

September 2022

**COLLABORATION
COOPERATION
CO-CREATION**

Case studies of social service
innovations during COVID-19

What's Up Walk-In Clinics' strengthened network model:

Moving along the collaboration continuum



WORKING WITH
COMMUNITIES IN
PEEL, TORONTO &
YORK REGION

Report partner:



PhiLab

CANADIAN PHILANTHROPY
PARTNERSHIP
RESEARCH NETWORK

Land acknowledgement

United Way Greater Toronto acknowledges that our work takes place on the traditional land and gathering place of many Indigenous nations including the Anishnaabeg, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and it is now home to many diverse Inuit, Métis, and First Nations peoples.

We also recognize the rights of Indigenous communities and that the Greater Toronto Area is covered by several treaties including Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Williams Treaties signed by seven First Nations including the Chippewas of Beausoleil, Georgina Island, Rama, Mississaugas of Alderville, Curve Lake, Hiawatha and Scugog Island.

We honour the teachings of Indigenous peoples about the land we each call home and our responsibilities to the land and one another. We are committed to improving our relations and walking in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. From coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of the Inuit, Métis and First Nations peoples.

Research team

United Way Greater Toronto:

Isabel Cascante, Hadeel Al-Saidawi, Laura McDonough, Alexander Adams

PhiLab:

François Brouard (Carleton University), Manuel Litalien (Nipissing University)



As the largest non-government funder of community services in the GTA, United Way Greater Toronto reinforces a crucial community safety net to support people living in poverty. United Way's network of agencies and initiatives in neighbourhoods across Peel, Toronto and York Region works to ensure that everyone has access to the programs and services they need to thrive. Mobilizing community support, United Way's work is rooted in ground-breaking research, strategic leadership, local advocacy and cross-sectoral partnerships committed to building a more equitable region and lasting solutions to the GTA's greatest challenges.

unitedwaygt.org



PhiLab

CANADIAN PHILANTHROPY
PARTNERSHIP
RESEARCH NETWORK

The Canadian Philanthropy Partnership Research Network / Réseau canadien de recherche partenariale sur la philanthropie (PhiLab) is a Canadian research network on philanthropy. The network is divided into several regional hubs across the country. The network's headquarters are located in Montreal, on the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) campus. Philab Ontario is a hub located at Nipissing University.

The project started in 2014 as part of two SSHRC partnership development projects on "Canadian Grantmaking Foundations". From its beginning, the Network has been a place for research, information exchange and mobilization of Canadian foundations' knowledge. Research conducted in partnership allows for the co-production of new knowledge dedicated to a diversity of actors: government representatives, university researchers, representatives of the philanthropic sector and their affiliate organizations or partners.

The Network brings together researchers, decision-makers and members of the philanthropic community from around the world in order to share information, resources, and ideas.

philab.uqam.ca



Message from Daniele

Throughout the pandemic, United Way Greater Toronto's (UWGT's) network of over 300 funded agencies and community partners mobilized quickly to meet urgent and evolving needs and problem solve in real time – leading to effective innovations with the potential to move the needle on critical issues facing communities.

Our network saw firsthand how the pandemic upended our collective and individual understandings of “normal” and left many grappling with precarious employment, income insecurity, mental and physical health challenges, and more. But during this time, the story unfolding across our region has been not only one of crisis, but also one of small transformations – innovations that UWGT has championed as we've convened cross-sector partners to forge new paths forward, mobilized emergency funding in response to heightened and emerging needs, and ensured our funding gave community agencies the flexibility to allocate resources to where they were needed most.

UWGT's commitment to systems-level change means not only championing initiatives with this potential, but also analyzing and amplifying the lessons they have to offer. This case study is one of five in the UWGT series *Collaboration, Cooperation, Co-Creation: Case Studies of Social Service Innovations during COVID-19*, developed in partnership with the Canadian Philanthropy Partnership Research Network (PhiLab). These case studies remind us that times of crisis necessitate innovation – but they don't guarantee it. Major disruptions only bring systemic change when communities have both a clear vision for a path forward and the tools to get there.

