience, I feel supervising behavioural teams are missing valuable input from all support systems who implement and follow these plans every single day. They are missing the grass growing around them, the supportive roots offering ideas. Support staff and natural supports are burning out, getting frustrated that they do not feel heard, or being placed in unsafe positions via lack of clarity or inaccurate support plans. Without adaptivity, both people supported and their support systems struggle to keep up, the distance grows larger and the grass begins to wilt.

As an aspiring behavioural neuropsychologist, I am pursuing a masters of Applied Disabilities Studies, using my experience as a support worker to close that distance, to keep looking for the roots and grass. With SEIU’s scholarship support, I want to gather input from every aspect of a person supported’s life and find unique ways to foster stronger support plans, work towards desired goals and avoid unsafe care. I want to be the behavioural support that asks the clients *and* support systems what they think, how they feel, and how I can better myself for

them, even if it's putting on my old (probably stinky) shoes and remembering where I came from. I want to be the kind of supervising support I wish I had when faced with challenges first-hand, someone who offers more than “follow the BSP.” I want to be approachable, someone who remembers to touch the grass and look for the roots as much as I possibly can and to push other supervising care teams to do the same.