

Summary of 'Transforming youth mental health services in a semi-urban and rural region of Canada: ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent' in the ACCESS Open Minds Early Intervention in Psychiatry Supplement

Transforming Youth Mental Health in Chatham-Kent, Ontario

Introduction

ACCESS Open Minds is a national evaluation project transforming youth mental health services across the country. The project was initiated through Strategy of Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR) and it funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Graham Boeckh Foundation.

The ACCESS Open Minds network is made up of 14 communities located in 6 provinces and 1 territory. The service transformation framework consists of 5 objectives: early identification, rapid access, appropriate care, continuity of care, and youth and family engagement. Due to the diversity of geographic, political and cultural realities at each of the 14 sites, the transformation framework and objectives were designed to be adapted to each site in order to meet the specific needs of local youth in those communities.

The supplement describes how service transformation was achieved in seven of the ACCESS Open Minds sites. This document summarizes the article describing the service transformation which took place in the semi-urban and rural ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent site.



Early Identification



Rapid Access



Appropriate Care



Continuous Care



Youth and Family Engagement

SPOR network funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Graham Boeckh Foundation.



Context

Chatham-Kent is a rural municipality in south-western Ontario with a population of 101,647. There are about 11,595 youth aged 15-24 in this community. Historically, mental health services in Chatham-Kent have been delivered through a collaborative approach between the hospital and community organizations. Despite this, emergency department visits and demands for service continued to increase year over year. Homelessness has also been an increasing phenomenon in the community. Navigating the system was difficult for youth and their families. There was a need for change, and the community came together to undertake a **community mapping of services** in order to identify gaps and come up with solutions.

Community Mapping



- Community mapping undertaken by a number of community stakeholders (police, addictions services, housing services, education, etc.).
- Lead to the creation of a complete inventory of services and gaps put together by a community volunteer and a family peer navigator (ACCESS OM ambassadors).





Early Identification

The ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent site has conducted community-wide education to increase mental health awareness and promote ACCESS Open Minds as a central point for youth referrals. Social media and more traditional forms of media (radio) were also used to publicize the program. Invitations for the grand opening of the site were sent to all youth-focused community services in order to strengthen inter-organizational connections and break down barriers to accessing care. These types of inter-organizational partnerships resulted in better overall support for youth in the community. For example, the Municipality of Chatham-Kent's income and housing programs helped identify youth at risk for homelessness so that they could be provided with affordable housing. As a result of all of these awareness building initiatives, in the first year of ACCESS Open Minds operation there was an increase of about 25% in youth seeking mental health services. This success can be attributed to the prominent new location in the downtown area, the collaboration between partnering organizations and the numerous awareness activities.



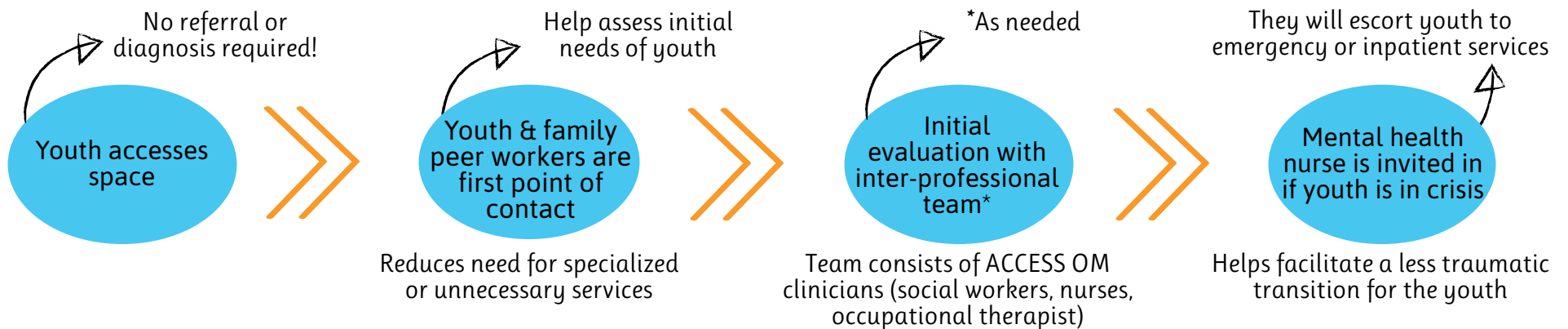
Rapid Access



To facilitate rapid access to an assessment within 72 hours a “youth space” was designated as the “go-to” space for youth, families, friends seeking mental-health related support and services. Many other core services (counselling, housing, case-management, psychiatry) are co-located in this open-concept space which has removed barriers to care. This eliminated the need to refer people out to multiple locations/services.



