



Paying it Forward: The Family Navigation Project at Sunnybrook

Improving the mental health of young people in Canada is a collective responsibility that requires action on multiple fronts – from parents, educators, health professionals and community organizations. Although an estimated 1.2 million children and youth in Canada are affected by mental illnesses, less than 20 per cent will receive appropriate treatment. Further, by age 25, approximately 20 per cent of Canadians will develop a mental illness. Increased access to the appropriate services and support is needed, including early identification, primary care, specialized treatment, ongoing support and long-term care.

The Family Navigation Project (FNP) at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, a non-profit program designed to provide navigation of the mental health and addictions service system, is committed to supporting families and their youth (ages 13-26) in the path to recovery and optimum functioning. It is also a personal philanthropic endeavour of Leon Frazer's President, Dona Eull-Schultz.

As a mother, watching her children and their friends navigate the difficult waters of adolescence, it became obvious to Dona there were shortcomings in the education and medical systems in helping teenagers cope with mental health issues. She recognized the complexity of not only accepting the "stigma" of mental health, but the difficulty parents in crisis face in finding the appropriate resources in a complicated medical system. As such, Dona became the key driver in what is now known as the Family Navigation Project.

Dona enlisted the expertise of Dr. Anthony Levitt, formerly Sunnybrook's Psychiatrist-in-Chief, to help identify a solution for parents and kids in crisis. Now Chief of the Hurvitz Brain Sciences Centre and also the Medical Director of the FNP, Dr. Levitt has spent years channeling time and energy into hearing and responding to

families' need for navigation. He has heard countless stories from families and youth of how there was no place to turn when they were in a mental health and/or addictions crisis or they weren't getting the help that they needed. "Parents have told us they've waited months for help, only to be told they're in the wrong line," said Dr. Levitt.

The Family Navigation Project was initially set to be launched in early 2014 following the first RBC Race for the Kids in 2013. After hearing about this brand new program, however, many families began calling Sunnybrook, wanting immediate access to the service. In response to the demand, the FNP began working with families in November 2013. Last year, the program helped over 728 families and this year is predicted to help between 800-900 families.

Experienced clinical navigators work with families to help them navigate the health care and related services system, connect to appropriate and credible assessment and treatment resources, receive assistance in as timely a way as possible and negotiate any challenging situations that may arise. Navigators collaborate with families and their youth with mental health and/or addiction issues to understand their unique needs and match them with the supports and services necessary to enhance their health and family functioning.

How can you help? Participate and/or fundraise in the annual RBC Race for the Kids on September 15, 2018, become a donor or refer the FNP to youth and families of youth with mental health or addiction challenges. With your support the Family Navigation Project at Sunnybrook will help more young people find the mental health care they so desperately need.

To find out more about the Family Navigation Project or to donate to this worthwhile cause, visit www.sunnybrook.ca/familynavigation.

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