The need is now: Child and Youth Mental Health Services

Why we need Children and Youth Mental Health

Currently if you are a young person suffering with a mental illness in Simcoe Muskoka, you can’t get the comprehensive care you need in this region.

Brawn, vividly remembers the nightmare her family experienced as they tried to find help for her brother Zach, 15, diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia.

His behaviour frightened his family. And that’s when they began a seemingly endless journey to find him help.

Over and over again they were told that there were no services for young people.

“It was awful,” says Brawn. “It felt like neither he, nor our family, mattered. More often than not, he would be declined services because of his age or a lack of beds. Our family lived in constant fear of what would happen if we could not find him treatment.”

RVH currently has no specialized inpatient mental health services for children and youth. RVH wants to change all that and is developing plans for an inpatient unit for children and youth with outpatient and crisis support.

“There is nothing wrong with getting help. There just isn’t any.”

-Rachel, 13

Rachel is 13 and instead of having fun with her friends she is in crisis. She suffers from mental illness and because there are no services for children and youth available at Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre she is not getting the help she needs.

She feels like a nobody. She feels alone.

She knows she needs help, but there is none.

So she puts her feelings on paper as she collages (left), draws and journals...and waits for the help she hopes will come.

Help Make each life better. Together.
Young adults deserve treatment where they feel safe

Seventy per cent of mental health problems begin during childhood and yet in North Simcoe Muskoka only one in five young people get the help they need. Most alarming about this gap in services is that sometimes young people are sent home or admitted, inappropriately, to inpatient adult psychiatric units.

Putting patients first

In Simcoe Muskoka there is a critical need for child and youth mental health services given that as many as 16,000 area young people experience a mental illness. Since 2007, the number of days that area children and youth have spent in the region’s hospitals suffering from mental health issues has tripled. In fact, suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth in Simcoe Muskoka. The health centre is developing plans for an inpatient unit for children and youth with outpatient and crisis support. It is a plan fully aligned with the provincial government’s mental health strategy to provide fast access to high-quality services, early identification and support for vulnerable children with unique needs.

Care at an early age reduces adult incidence of mental illness

“The burden on families is enormous and heartbreaking so, developing child and youth mental health services is one of RVH’s highest clinical priorities,” says Dr. Roger McIntyre, RVH’s clinical director of mental health services. “What our young people need is seamless mental health services – in essence we need ‘one-stop shopping.’ It is what our patients and families deserve. Severe and persistent mental illnesses, like schizophrenia, often begin in the teenage years. Providing appropriate treatments early on has been scientifically proven to have a major impact on the course of the illness.”

-Dr. Roger McIntyre, RVH mental health clinical director
If children reach out for help, we need to be there

Sadly, mental illness is still shrouded in stigma and it takes great courage for a young person to seek help. Not having a hand to guide them to a place of healing and hope is unacceptable. Establishing mental health services for children and youth is not a want it is a dire need.

The mental health patient journey

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<th>Emergency Triage</th>
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<td>All patients are greeted at triage by ED nurse with special mental health training and experience. If the nurse identifies a need for mental health care, the patient will be taken immediately to the appropriate area in the ED for assessment and management.</td>
<td>Using age-specific mental health screening tools ED team will assess the patient’s cognitive, emotional and behavioural problems as well as internalizing disorders, externalizing disorders, substance use and crime or violence.</td>
<td>The patient will either be assessed directly by a Child and Youth Mental Health Clinician or an ED physician. The patient may then be referred for further assessment or assessed for potential admission with the Psychiatrist, Paediatrician or Family Physician on call.</td>
<td>Based on the clinical assessment the patient will either be admitted to RVH; refered to community agency with telephone follow up; or sent home for follow up with family physician.</td>
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We can do better...

“I am very passionate about bringing child and youth mental health care to RVH. I know many families whose lives have simply become nightmares as they try to find the help they need. Most recently I worked closely with the family of a young man with schizophrenia. They faced a horrible situation because they were not able to access the necessary services in a timely fashion. I want these services here at RVH so that what this family went through does not continue to happen. Children and adolescents with mental health and addictions are a very underserviced population in our region due to the influx of new residents and the ever-increasing challenges faced by young people such as earlier exposure to substance use, difficulties around social media, broken families, etc. The wait for a child psychiatrist can be several months or more. A child and adolescent unit will give children and adolescents immediate access to crucial psychiatric care.

- Clayton Warren, RSW
Inpatient Mental Health and Addiction Program
Tyler lived in a dream world. It was a place filled with terror, suspicion, paranoia and voices.

Welcome to the world of schizophrenia.

“I was so paranoid,” says Tyler, now 19, but 17 when his episodes began. “I thought everyone with brown eyes was out to get me. My dreams were so real, so vivid, I actually thought my dreams were the real world.”

While Tyler struggled with reality, his parents Dave and Sonya, struggled to find answers.

“There was really no help for us,” says Dave. “We were helpless and literally didn’t know what to do.”

Tyler learned about the gap in services when he had a paranoid incident that required both police assistance and hospitalization on RVH’s adult inpatient mental health unit.

“As a parent I just didn’t want to leave him there. The whole thing was scary for me,” says Dave. “It would have been so much better if there was a unit that was not so sterile and more comfortable for young people.”

Although their son received excellent care, Sonya agrees. “As a mom there were days I cried every hour for him not knowing how to help. Imagine your child looking at you, the one person who he is supposed to feel utterly safe with, and seeing in his eyes fear, mistrust and pain. It was so horrible to see.”

* Names changed for privacy reasons.

Your help is critical - Tyler’s story will tell you why

RVH first identified the need for mental health services for children and youth in 2007. Since then we have deliberately and successfully developed the foundation necessary for a comprehensive program for the young people of this region. In fact, for the past 10 years RVH has been a strong advocate for the need of inpatient and youth mental health and addiction services.

RVH has the solution for the crisis currently plaguing children and youth suffering with mental illness. It is our goal to establish our own inpatient unit with affiliated outpatient services at RVH by late 2015 or early 2016 but this will rely on community support.

Highlights of the Child and Youth Mental Health Program include:

- A clinical director to oversee the delivery of a child and youth mental health program which includes inpatient and outpatient services.
- Strong relationships with community service providers to create a seamless systems of care
- Child and youth friendly, eight-bed inpatient unit and outpatient areas.
- Capacity to admit 290 approx. inpatients a year
- Acute Day Hospital (partial hospitalization) program including interdisciplinary team
- Crisis Team availability