



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IN CALGARY

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ABOUT THE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT PROJECT

The Mental Health Support Project aims to highlight the successes and challenges of Calgary's mental health sector. By conducting interviews with Calgary's leaders in mental health, this project looks to consolidate the resources available to the city, as well as further the discussion on what can be done to improve the sector as a whole.

ABOUT GLOBAL SHAPERS CALGARY

The Global Shapers Community is an initiative of the World Economic Forum consisting of nearly 400 local hubs around the world that bring together over 8,000 top young leaders between the ages of 20 and 30. Calgary is where we live, work, and play. We're proud of our city and are committed to making it even stronger and more vibrant.

CONVERSATION WITH CMHA CALGARY



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Mental health for all

Key Takeaways

- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Calgary works to promote mental health through a variety of evidence-based programming including: 1) educational sessions in schools, 2) a Community Helper Program to increase individuals' abilities to support those around them, 3) a Recovery College Program consisting of courses to support mental health recovery that are co-designed and co-delivered by individuals with lived experience facing mental health issues, and 4) mental health peer support.
- CMHA differentiates itself from other mental health organizations by using a “lived experience model”, in which individuals who have dealt with mental health challenges are involved throughout the design process, from strategy to execution.
- The key challenges faced by CMHA include obtaining sufficient funding to meet the demand for services as well as tackling mental health stigma to ensure that individuals feel comfortable accessing mental health support. As a step to minimize stigma associated with seeking mental health support, CMHA has moved locations from an office tower to a street-level, client-focused space that is designed like a café to foster a casual, welcoming atmosphere.
- One way that the mental health landscape in Calgary could be improved, according to CMHA, would be increasing the delivery of programs in “natural hubs”, such as schools, community centres, libraries and other public spaces that are easy for individuals to access. Doing so can contribute to reducing social barriers (e.g. accessibility, transportation, financial challenges) to accessing services.

Who are you and what is your role with CMHA?

- Ashley Lamantia is the Education Lead, Youth, Corporate and Community and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) of Calgary. She oversees strategy, design, and implementation of these programs throughout the city. Her work focuses more on non-clinical initiatives to raise awareness on mental health, as well as engage in partnerships to further promote the issue among different stakeholders.

What is your organization's mission towards mental health?

- CMHA is a national organization with various regional chapters throughout Canada. Their decentralized structure allows for each regional office to tailor its own goals and objectives to their local context. Calgary's chapter specifically focuses on programming and education-based services. In addition, CMHA also offers counselling for people for suicide bereavement, residential services for clients, and transitional services for individuals coming back from healthcare facilities.

What type of mental health services does CMHA Calgary provide?

- CMHA's educational services are primarily prevention and promotion based. They offer strong support for students in grades 7 to 12 and post-secondary students through hosting short (45 to 90 minute) learning sessions in schools. These sessions address topics including stress management, mental health promotion, suicide bereavement, and supporting the mental health of others. CMHA also has a Community Helper Program, which is focused on increasing individuals' abilities to help and support those around them. The Community Helper Program primarily takes place in schools but also in youth community groups. The program has recently expanded to include youth community groups that target particular demographics, such as immigrant youth. CMHA's educational programs are all evidence-based and use technology to maximize engagement. They also have programs for professionals in working environments, with similar content but a different structure.
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- CMHA also holds a Recovery College program across Alberta, which consists of in-depth courses of 1 to 8 sessions each. These courses are targeted towards individuals who identify as having lived experience with mental health or addiction concerns and who are looking for tools on their recovery journey. The courses are co-designed and co-delivered with individuals with lived experience relating to mental health issues, to ensure that the content is appropriate to the needs of the learners. Recovery College is like “Netflix for mental health”, in that it offers a wide array of courses and learners can choose a course that is best for them. The courses cover topics including how to speak up for yourself, how to navigate the mental health system and how to tackle procrastination. These courses are free and accessible to anyone, but there are also courses targeted to particular groups like seniors, caregivers and Indigenous peoples.
- Additionally, CHMA offers peer support for individuals looking to connect with people with lived experience in tackling mental health issues. These peer supporters undergo training for several months to be fully equipped to provide support.
- As with many organizations amid the COVID-19 pandemic, CMHA has moved into a more virtual space. They initially provided toolkits and bite-size shorter sessions of the classes virtually, but following a positive response have expanded to regular online class offerings. While the majority of individuals use virtual learning, CMHA also offers a few in person spots for their programs.