Together, these case studies show what we know so well at UWGT: that a non-profit sector that is rooted in community and fortified by decades of expertise knows where we need

to go even before crisis hits. That a sector equipped with the right tools and resources has remarkable capacity for agility and adaptation. That flexible funding and general operating support – two staples of UWGT'S funding model – are key elements of the toolbox that enables organizations to pivot and engage in necessary strategic, systems-level work. That through networks UWGT has been cultivating for decades – networks of community agencies, local residents, and partners in government, labour, and the corporate sector – with the resolve to work together in new ways, the change we are capable of achieving is exponential. And finally, that backbone support provided by entities like UWGT – from research to convening to strategic investments in community – is foundational to all of these elements.

These stories of innovation show that our path forward is not about recovering our pre-COVID “normal.” Because we are building something better. We're bridging siloes and catalyzing new partnerships, so that everyone can access the services they need without coming up against roadblocks. We're amplifying community voices and joining hands in advocacy. We're deepening our understanding of what advancing equity looks like in concrete terms – and most importantly, acting on it.

Our world is in flux. These case studies offer important lessons for how we can chart a path through instability and uncertainty – one that not only ensures urgent needs are met, but brings us all closer to a future without poverty.

Daniele Zanotti

President & CEO

United Way Greater Toronto

What's Up Walk-In Clinics'
strengthened network model:

Moving along the collaboration continuum

Introduction

The pandemic has been hard on children and youth. School closures, the loss of extracurricular and other in-person social interactions, and increases in family tension due to financial challenges and more time spent at home have taken a toll on child and youth mental health, prompting some to name the resulting increase in rates of mental health challenges among children and youth a “shadow pandemic.”¹ Calls to Kids Help Phone, which provides mental health support to youth across Canada, saw a 350% increase during the first wave of the pandemic.² High numbers of Canadian children have reported a deterioration to their mental health including symptoms of depression, anxiety, irritability, hyperactivity, obsessions/compulsions and decreased attention spans.³

As the pandemic carries on, with continued disruptions despite a return to school and easing of other restrictions, the heightened levels of depression and anxiety among children and youth seen at the beginning of the pandemic persist while the long-term impacts remain unclear.⁴

These challenges have revealed historical gaps in the mental health system and amongst service providers, shedding light on issues of access and sector capacity to meet rising demand. Like others across the social services sector, mental health practitioners have been reassessing their pre-pandemic service delivery models, including partnership models and collaboration strategies, and testing different approaches to expand access to needed services.

¹Public Health Ontario. (2021, October 13). *Impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of children and youth in Ontario*. <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/about/blog/2021/covid-19-mental-health-youth-ontario>; Scott, C. M. (2021, March 15). *Youth and mental health: The shadow pandemic*. Vaughan City Life Magazine. <https://mycitylife.ca/people/health/youth-and-mental-health-the-shadow-pandemic/>; Hamilton Health Sciences. (2021, March 15). *The other side of COVID-19: Mental health challenges prevalent in youth*. <https://www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/share/youth-mental-health-during-covid-19/>

²Steinberg, H. (2021, May 28). “We saw a 350 per cent increase in calls”: Katherine Hay, CEO of Kids Help Phone, on the surge in demand for support during Covid. Toronto Life. <https://torontolife.com/life/we-saw-a-350-per-cent-increase-in-calls-katherine-hay-ceo-of-kids-help-phone-on-the-surge-in-demand-for-support-during-covid/>

³SickKids. (2021, February 26). *New research reveals impact of COVID-19 pandemic on child and youth mental health* [Press release]. <https://www.sickkids.ca/en/news/archive/2021/impact-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-child-youth-mental-health/>

