

# The Employment Journey

PEI's Top Source for Career Planning and Job Seeking

## A look at jobs at the new youth addictions day program

by Heidi Riley



Youth Worker Alana Jarvis and Team Lead Sean Morrison are staff members at the Strength Program, a new youth substance abuse and addiction program.

A new provincial youth addictions day treatment program opened in Charlottetown in January. The goal of the **Strength Program** is to help youth deal with challenges related to substance abuse, addiction, mental health, family issues, and education.

“The program was developed with best practices in mind,” says **Sean Morrison**, Team Lead. “It is important that we work closely with youth and families to deal with substance abuse concerns and factors which may contribute to substance use such as depression or anxiety. Education and guidance for parents and other family members is also a key part of the program.”

### Staff

The program employs staff in a variety of occupations who work as a team.

- The **Team Lead** designs and plans the day-to-day aspects of the program and supervises both the program staff and supervised housing staff.
- A **Mental Health Therapist** divides time between the Strength Program and Richmond Centre. This position requires a Social Work degree.
- Two **Youth Workers** are on site. This position requires a one or two-year college-level program. Youth workers have a dual role. Their day starts in the group home, assisting the youth in getting up and driving them to the program. They assist with programs during the day, and then transition the youth back to the group home for the night. The supervised housing program based in Cornwall is staffed through a casual list of rotating Youth Workers.

- An **Academic Youth Worker/Education Specialist** works with program participants on high school credits, school re-entry activities, or on GED preparation. The teacher also works with schools on curriculum development and assists in running group discussions and outdoor recreation activities. This position requires an education degree and experience working with youth in alternative education. The skills needed are similar to what is required for educational components at the correctional facility for youth in Summerside or the Provincial Alternative Education School at the Royalty Centre.
- An **Administrative Support** person runs the administrative office and schedules case conferences.
- The **Youth Counsellor** position requires extensive experience working with youth and a degree in sociology, psychology, social work, or a college-level program in youth development. This role is similar to other youth counsellor roles across the province but works in an extended program environment rather than in schools or community-based addiction service sites.
- **Youth and Family Counsellor** would also require a degree in the social sciences. This is a role similar to youth and family counsellors who work at addiction service sites across the province. This individual runs the daily youth programs and also facilitates the family/parent support component of the program.

### Positions hardest to fill

“Healthcare is always a difficult environment for recruiting skilled, educated, and experienced employees,” says Sean. “Finding qualified addiction and mental health counsellors is a challenge.”

### Job placement

A social work student from UPEI currently has a work placement with the Strength Program. The student is working with the Mental Health Therapist. Job placements help social work and sociology students get clinical experience.

“In the future, we plan to offer job placements to college students as well,” says Sean. “We will do just one field placement at a time, and we may take on another placement in April.”

### Hiring in the near future

“The casual positions for supervised housing may eventually become permanent roles if demand for the service is there,” says Sean. “Being on the casual list is a good opportunity to gain experience. We have been quite fortunate to find Youth Workers who have worked in other facilities or group homes.”

### A Youth Worker's employment journey

**Alana Jarvis** has been a Youth Worker for the past nine years. She was inspired to pursue this occupation while living in Toronto. “I met many youth who were struggling with life, and that gave me a passion for this field. We have the same needs here on PEI that you see in Toronto.”

Alana earned a double major in Psychology and Sociology from UPEI. She has worked in group homes and also ran a youth project for the **Council of People with Disabilities** called **Around the Block**.

“There is a quote that I live by: ‘Every youth needs somebody to be irrationally crazy about them.’ There are a lot of us in this field who want to make someone feel special.

“I love working with people, and I like everything about my job. I also enjoy the team building with the people I work with. I truly believe that when you're happy and excited to go to work, you are in the right place.

“Knowing that something is being fulfilled at the end of the day and that there is a reason behind your work helps a lot too. The work is fresh and new. I feel like I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be right now.”