



# ACCESS OPEN MINDS ESPRITS OUVERTS

Chatham-Kent, ON

## The impact of youth mental health transformation

Until recently, youth in Chatham-Kent had trouble getting the mental health care they needed despite strong links that existed between local health and community services. Although services were available, navigating the system was still complicated and difficult for youth and their families and carers, and visits to hospital emergency departments by youth continued to increase.

Recognizing this reality, and through the ACCESS Open Minds (OM) project, Chatham-Kent Health Alliance (CKHA) and the Canadian Mental Health Association Lambton-Kent (CMHA-LK) formed a ground-breaking partnership with key community stakeholders that would transform the way youth mental health services are delivered in the community.

Through the ACCESS OM project, more than 15 community partners came together and collaborated to begin offering services under the new banner of ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent. Stakeholders were each willing to put their individual organizational agendas aside to focus on a new plan that would be transformational, challenge the status quo, and address the presence of barriers to care. This kind of increased cooperation was necessary to provide youth and their families and carers with a one-stop access point to youth mental

health services, whether the problem was minor or serious.

For youth, ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent provides direct access to a mental health assessment and support without a referral. Peer support, family support, counselling, case management, and service coordination are some of the services offered on a daily basis. Not ready to talk just yet? The hub also holds weekly Fun Nights which include various activities such as board games, art, music, and movies. These gatherings are a way to help connect young people, and give them an opportunity to talk or check in with helping people, or each other, in a less formal setting.

For family members and carers who may be accompanying a young person in need of support, the Chatham-Kent team has a Family Navigator on staff as well, to help and support them through their process of help-seeking.

### Keys to transformation

Changing a system as complicated as health and social services isn't easy, and it's an ongoing process. Despite the difficulties, there are some key highlights that have made ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent a success so far:



ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent is a youth-friendly space, where young people have rapid access to youth mental health services

# ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent

## 1. Location, collaboration, and a strong foundation

### *Co-location for integration*

Through the ACCESS OM project, there are currently over five community partners (and counting!) who became roommates. Despite best intentions, these service providers used to operate in silos, but now through co-location and collaboration, they've created a truly integrated service delivery model. This kind of working together happens when peer organizations work side by side, share knowledge, and participate in real-time collaborative treatment and intervention planning. It's one thing to have official "referral pathways," but the Chatham-Kent team found that bringing everyone together under the same roof was essential in giving youth and their supporters direct access to the help they need.

### *A common name for a common goal*

As more organizations came on board, adding the various logos to documents became increasingly difficult. Clients and families shared with the service providers that it wasn't important to them who did what; they cared most about finding and accessing services quickly and easily. Bringing all the organizations under one common name gave a sense that everyone was a part of this new solution; organizational histories were important, but the partnering agencies all made a commitment to system transformation, which meant trying something new and innovative.

### *The importance of early planning*

Facilities planning is a concern that can easily distract any team from the core business of serving the community's youth. Sustainable revenue sources are a critical first step of committing to a "hub" space – which can be more easily said than done. Since the organizations are now working with reduced administrative budgets, securing revenue to cover lease and operating expenses is a daunting but essential challenge. Such a hub includes establishing a defined "space" that brings partners together. Dedicated revenue for the lease and operating costs must be included in early planning stages for transformational projects like ACCESS OM to succeed.

## 2. Support from peers (for both youth and families)

Who better to help navigate a system than someone who has been there before? ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent employs two youth Peer Navigators and a Family Navigator. These navigators are sometimes the first person people seeking

help might meet, making that first big step of asking for help a little bit easier. The navigators themselves are trained in mental health first-aid and active listening, and are considered part of the clinical team. They are also trained in data collection, making the experience an enriching and fulfilling position for young adults who have experienced the system and want to help their peers. Youth and Family Navigators are described as being a voice that individuals seeking help can relate to, and who remind them that they are not alone.

## 3. By youth, for youth

Part of the ACCESS OM project is making sure that youth are involved in every part of the transformation. For ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent, youth were involved in every aspect of planning, from the design of the new space, making it as inviting as possible and somewhere that youth would actually go, to the hiring of new staff.

The team learned early on that the community, health care and social service leaders, private funders, and policy makers wanted to hear directly from the youth, so as to ensure that their influence and stamp of approval was on every component of the ACCESS OM project. A core value of the National Youth Council states: "We are all ACCESS: remembering that youth are an important part of a greater network." This value has been carried out with ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent through engaging youth voices at every step of the way.

## 4. Working together to address service gaps

Transformation doesn't happen overnight, and it certainly doesn't happen without bringing all the stakeholders to the table to ensure that there is a common sense of ownership over the project. Crucial to the whole process was the creation of an inventory of existing services in the community. This exercise began with a Community Mapping process, which helped everyone better understand what each partner had to offer and where there were duplicate services and gaps in the system. Community partners learned a great deal from one another, and most left with an improved understanding and appreciation of the resources that already exist.

This exercise established new priorities that the ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent team still references today when new funding opportunities arise. As partnering organizations were no longer competing for resources, more opportunities arose to share and support one another's applications to address outstanding gaps in care, and to further expand upon available resources.

## Impacts so far...

The results have been resoundingly positive since ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent opened its doors in May 2016:

Over 400 youth have accessed services, with a noticeable increase in the number of youth living in rural areas seeking help.