⁴SickKids. (2021, July 8). *SickKids releases new research on how COVID-19 pandemic has impacted child and youth mental, physical health* [Press release]. <https://www.sickkids.ca/en/news/archive/2021/research-covid-19-pandemic-impact-child-youth-mental-physical-health/>



This case study features the evolution of the What's Up Walk-In Clinics (hereafter What's Up) delivery and network structure during the COVID-19 pandemic. What's Up is a youth mental health-focused network, originally comprised of six agencies, led by Strides Toronto (hereafter Strides) in collaboration with Etobicoke Children's Centre, Griffin Centre, Skylark Child and Family Services, Yorktown Family Services and YouthLink.⁵ Etobicoke Children's Centre, Griffin Centre and Skylark Child and Family Services, as well as one other agency, subsequently amalgamated into a new organization called Lumenus Community Services, making What's Up a collaboration among four agencies. Formed in 2011, What's Up provides free mental health counselling to children, youth, young adults and their families, and families with infants. Pre-pandemic, What's Up provided in-person walk-in services through six distinct access points operated independently by network members in

.....
“The changes we made during the pandemic brought to the surface ways in which working together could really improve accessibility for young people and families. We demonstrated that we can actually work in a different way, in a more interdependent way.”
.....

—Janet McCrimmon,
Strides Toronto
CEO

select catchment areas across the City of Toronto. In response to pandemic restrictions and heightened need, the network adapted its approach and ushered in a more collaborative and interdependent virtual model that has enhanced service provision and enabled the network to meet rising demand for services.

This report draws on several conversations with What's Up network members between November 2021 and March 2022: Suzette Arruda-Santos, Executive Director of Yorktown Family Services; Akosua Atta-Mensah, Senior Manager of Clinical Services at YouthLink; Janet McCrimmon, CEO of Strides; Maureen Ringlein, Manager of

Child, Youth and Young Adult Mental Health Services at Yorktown; Lydia Sai-Chew, CEO of Lumenus Community Services; and David Wills, Senior Director, Lead Agency and Systems Transformation at Strides. United Way Greater Toronto is grateful for the time and insights shared by all interviewees, without which this report would not be possible.

⁵Strides Toronto, Yorktown Family Services and YouthLink are United Way Greater Toronto anchor agencies. United Way Greater Toronto funds a network of anchor agencies that receive flexible and multiyear funding intended to build strong, responsive, sustainable and effective organizations.

What's Up Walk-In clinics

About What's Up and its partners

Lumenus Community Services offers a broad range of mental health, developmental, autism and early years intervention services to children, youth, families and individuals across Toronto. Operating mainly in the west end of the city, Lumenus's vision is to ensure every infant, child, youth, individual and family in Toronto gets personalized guidance and the mental health, developmental and community services expertise they need to be seen, be heard and be well.

Strides Toronto (formerly East Metro Youth Services) is a multi-service agency that offers mental health, autism, developmental and community services support to infants, children, youth and their families. As part of Ontario's Moving on Mental Health strategy, Strides became the Lead Agency for infant, child and youth mental health for the Toronto region in 2012. Under this model, Strides coordinates planning supports across the 23 agencies providing infant, child and youth mental health services and supports within Toronto.⁶ The What's Up's network of six agencies exists within this broader network of 23, with Strides also taking on a lead coordinating role within What's Up.

Yorktown Family Services is a fully accredited community service agency comprised of an infant, child and youth mental health centre, a women's shelter and community-based violence against women services. Located in North York, its mission is to support and equip women, children, youth and families to create positive change in their lives.

YouthLink is a multi-service agency located in Scarborough offering youth and family counselling, parenting support, youth shelter and housing, education programs and community-based programs for youth ages 12-24 and their families. YouthLink's mission is to join with youth, families and partners to highlight and develop strengths, aspirations and positive actions that improve the health and well-being of all who live, work, study and play in their community.