What Rapid Access looks like at ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent:





Services include

- Youth and family support and groups
- Single session walk-in therapy (point of entry into care)
- Homes4Youth
- Psychological therapy

ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent has also built strong links to other mental health and addictions and social services in the community, and are thus in a good position to transition youth to services not offered within the shared space. Partnerships range from mental health and addictions organizations and services, local police, a restorative justice organization, public health agencies, youth and family services, as well as school boards and many more.



Appropriate Care

Most of the services provided by ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent are located within the large shared space which makes access to appropriate care, and referrals between services, within 30 days possible.



Continuous Care

The ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent site was built on existing work towards integration to improve youth experiences of mental health services. This resulted in partnerships between children's mental health services, hospital, and the adult mental health sector which has produced strategies for improving the continuity of care. With Chatham-Kent Children's services offering services within the shared space, youth no longer experience the abrupt change in services they receive at age 18. They can continue to seek services in the same location and can maintain proximity to a former counsellor.



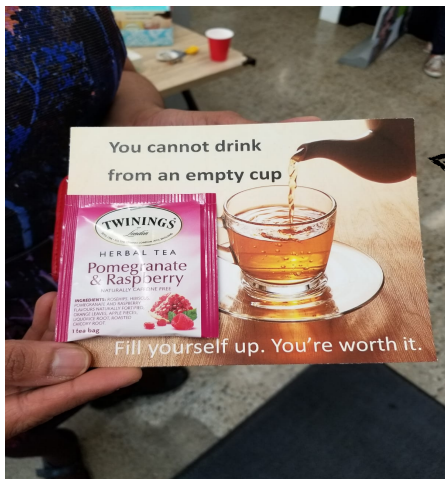
ACCESS Open Minds counsellors facilitate seamless transitions to new counsellors by accompanying the youth to their first interactions and have even continued to provide some services using a shared care approach. Both youth and their families have expressed appreciation for being able to receive services in a familiar setting with familiar faces.



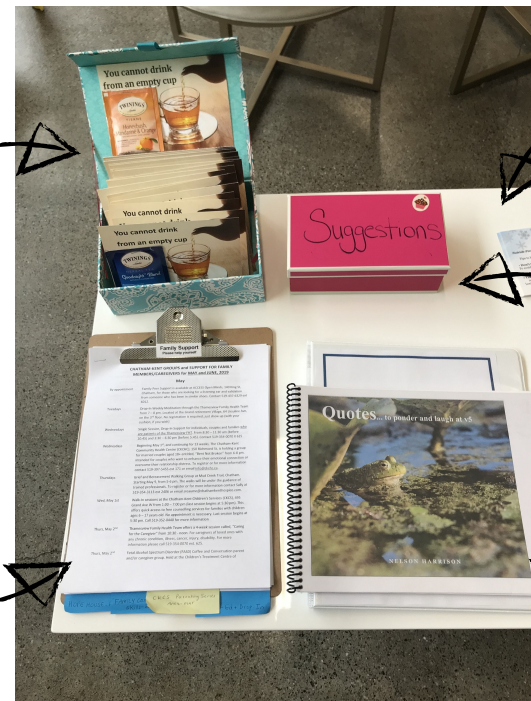
Youth and Family Engagement



Youth and families have been actively involved in the establishment of the site and operation of the activities. They have also raised awareness in the community and have provided leadership on youth and family engagement at a national network level. Youth have also been actively involved in choosing the location of the space, in meeting with realtors, and in designing the space (including designing art and themes for the rooms and contributing to the "look and feel" of the common space). The site also employs two youth peer navigators, and a family navigator who are often the first individuals visitors meet when coming to the site. Additionally, youth and families participate in the decision making around new staff, program planning and evaluation.