Figure 1 illustrates the steady increase of youth seeking help at the ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent hub over the last year. Since the site's official launch of ACCESS OM in 2016, there has already been 36% more youth seen than in the baseline year of 2014-15.

Participating organizations are identifying ongoing opportunities to repurpose existing funds to invest in the ACCESS OM framework, which is important for the sustainability of the project, and the youth hub as a critical resource for the community.

Inter-ministerial and private-sector collaborations are proving to be successful. Programs funded under the Ministries of Health, Children and Youth Services, Education, and Community Safety and Corrections Services, as well as the Municipality of Chatham-Kent, the local Rotary Club, and private businesses are just a few examples of the organizations joining together to transform youth mental health services. These joint efforts include providing services directly to youth, participating in community education and awareness initiatives, donating furniture and supplies towards the youth space, and leading community beautification projects to give the youth space a welcoming look and feel.

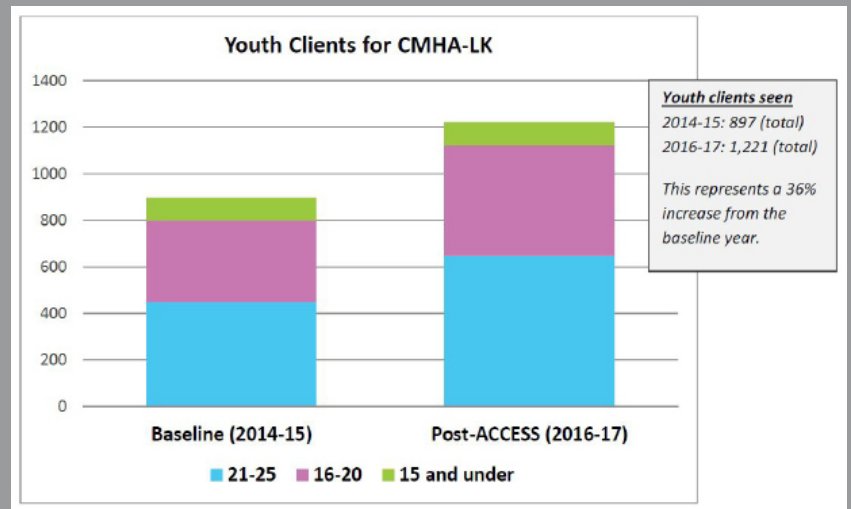


Figure 1: Youth clients of CMHA-LK

Community champions such as the Chatham-Kent Children's Services, Youth Diversion Officer, and the Mental Health and Addictions Nurse in the school sectors are introducing ACCESS OM as a resource for youth seeking help, and have often accompanied youth to their first visit for an in-person and warm handover and a reassuring presence. A Mental Health and Addictions Nurse, who would typically work in the CCAC or local school, now prefers to frequent the ACCESS OM site and work alongside peers in order to improve collaboration and knowledge transfer between various programs.

This new way of doing things is appealing to other service providers who are also frustrated with the current system; ACCESS OM Chatham-Kent has recently recruited a new child/adolescent psychiatrist who will be available to directly provide specialized services to those in need.

## Direct feedback from youth and family members has also been positive:

*"...I must say we were encountering numerous obstacles when trying to get things done. Well, with all of the help and guidance...we now have answers and continue to move forward with things in regards to our relative...So with this being said we would like to thank the centre and both women for their guidance during this confusing time."*

– **Grandma and Aunt**

*"...You were SO HELPFUL and we are greatly appreciative! I think you provided us with the support and understanding that we needed—just confirmation that we aren't monsters!"*

– **Parent**

*"[ACCESS] is an excellent bridge to help an individual get by when they're in need of support. 10/10."*

– **Youth**

## About the national ACCESS Open Minds project

ACCESS Open Minds is a pan-Canadian research and evaluation project that marks a major innovation in youth mental health service design, delivery, evaluation, and research. Its framework provides a structure through which communities can mobilize their strengths and address the mental health needs of their youth. With more than a dozen participating service sites across Canada, these individuals form the first network launched under Canada's Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR), funded through a partnership between the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Graham Boeckh Foundation.

The state of communication and partnerships between health care services in Chatham-Kent is exemplary, and the positive impacts of more easily accessible, unified pathways to care are good news for the community. It's also good news for all Canadian youth, because the lessons learned from Chatham-Kent's strengths and successes are continually being fed back into the pan-Canadian ACCESS OM research and evaluation project, to help build a robust framework for any of the diverse contexts across Canada.



For more information about ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent site, please contact:

Rebecca Prince, Clinical Coordinator  
240 Grand Ave West, Suite 100  
Chatham, ON N7L 1C1  
Telephone: (519) 437-6329 ext 2601  
[info@accessopenmindsck.com](mailto:info@accessopenmindsck.com)

## Our Partners:

Chatham-Kent Health Alliance, Mental Health & Addictions Program  
Canadian Mental Health Association Lambton Kent  
Chatham-Kent Children's Services  
Chatham-Kent Police Service  
Mobile HELP Team  
Family Service Kent  
Municipality of Chatham-Kent  
Lambton Kent District School Board & St. Clair Catholic District School Board  
Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) Mental Health & Addiction Nurse providing services in primary and secondary schools  
Mental Health Network (Hope House)  
Restorative Justice Chatham-Kent  
WAYS Mental Health Support  
Chatham-Kent Community Health Centre  
Make Children Better Now Foundation

Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research

**SPOR**

Putting Patients First 



Fondation  
**Graham Boeckh**  
Foundation