What's Up Walk-In clinics pre COVID-19

What's Up was originally established to address long wait times and the immediate needs of children, youth and their families in crisis.⁷ What's Up employs trained clinicians who use a solution-focused brief therapy model – a short-term, future-oriented intervention with a focus on goals and plans.⁸ The What's Up model addresses several

⁶Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. (n.d.). *Moving on mental health*. Government of Ontario. <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/professionals/specialneeds/momh/moving-on-mental-health.aspx>

⁷Raza, A. (2014, December 10). *Scarborough's 'What's Up' Walk-in Clinic offers unique, accessible mental health counselling*. Toronto.com. https://www.toronto.com/news/scarborough-s-what-s-up-walk-in-clinic-offers-unique-accessible-mental-health-counselling/article_13f1f5df-89b2-5848-b100-e62a1aab88ef.html

⁸Institute for solution-focused therapy. (2022) What is solution-focused therapy? <https://solutionfocused.net/what-is-solution-focused-therapy/>

barriers in that it is free, does not require a health card or appointment to receive service and offers services in several languages. Individuals or families complete a brief intake form and are then quickly connected to an available counsellor for a single session that can last up to one hour. Common issues that bring individuals and families to What's Up include but are not limited to depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicidal ideation, sexual identity matters, bullying and behavioural concerns.

Prior to the pandemic, What's Up operated in a loosely coordinated approach that was well-suited to the network's geographically bounded catchment areas. According to

interviewees, the walk-in clinics were a game-changer in addressing the months-long wait lists for mental health services experienced pre-pandemic. An internal evaluation of What's Up showed that 80% of clients using the service needed only a one-time intervention, pointing to its effectiveness. Pre-pandemic, the network collectively served about 6,000 children and youth annually.

As the network coordinator, prior to the pandemic, Strides provided administrative backbone support focused on centralizing processes and periodically analyzing high-level data to enhance individual site operations. The network convened its leadership and steering committees quarterly



to discuss such issues as streamlining referral forms, maintaining consistent approaches in counselling, sharing information and resources, implementing professional development for clinicians, and collecting and comparing data to inform ongoing improvements to the service delivery model. Strides developed and compiled quarterly reports based on data submitted separately by each agency for submission to the Ministry of Health. The network had started exploring using the Business Intelligence (BI) solution developed by the Government of Ontario to extend its data sharing capabilities and enhance data quality but had only taken initial steps toward implementation pre-pandemic.

What's Up Walk-In clinics during COVID-19

Driven by physical distancing restrictions and health concerns, and mirroring similar transitions across the sector, at the start of the pandemic, What's Up's in-person walk-in model shifted to virtual delivery. This change in model expanded the catchment areas from which clients came, making previous geographical distinctions between agencies less relevant.

In the early days of the pandemic, despite indications of increased demand for mental health services, fewer people were utilizing the now virtual services offered by individual agencies within the What's Up network. In response, What's Up's leadership committee brainstormed solutions and redesigned a more integrated model, with a single point of entry, that they believed might bolster access and help children, youth and their families connect to services more easily.

Under its role as Lead Agency for the Toronto region, Strides already managed a centralized mental health telephone service for the region, branded Mental Health TO (MHTO). The What's Up network leveraged this existing platform to reorganize the program around a centralized telephone access point available to participants city-wide, while leaving some flexibility for agencies to continue to

connect directly with existing clients.

This shift in delivery model was only possible with a corresponding shift in the network's partnership model. The six agencies could no longer work independently of the others. Instead, they had to harmonize activities and coordinate schedules to ensure seamless service delivery during set hours of operation—now extended to evenings and weekends to leverage capacity and meet rising demand. This deeper collaborative approach also facilitated shared learning and enhanced collective capacity of the network.