What unique value does your organization offer compared to other mental health service providers?

- CMHA differentiates itself by focusing their delivery through a “lived experience” model. This is achieved by allowing people who have dealt with these challenges to collaborate through the entire program design process, from strategy down to execution. This ensures the programs are delivered through the lens of their target demographics, cultivating a bottom-up approach that allows CMHA to understand and empathize with their clients.

What are some of the challenges you find with addressing mental health in Calgary? What efforts have you taken to address these challenges?

- A key challenge faced by CMHA, as with many non-profit organizations, is obtaining sufficient funding to meet the demand for services. This is particularly an issue in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the organization has not been able to have fundraisers as normal this year.
- Another ongoing difficulty with regards to mental health is tackling stigma and ensuring that people who need mental health support are comfortable accessing these supports. To address this issue, CMHA has moved locations from an office tower to a street-level, client-focused space that is designed like a café. The new location aims to foster a casual, welcoming atmosphere in contrast to the office tower in which individuals had to take an elevator and talk to a receptionist in order to access support. However, CMHA still is based in downtown Calgary, while some organizations in other provinces have satellite offices closer to residential areas that limit barriers to access. Moving forward, the ability to offer support more widely in various locations throughout Alberta could be beneficial to increase the use of CMHA's services.

What are some potential solutions to the challenges you mentioned that you would like to see in the mental health space in Calgary?

- While the challenges of surrounding mental health support are always evolving, the local context in which a program operates in is key. One of the potential solutions that could be implemented in Calgary would be making sure to meet people where they are. This means being able to deliver programs in “natural hubs”: schools, community centres, libraries and other public spaces that are easy for individuals to access. Furthermore, these natural hubs ensure the various social barriers (e.g. accessibility, transportation, financial challenges) to accessing services are reduced.

CONVERSATION WITH CATHOLIC FAMILY SERVICE



Key Takeaways

- Catholic Family Service (CFS) focuses on the importance of strong families as its guiding principles. Being able to leverage the personal network of the client is key to providing a personalized and unique support program for the individual and reduces hierarchical barriers that can be present among other programs.
- The Rapid Access Counselling initiative is a single-session, goal-focused counselling program designed to reduce barriers to access for mental health support. In light of COVID-19, this program has shifted to an online, 24/7 booking platform.
- In collaboration with other non-profit organizations, CFS also launched Community Connect YYC which streamlines a variety of mental health support services, also with a 24/7 online booking capabilities.
- The biggest challenge that CFS faces continues to be the stigma surrounding mental health in Calgary. COVID-19 presented an opportunity for the conversation to be normalized, as well as enable creativity among delivery methods for non-profits.
- Gaps within the mental health space continues to be the lack of funding and resources to be able to deliver these services, especially for marginalized members of society. CFS has continued to focus on reducing barriers to access by ensuring their programs can be delivered in an accessible and timely manner to those in immediate need.

Who are you and what is your role with Catholic Family Services?

- Vanessa McConnell is a registered psychologist and Counselling Services Manager with Catholic Family Services (CFS). In this role, she oversees the various counselling programs offered by CFS. Vanessa has worked in the non-profit sector for 15 years and has worked with CFS for the past 3 years. She took on her current role of Counselling Services Manager in January 2020.

What is your organization's mission towards mental health?

- CFS's core value is to build strong families. This philosophy applies to all programs throughout the organization, and is especially important in their approach to mental health. By focusing on the family, CFS believes that this creates a resilient environment and effective support system for individuals facing adversity.

What type of mental health services does Catholic Family Services provide?

