

A BIG IDEA:

An Integrated Youth Services Network Model for Guelph and Wellington County

Rotary has a long and proud history of helping to make good things happen in communities. The Rotary Club of Guelph is now facilitating a significant local project - to make youth services more accessible by providing youth with a centralized system to gain access to everything from employment counselling to mental health and addiction help.

On April 26th, 2019, Cyndy Forsyth (co-chair of the Rotary-led project steering committee) provided the Rotary Club of Guelph members with this summary and update on the initiative. Here is the story so far.

The Challenge

We are fortunate to have many wonderful health and wellbeing services in our area, but they are spread out and independent from each other, making it difficult (often impossible) for individuals to find and access the right resources in a timely way when needed. This challenge is especially true for young people needing help, with mental health and related concerns topping the list.

So ... what if we could change this situation, and somehow make it easier for young people and their supporters to “navigate the system” and get friendly, knowledgeable, speedy help through a one-stop shop? A place that is attractive, warm and welcoming so youth want to be there?

A grassroots community initiative towards this aim is well underway in Guelph-Wellington, led by the Rotary Club of Guelph.

The Vision

*To establish an **Integrated Youth Services Network** for Wellington County and the city of Guelph, where youth (age 12 – 26) are at the centre of services that are available in our community, and youth have equal access to a continuum of services from employment to mental health and addiction services. Our vision includes service providers **working together** to enhance the integration of services and build a system to better meet the needs of youth in our community.*

Background

It's been clear for a very long time that "the system" needs to change to better meet the needs of youth. However, our wide variety of separate agencies have so far not had a pathway to integrate local youth services to any great extent. Understandably, one agency cannot tell another agency what to do, so they continue operating independently and separately for the most part, in their own area of expertise.

At our club, the idea arose that perhaps **Rotary could play the role of a neutral facilitator to bring parties together for an integrated and more effective system.** It's a big and bold idea ... and things are happening! Here's the story so far.

The start ... August 2018

The Rotary Club of Guelph invited Dr. Joanna Henderson from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) to speak about the establishment of Youth Wellness Hubs in Ontario. These centres are designed to provide youth with "**The right services, at the right time, in the right place.**" Joanna's extraordinary expertise, vision and passion were inspiring and lit a spark. Could Guelph create a youth wellness hub as other cities had done? A few club members, led by Cyndy Forsyth and Marty Fairbairn, felt that Rotary should test the waters to see if there was a local appetite for this idea, and whether people were willing to work together in our community to make it happen. Planning for the first step began without delay.

November 2018

On Saturday, November 24th, 2018 the Rotary Club of Guelph, working collaboratively with the Guelph YMCA/YWCA, the Guelph Community Foundation and the Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington, hosted a one-day workshop to examine the viability and willingness to create a local youth hub. A wide range of stakeholders were invited to participate in the workshop including youth from the Guelph YMCA/YWCA, City of Guelph Youth Council, and Rotaract.

Over 40 different agencies (62 individuals) heard experts giving presentations on relevant topics including the current mental health and addiction crisis in Guelph and Wellington County and what a Youth Hub model looks like.

Results were not surprising. Everyone acknowledged that there is an overwhelming need to do things differently, and that it will take our entire community working together to change the alarming trends and trajectory of what we are currently witnessing.

The general concept agreed upon was the establishment of an **Integrated Youth Services model**. A "one-stop-shop" for youth aged 12-26, designed to meet a wide range of needs across the continuum, including mental health, substance use, primary care, education, employment, training, housing and other community and social services. Co-designed with youth, the

Integrated Youth Service model should include peer services, outreach, and system-navigation services. Services should emphasize quality, be timely, integrated and co-located, making it easier for youth to get what they need, when they need it.

With such a positive outcome, next steps were pursued immediately.

December 2018

An interim steering committee was formed, led by Rotary and expanded to include representatives from parties that are directly involved in service delivery to youth. At the first steering committee meeting, it was decided to commission an environmental scan to determine what is available for youth in Guelph and Wellington County, including the needs of both urban and rural youth.

Wellington County joined the steering committee.