To facilitate real-time learning and continuous improvement, partners increased meeting frequency to monthly from quarterly and provided joint training to frontline staff on good practices in telephone and virtual service provision. Meetings evolved from heavily administrative in nature to more reflective and focused on collective knowledge

and capacity building in service to the network's common purpose. Partners collectively planned staffing and coverage schedules; discussed trends in real-time data collected by the central access point; problem-solved challenges emerging from a centralized approach, including capacity challenges associated with extending the network's catchment city-wide; identified and

.....
“One of the best things the changes implemented in the network did was really drive home for everybody the need for us to work together and look at the system as all our responsibilities. So it's that we're all accountable to the whole system [... as] part of a network, and the network is accountable for all clients in Toronto. So [it is] our shared responsibility, which was always there, but I think the pandemic really raised the commitment of member agencies.”

—Lydia Sai-Chew,
Lumenus Community
Services CEO

.....

addressed service gaps; and discussed problems, allowing for a timely and mutually accountable collective response. Working this way fostered consistent practice across the network resulting in a more consistent experience for service users, while the nature and frequency of meetings enabled more effective operational planning and quicker systems improvements at a larger scale.

What's Up's network of agencies was able to make this shift as a direct result of the trusting relationships built prior to the pandemic. While their work together had always had challenges, members' willingness to try something new, work through disagreements together and commit to collective decision-making were essential elements that made their deeper collaboration possible. For instance, cooperation on scheduling coverage, especially on weekends, evenings and holidays was not easy to negotiate, but network members remained engaged until a solution was found. There were and continue to be tensions around balancing the desire among some for a centralized access point to What's Up, while also continuing to provide local access to the program through network members. The network remains dedicated to uncovering and working through such pressure points.

This deeper level of collaboration has enhanced What's Up's service provision: the network has met its core goals not only to restore but also to amplify services and related impacts. Within two months of implementing the centralized access point, call numbers picked up and matched pre-pandemic intake within six months. Efficiencies have trickled down to

service users: whereas pre-pandemic approximately 500 children/year were turned away and asked to return the next day, in the first two years with a centralized telephone access point, only 100 children were turned away. Yet, despite these efficiencies, it is important to note that

capacity continues to be a challenge for the network as demand for children and youth mental health counselling continues to grow.

Going forward, with the return to in-person services, What's Up continues to evolve. Current efforts include revising the network's memorandum of understanding (MOU) and terms of reference (TOR), and welcoming new partners to the network. Caribbean African Canadian Social Services and Centre Francophone du Grand Toronto now offer What's Up through their respective organizations. Discussions continue about how to serve clients most effectively in a hybrid model, where virtual and in-person services co-exist. At the time of writing, the network was still debating how best to maximize a centralized access point while also preserving network members' ability to serve their local communities.

Despite pandemic-related challenges, including changing regulations and uncertainty, staff health and wellness and high staff turnover rates, What's Up has modernized its service delivery model to maintain and extend services, providing more timely and

convenient access and turning away fewer clients. While the process has not been without difficulties, it has resulted in significant impact, learnings and emerging good practices of relevance to collaboratives across the social services sector.

.....
“All the What's Up network partners were able to convert quickly to the centralized access point after we collectively figured this solution out and advertised it. That shift was helped along by the partnership. And that's where the network worked well, and having the backbone of the lead agency of Strides helping spread the word and assisting in creating an access point for young people and families into the walk-in sites was essential. Also having the network in place already was a benefit, because we already had those relationships, but the pandemic certainly required us to have more difficult conversations, which strengthened the network.”

.....
—Lydia Sai-Chew,
Lumenus Community
Services CEO



United Way contributions



United Way Greater Toronto's work is comprehensive. We support a network of over 300 funded agencies and community partners to move the needle on critical issues facing communities. To meet urgent needs and lead systemic change on a wide array of social issues, we:

- use our grantmaking expertise, deep knowledge of issues, neighbourhoods and social service infrastructure to make investments where they can have the greatest impact
- partner with others to overcome challenges and streamline support, as we have with the Cluster Tables that brought local government and agency leaders together during the early days of the pandemic and continue to be a vital lever for better serving community
- convene diverse parties and perspectives to drive strategic initiatives and multi-sectoral solutions
- lead research to learn, share and inform progressive policy and legislation and leverage our platform to amplify calls for systems-level change.