- CFS provides various intervention and prevention programs to support mental health and build strong families. The organization's largest general public program is Rapid Access Counselling, which is based on a single session model where each client has a 75 minute goal-based, focused, counselling session. During these sessions, clients discuss their current state and where they aspire to be, and mental health professionals offer tangible support and strategies tailored towards the mental health issue at hand. Clients can also be referred to long-term mental health support following their Rapid Access Counselling session. In July 2019, CFS launched an online booking platform to mitigate barriers to access for Rapid Access Counselling. The platform has 24/7 booking to not only facilitate increased logistical efficiency but also to empower clients by allowing clients to book sessions immediately when they feel inspired to do so. Online booking also helps to tackle the issue of stigma associated with seeking mental health services, as prospective clients do not need to talk to people over the phone when booking appointments if they are uncomfortable doing so. By only offering single sessions through this program, CFS is able to meet the high demand for counselling services by almost always having a session available within 48 hours of booking time. CFS has noted a substantial increase in uptake of Rapid Access Counselling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Another noteworthy initiative of CFS is Community Connect YYC (CCYYC), which is a collaborative of Calgary mental health service providers committed to eliminating barriers to access and long wait times in mental health services. Launched in August 2020, CFS migrated their Rapid Access Counselling to this platform and integrated it with the CCYYC network. CFS works with 5 partner agencies who have made their inventory of mental health appointments available online for 24/7 booking. New sessions are made available every week so clients can access appointments within a few days of booking. The platform streamlines a variety of services, including suicide bereavement, family support, sexual health counselling, income supports to low-income families, and counselling for family and children, to enable clients to easily select a service that meets their needs. CCYYC has received a lot of positive feedback since its launch and was recently featured on CBC radio. Additionally, CCYYC will be launching 5 new partnerships by the end of 2020, with at least 5 more services being added to the site!
- CFS also provides functional family therapy, an evidence-based model for family therapy that aims to support youth (age 11 to 18) who are at risk of criminal justice involvement, addictions, suicide, self-harm and other mental health issues. It is an in-home intensive service that works with the whole family together. Functional family therapy is a strengths based model that focuses on improving relationships within the family by working with existing strengths. Functional family therapy operates in partnership with carya, a Calgary-based organization that provides counselling and development services for people of all ages.

What unique value does your organization offer compared to other mental health service providers?

- There are a number of ways in which CFS provides a unique approach to mental health service. First is the organization's adherence to a systemic approach; they never see problems as individual problems, but rather through the social contexts from which they occur. One of the ways CFS utilizes this philosophy is by reaching out to the person's network; who is available to support this person through this process, and how can we strengthen their network? The family lens is very important to understanding this network as well, looking not just at the biological family but also the family the individual has chosen. Clients are very receptive and appreciative of this method because it reveals and reinforces the capacities they already have that they may have neglected in the past.

What are some of the challenges you find with addressing mental health in Calgary? What efforts have you taken to address these challenges?

- A key issue that CFS has faced is meeting the high demand for affordable mental health services with limited capacity. The 4 to 5 month wait list for mental health services that CFS previously experienced motivated their transition to a rapid access single session model to improve the availability of services. CFS aims to at least offer preliminary conversations and intake sessions in the immediate term when a client expresses interest, rather than having clients wait months for an appointment. This model is based upon the principle that it is more effective to offer a one-time service to support individuals when they are ready to take action, than to wait for clients to potentially lose motivation and interest. Vanessa also noted that prospective clients need more effective ways to determine which mental health agencies are available and to have smooth transitions between agencies. She emphasized that the mental health space should be centered upon collaboration rather than competition between providers, to leverage services and share demand across the sector. Community Connect YYC works towards this goal by offering services by mental health issue rather than by agency name, thereby facilitating bridges between different agencies as well as transitions of clients to another agency that may fit better with their needs.

What are some potential solutions to the challenges you mentioned that you would like to see in the mental health space in Calgary?

- The most prominent solutions that mental health spaces seek is an overall reduction of stigma around mental health, from everyday conversations all the way to high-level decision making among key stakeholders. Having a common language and comprehension of mental health will make it easier for those seeking access to navigate what type of service they are looking for. While there have been many positive steps taken to reduce the stigma in Calgary, the conversation needs to continue, especially given the unique opportunity that COVID-19 has given to the mental health space. The ability to achieve this is largely dependent on funding, resource capacity, and long-term support measures; however, Vanessa says that CFS understands it needs to be creative and focus on making the most impact with the resources at hand..