January 2019

Community outreach expanded, mainly through word of mouth or introductions. The Guelph Library, the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and Public Health joined the steering committee. The Guelph Youth Council was invited to the table. Our MP Lloyd Longfield, who is passionate about improving mental health, was consulted to determine what is missing from our concept.

Key ideas emerged:

- To create multiple physical service centres (both urban and rural) co-located throughout Wellington County and Guelph all networked together to ensure youth can access a centre reasonably close to them.
- To include a “virtual” component in the model, to allow youth to access services online
- To include the university community as they are grappling with these issues as well.

Two primary partners were established.

- The **Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington** (CMHA WW, represented by Helen Fishburn, Acting Executive Director). Rather than creating another charity, this initiative will rest under the CMHA WW umbrella and report to an independent committee like the steering committee that has been established.
- The **Guelph Community Foundation** as financial partner (GCF, represented by Executive Director and fellow Rotarian, Chris Willard). The GCF has set up an endowment fund to ensure the longevity of this



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Waterloo Wellington



initiative, which is being planned with a 10-year outlook, and a flow-through fund to meet the immediate needs to ensure this project is launched.

February 2019

With momentum and community involvement growing rapidly, the need was identified for a **project manager** to expedite the work, and the call went out to stakeholders for seed funding through the Guelph Community Foundation. To date, \$54,000 has been raised towards the goal of \$150,000 to hire a project manager for a year. This funding would allow the initiative to ensure that critical tasks can be done in a timely manner. It would also be directed to stakeholder engagement, concept development and youth engagement.

The fund donation card is at the end of this article) – please help us spread the word.

Portage Ontario, the residential drug addiction rehabilitation centre for youth in Elora, joined the steering committee.

March 2019

Project leaders met with Kristen Drexler from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Centre Wellington. It had been learned that they were creating a hub type model in Fergus. Says Cyndy, “Our models aren’t that far off so we have joined our efforts and Fergus most likely will be the first site to open.”

Also in March, a consultant was hired to write a grant proposal to the federal government for the **Guelph Wellington Integrated Youth Services Network**. Cyndy added “We needed to keep moving forward with the work despite not having a project manager. We are working with Joanna Henderson on this proposal and the University of Guelph is lending their expertise as well.”

Further, the project team agreed to participate in a social networking analysis that is conducted by Joanna and her team. This analysis will identify the service gaps for youth in our community.

The Steering Committee at present

It now consists of four Rotarians from the Rotary Club of Guelph (Cyndy Forsyth, Marty Fairbairn, Chris Willard, Paul Dredge); the Guelph YMCA/YWCA; the Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington; Wellington County; a representative from the two Guelph Wellington School Boards; Family and Children’s Services; Wyndham House; Michael House; the LHIN; the Guelph Public Library; the Guelph Community Foundation; Public Health; Portage; the

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United Way; and the University of Guelph. Daniel Price, an active and insightful local resident in his 20's, has joined the steering committee in the valuable role of Youth Representative.

Additional outreach

Meetings are continuing with key stakeholders: area mayors, politicians, other Rotary and service clubs, service providers, community resources, police services, businesses, key individuals, and more.

The more that people hear about this initiative, the more they want to know how to get involved. That is why a full-time project manager is now urgently required.

Initial Planning Stage

We are proposing that the initial stage of this project should focus on multiple physical co-locations for youth in both rural and urban locations in Guelph and Wellington County. The youth friendly locations must be easily accessible and provide services on both a walk-in and appointment basis.

How does technology expand the reach?

Simultaneously, we would build a technology component to enable this work. We know, from research, that youth want to access a physical location to connect with people locally, and they also want to be able to reach out through technology when they are in need and connect with a person who knows their local community and is available to assist them.

Youth involvement from the beginning

The physical spaces would be co-designed by youth to ensure the spaces are what youth want and where they want to be. It is more than simply a mental health and addiction service centre. It also includes being a safe place to hang out, with access to computers, recreational activities and an array of services to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

The steering committee wants to hear about the experiences and wishes of youth and has developed this online survey. Please share it widely:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GuelphWellingtonYouthSurvey>

April 2019 - Working Committees established

Four Working Committees were created on April 2, 2019.