United Way is proud to work with several What's Up program partners in the following ways:

Lumenus Community Services:

- providing three-year Program grant funding*
 - collaboration at the North York Cluster Table
-

Strides Toronto:

- providing five-year Anchor grant funding**
 - collaboration on mental health systems planning
-

Yorktown Family Services:

- providing five-year Anchor grant funding**
 - collaboration at the York Weston Pelham Cluster Table
 - supporting anchor partnership at United Way's Jane Street Hub, led by Unison Health & Community Services
-

Youthlink:

- providing five-year Anchor grant funding**
- collaboration at the South Scarborough Cluster Table
- supporting participation in the Golden Mile Impact Network Steering Committee, for which United Way acts as an advisor

* Program grants support communities to lead local solutions to local challenges. The three-year funding is nimble and targets investment to the populations, geographies and issues at the centre of our ongoing fight against poverty.

** Anchor grants provide dependable and flexible five-year funding for both programming and core operating support – so community agencies can meet immediate needs while building long-term capacity and solutions to move the needle on poverty and related issues in our region.

To learn more about our various tools for community investments, please refer to the UWGT 2021-2022 Annual Report.

Lessons learned



Collaboration strategies must evolve as external conditions shift

At its root, collaboration is about working together toward a shared purpose to accomplish what cannot be achieved alone. There are several strategies and approaches to partnerships across the collaboration continuum (Figure 1) and no one is inherently better than the others.⁹ Each is valuable and appropriate in specific circumstances, and the strategy depends on the network's capacities, resources, goals and levels of trust and comfort with shared risk, among other factors.

The pandemic presented members of the What's Up network with a challenge that required them to revise and deepen their collaboration strategy. The network evolved from a coordinated but independent effort to one that required closer alignment and adjustments with one another. This effort was ultimately successful because there was agreement across network members on the community need, and on the opportunity to leverage MHTO as a centralized access point while in-person services were not possible. Despite a return to in-person services, the pandemic continues, and the What's Up network will continue to adapt its collaboration strategy as external circumstances shift.

While it was not a priority during the early days of the pandemic, the What's Up network is now revising its MOU and TOR to reflect the evolution of the collaboration. These documents are not simply critical starting points for networks, but rather agreements that must evolve as collaborations change.