Tea because "you can't drink from an empty cup"



Clipboard of groups and supports in the community for family/caregivers

Welcome card containing a self-care message, helpful numbers (including the contact of the Family Navigator) and information about ACCESS Open Minds

Suggestion box

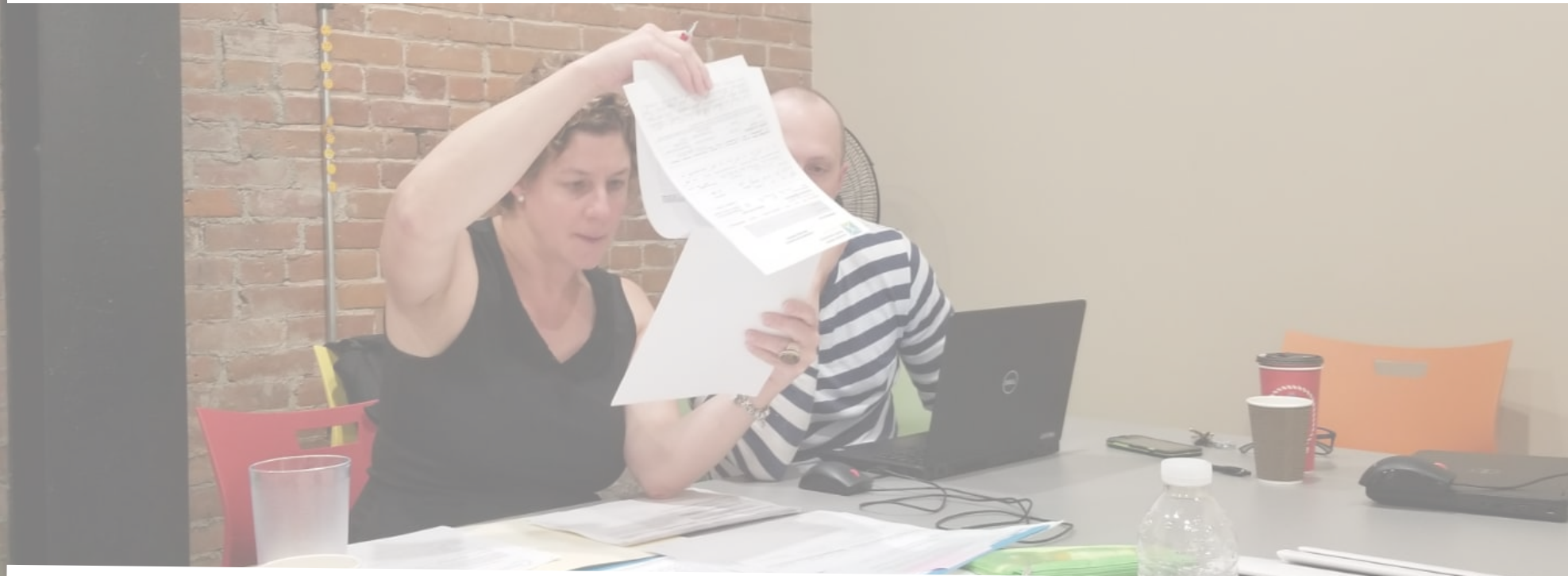
Quote book filled with funny and inspirational thoughts - perfect for de-stressing!



Research and Evaluation

To ensure that youth were engaged in both clinical and research activities, two joint positions integrating Peer Navigator and Research Assistant functions were created. The people in these roles received training from the ACCESS Open Minds central office so that they were well positioned to contribute to the data collection at the site.

Integrating peer-navigation, research and evaluation helps to ensure continuity and team communication. It also increases youth understanding of the importance of research and evaluation in youth mental healthcare.



Community engagement has been instrumental in the establishment of the physical space and the services offered. The Chatham-Kent community has supported ACCESS Open Minds in various ways including donations from high schools, philanthropic organizations, private corporations and family members. Other community organizations such as the Rotary Club even provided crucial seed funding for programs, furnishings and public events.

Involvement of organizations and community

Challenges and Sustainability

Several challenges have been experienced throughout the process of the transformation of the Chatham-Kent site. These challenges include issues with shared-decision making between stakeholders, recruitment and retention of qualified staff, securing sustainable funding, and maintaining the capacity to deliver services despite the increasing number of youth being referred.

To ensure sustainability of the ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent site, several strategies are being tested. For example, organizations that are part of the shared space are identifying opportunities to maximize the use of existing resources and funds. The site has also participated in numerous local, regional, provincial and national presentations to promote ACCESS Open Minds as a core component of the community and a key resource for youth seeking help.

The ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent site was also 1 of 10 sites selected to receive investments from the Ontario Ministry of Health to promote youth wellness as part of the Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario initiative.