1. Community Outreach and Communications

Assess what outreach has been done to date and create a strategic plan to ensure key stakeholders from both Wellington County and the City of Guelph have had an opportunity to learn about the initiative and how they can be involved.

2. Data Analysis, Literature Review, Environmental Scan

Review the research completed to date by Dr. Henderson, review the phase 1 environmental scan and review the literature. Identify work and/or gaps that need to be completed going forward and make recommendations to the steering committee.

3. Youth Engagement

Identify the opportunities in Wellington County and Guelph where youth can provide their input and engage. Include both rural and urban youth, different social economic backgrounds, age groups and education levels with the goal to be inclusive. Ensure marginalized youth are able to provide input and engage. Take an inventory of what has been completed and map our strategy going forward to ensure those who wish to engage have an opportunity.

4. Funding Opportunities

Identify funding opportunities for the project manager (\$150,000). Oversee the creation of the federal funding proposal and prepare a recommendation for the steering committee regarding a work plan for securing funding. Work with the Centre Wellington Community Foundation to secure funding in collaboration.

These committees have been established to create strategic work plans for each of the above areas. Working groups will come together, identify a path and put pen to paper on how they wish to create the road map for the work that needs to be accomplished in the upcoming year. They are to report back to the steering committee by the end of June 2019.

Learning from the experience of Rotary Chatham

On April 13th, members of the steering committee traveled to Chatham (Ontario) to see that city's youth hub called [ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent](#) which is one of 14 such sites under the umbrella of a pan-Canadian research and evaluation network.

The Rotary Club of Chatham played a significant role in getting this local youth hub established. Although theirs is a slightly different concept than our proposed model, their website at [ACCESS Open Minds Chatham-Kent](#) gives an idea of what is meant by an integrated youth services site. Their website photos also reflect their warm and interesting site design where youth have had input every step of the way, which is our intention, too.

June 2019

Wellington County will be hosting a meeting on June 26th of groups that are involved in youth mental health in Wellington County, to further discuss what everyone is doing and see if we can all work together.

The idea is to bring the entire Guelph Wellington community together – service clubs, service providers and stakeholders – EVERYONE in order to bring this initiative to fruition.

Cyndy says, “It is a massive undertaking and we are chipping away at it, one relationship at a time.”

Conclusion

As we move this project forward, it is clear that our community wants to meet the needs of our youth in an integrated and innovative way. We know our current system isn’t working. This model provides us with an opportunity to offer wrap-around services for our youth, placing them at the centre of their care.

Will an integrated youth services network solve all our problems? Absolutely not. We will still need vital services like Wyndham House, the Guelph Community Health Centre, the Canadian Mental Health Association and many other organizations to serve severe cases. What this integrated youth services model can do is provide youth with a centralized space that is safe and socially inclusive, to visit in person or to link online when they need help.

We have no doubt that this model will enrich and perhaps even save the lives of local youth by responding to their needs at the right time, in the right place, and in the right way.

For more information:

Contact the steering committee at
integratedyouthservicemodel@gmail.com

Steering Committee Members, as of April 26 2019

Committee Co-Chairs are Cyndy Forsyth (Rotary Club of Guelph) and Sheila Markle (Family & Children's Services Guelph Wellington)

Organization	Represented by
Rotary Club of Guelph	Cyndy Forsyth, Paul Dredge, Marty Fairbairn
Family & Children's Services GW	Sheila Markle
Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington	Helen Fishburn, Kate Reed
Guelph Community Foundation	Chris Willard
Youth Representative	Daniel Price
Guelph YMCA / YWCA	Geoff Vogt, Melissa Haynes
Upper Grand District School Board	Jenny Marino
Wellington Catholic District School Board	Brenda Kenyon
Wyndham House	Debbie Bentley-Lauzon
Waterloo Wellington LHIN	Jennifer Kaytar
Michael House	Beth Harris
Wellington County	Lori Richer
Guelph Public Library	Ben Robinson
Guelph Wellington Dufferin Public Health	Amy Estill
Portage	Allan Farkas, Sourav Addy
Guelph United Way	Shakiba Shavani
University of Guelph	Carrie Chassels




Integrated Youth Services Fund

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