



Suicide Crisis
Helpline



Lived Experience at the Heart of 9-8-8

The 9-8-8 Lived Experience Engagement Model

Lived experience strengthens equity, quality, and authenticity in suicide prevention.

When people with lived and living experience of suicide are meaningfully engaged, services become more responsive, compassionate, and effective. This document shares 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline's approach to embedding lived experience at the heart of 9-8-8 service, and offers strategies you can use in your own work.

What is the 9-8-8 Lived Experience Advisory Team?

The 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline is Canada's three-digit suicide prevention service.

At 9-8-8, lived experience is not an afterthought – it is foundational. Our goal is to keep lived and living experience at the heart of 9-8-8, embedding the perspectives of people who have experience related to suicide across all areas of the service.

Leading this work at 9-8-8 is the Lived Experience Advisory Team, a group of Advisors from across Canada.

Advisors draw on their intersecting identities and a diverse range of experiences, which can include having thoughts of suicide or attempting suicide, supporting someone they care about, accessing crisis services, and grieving someone lost to suicide.

Together, they collaborate regularly with 9-8-8 staff to co-create solutions, review materials, inform processes and procedures, and strengthen how the service operates.

By including lived and living experience at 9-8-8, we are...



Ensuring the service reflects the real needs of callers and texters.



Strengthening equity, quality, and a person-centred approach.



Embedding continuous improvement into service design and delivery.



Upholding the principle:

“Nothing about us, without us.”

- the idea that no decisions about a group should be made without their direct collaboration.

Sowing the seeds of impact

Engagement creates meaningful change in multiple ways. It empowers advisors to share their experiences, shapes organizational decisions, and contributes to broader progress in suicide prevention and life promotion.

Meaningful engagement

Advisors inform decisions across all areas of 9-8-8 – ensuring people with lived and living experience shape training, communications, and service delivery.

Supportive spaces

Advisor contributions help build a collaborative, compassionate, and validating culture across the service. Their lived and living experience helps to inform a trauma-informed approach to make 9-8-8 a more supportive space for callers, texters, and staff.

Rooted in shared values

Lived and living experiences are the roots of 9-8-8, and flow into every aspect of the service from the ground up. People with lived and living experience from diverse walks of life help to ground the 9-8-8 team in shared values that create the conditions for meaningful work.

Personal Impact

Advisors experience connection, empowerment, and hope by being meaningfully involved and seeing changes made based on their input.

Societal Impact

By centering lived and living experience, 9-8-8 contributes to greater equity, authenticity, and positive change in suicide prevention and life promotion.

Organizational Impact

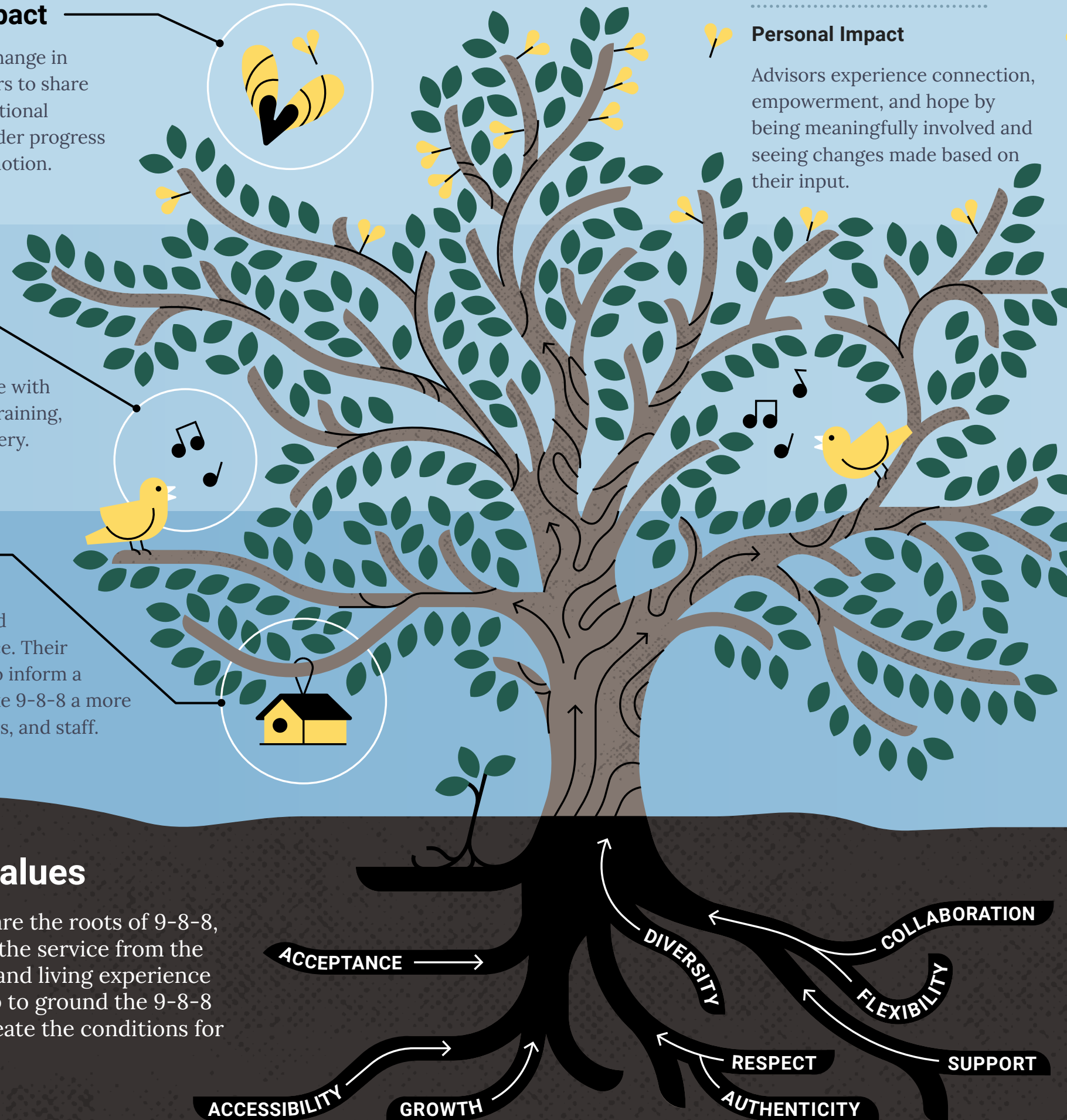
Procedures, training and service design are strengthened by lived and living experience, improving the quality and responsiveness of 9-8-8.

A model of ongoing partnership

The 9-8-8 engagement model reflects our sustained and relational approach to engagement. Advisors are involved early, heard often, and supported throughout.

Their contributions shape real decisions – influencing procedures and service delivery – and remain embedded as 9-8-8 evolves.

In turn, 9-8-8 creates the conditions for people to contribute their lived and living experience through clear communication, shared expectations, and structures that enable meaningful participation.



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Be genuine in how you invite people in. Value lived experience as expertise, not as an afterthought. Keep communication consistent and clear, but also allow for flexibility. And never underestimate the importance of relationships – people stay engaged when they feel connected and respected, not just when the project looks good on paper.

– Sarah, Lived Experience Advisory Team




9-8-8

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