THE COLLABORATION SPECTRUM

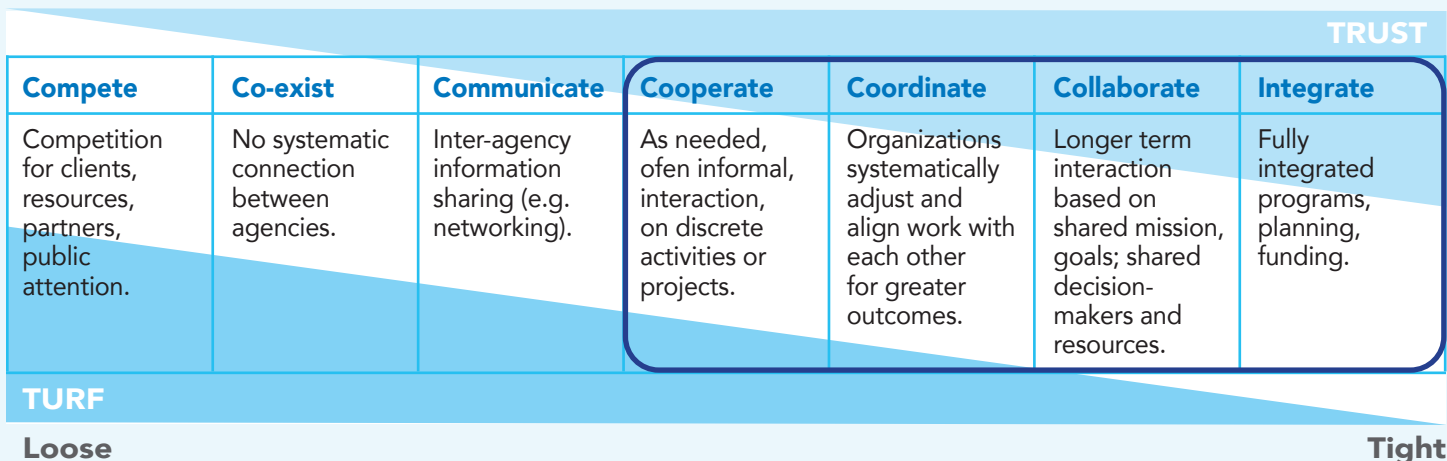


Figure 1: Collaboration Spectrum Model, adapted from Tamarack Institute's Collaboration Spectrum Tool: <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/Collaboration%20Spectrum%20Tool%20July%202017.pdf>

⁹Himmelman. A. T. (2002). *Collaboration for a change: Definitions, decision-making models, roles, and collaboration process guide*. Himmelman Consulting. <http://tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Himmelman-Collaboration-for-a-Change.pdf>



Collaboration and autonomy can co-exist

A common concern with integrated collaboration approaches is fear of losing autonomy, whether in decision-making, control, brand identity or ability to serve local community. It is not uncommon for network members to feel conflicting pressures from the network's greater goal and the work of their individual agencies.

Driven by the unprecedented increase in need for child and youth mental health services, What's Up's network members managed these challenges through discussion and reflection on early indicators of impact. As call-in numbers increased, members were able to see how their decision to leverage a centralized access point was leading to better client outcomes and renewed their commitment to move forward together in a more integrated way.

Often systems change is about trial and error, stretching and experimenting while remaining grounded in trusting relationships. What's Up offers a demonstrated proof point for the efficacy of an integrated approach. With a return to in-person services, What's Up partners are considering how best to balance individual agency autonomy with the effectiveness and efficiencies of a centralized approach, and will no doubt rely on the shared foundation strengthened through the pandemic to continue to evolve their model for greatest impact.

Existing program elements can be repurposed as external conditions shift

It is sometimes easy to assume that the emergence of new needs requires entirely new solutions. However, in the case of What's Up, the pandemic's forced suspension of in-person walk-in services was addressed by leveraging the existing centralized mental health telephone service for the region—MHTO. Without Strides acting as lead agency on mental health for the region and having this resource at their disposal, the network might have had to put considerable resources into developing a solution from scratch, or foregone the centralization effort all together, likely resulting in fewer children and youth receiving the services they needed. To respond to future crises, collaborations might consider undertaking asset mapping processes to inventory individual member and collective assets and capacities and identify system and service gaps as well as emerging opportunities.



Collaborative systems can address service gaps

To meet the growing demand for mental health services for diverse families, the network shifted from a coordinated and decentralized model to one requiring closer alignment and adjustments. Shared data collection and analysis played an integral role in this model change and allowed for identification of long-standing service gaps across the system, particularly the under-representation of clinicians from Black, racialized and Francophone communities, as well as services designed for families with children under six.

While service providers and recipients experienced and were aware of service gaps before the pandemic, there was no mechanism to collectively collate and quantify the trends in service gaps, limiting individual agencies' impact and ability to affect systems change independently.

Under the new model, aided by the BI solution, gaps were not only identified but more coordinated, and better resourced efforts were made to address them. As a result, in June 2021, the network expanded its reach by inviting in two new partner agencies focused on serving Black and Francophone communities—CAFCAN (Caribbean African Canadian Social Services), which provides culturally sensitive mental health counselling to Black children, youth, adults and families, and Centre Francophone du Grand Toronto, an agency focused on supporting the growing French-speaking community in Toronto.

Good practices for network collaboration

- 1 Determine the specific challenges or opportunities that a collaborative model will address and take the time needed to achieve consensus on the challenges, opportunities and priorities that would be better served with a new model.
- 2 Co-create processes and protocols for discussing challenges and prioritize shared decision making to balance autonomy with systems-level goals. Find ways to build this commitment into MOUs and TORs.
- 3 Conduct an inventory of network member assets that can be leveraged to meet long-standing service gaps and to address challenges as external conditions shift.
- 4 Leverage real-time data collection on agreed indicators of success, continuous reflection and individual and collective learnings to drive service delivery improvements.

Implications for the future



Social and community service agencies:

- Enter collaborations and networks with purpose: promote the use of MOUs and TORs and encourage real-time assessment and evolution of network strategies in response to changing external circumstances.
- Rely on real-time data collection and analysis, including disaggregated social identity data, to identify critical service gaps and guide opportunities for service improvements.
- Evaluate network activities, outcomes and impacts and share findings broadly across the sector to support ongoing capacity building and improvements around networked approaches.

Provincial, regional, and municipal governments and philanthropic organizations:

- Provide funding to support network backbone infrastructure needed for guiding strategy; convening and facilitating dialogue among network partners, including difficult conversations; collecting and analyzing data and sharing results with the network and beyond; and identifying opportunities to shift existing network strategies to better meet shared goals, among other roles.
- Promote cross-sector learning and adaptation by commissioning and/or leading and sharing network evaluations, lessons learned and emerging good practices broadly within and across sectors to enhance learning, capacity building and collective impact of network models.
- Support knowledge mobilization and capacity building activities focused on good practices in network and collaboration models to strengthen impacts of collaborative work.

Acknowledgements

The research team acknowledges the support of several people who helped shape the study. First and foremost, we are grateful to Suzette Arruda-Santos and Maureen Ringlein from Yorktown Family Services, Akosua Atta-Mensah from YouthLink, Janet McCrimmon and David Willis from Strides Toronto, and Lydia Sai-Chew from Lumenus Community Services, for making time to share their experiences with our team. We thank all the agency representatives who attended our agency engagement session in June 2021 and those who responded to our sector survey in July 2021. Erika Clark and Jasmin Kay helped scope the research. Intern Kathryn Rehner supported with the references and Alex Mlynek with the copy editing. Nation Cheong, Ruth Crammond and Trisha Scantlebury provided helpful guidance and direction on earlier drafts of this case study.



This case study is part of a series exploring social service innovations during COVID-19:

Auduzhe Mino NeseWINong Clinic (Place of Healthy Breathing): Advancing Indigenous health and data equity

Cedar Centre's STAIR Group's virtual program transition: Balancing impact with client safety, privacy, security and cost

Etobicoke recovery site for people experiencing homelessness: Reimagining partnership between the healthcare and community services sector

Apna Health and community ambassadors in Peel region: Advancing health equity in the South Asian community

What's Up Walk-In Clinics' strengthened network model: Moving along the collaboration continuum



WORKING WITH
COMMUNITIES IN
PEEL, TORONTO &
YORK REGION

Corporate Office

26 Wellington St. E. 12th Fl.
Toronto, ON M5E 1S2
Tel 416 777 2001
Fax 416 777 0962
TTY 1 866 620 2993

Peel Region Office

90 Burnhamthorpe Rd. W.
Suite 1500, PO Box 58
Mississauga, ON L5B 3C3
Tel 905 602 3650
Fax 905 602 3651

York Region Office

80F Centurian Dr. Suite 206
Markham, ON L3R 8C1
Tel 905 474 9974
Fax 905 474 0051

unitedwaygt.org



Mark of Imagine Canada
used under license by
United Way Greater Toronto