

Youth Justice, Mental Health and Addictions: Understanding the Intersections in Niagara

Learning Event Summary

Monday, March 7, 2016

Four Points Sheraton, Thorold, ON

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Youth Justice, Mental Health and Addictions: Understanding the Intersections in Niagara

Overview of the Day

A one-day learning event was co-hosted by the Niagara Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee and the Niagara Youth Justice Service Collaborative on March 7, 2016 in Thorold, Ontario.

Purpose:

- To introduce participants to the Niagara Youth Court Screening Initiative.
- To provide participants a better understanding of:
 - Justice-involved youth with mental health and addictions issues; and,
 - The types of programs, supports and services available in Niagara to support this population.

Participants:

Participants included 73 service providers and stakeholders who work with youth with mental health and addictions issues in Niagara. A variety of service sectors and agencies serving all communities in Niagara were represented, such as mental health, addictions, justice, Aboriginal services, custody, housing, employment supports, public health, developmental services, education and transitional aged youth.

Structure of the Day:

Morning sessions introduced participants to the intersection of youth justice and mental health and addictions. Mary Wiley provided an overview of [Niagara Connects](#) and the development of the [Niagara Mental Health and Addictions Charter](#), a community-wide commitment to foster an environment where Niagara residents can achieve and maintain optimal mental health and wellbeing. Through networking, resource sharing, coordination, joint goal-setting, planning, and implementation, various organizations in the Niagara region are aligning their work with the principles of the Charter and demonstrating how cross-sectoral collaboration can enable systems-level change for the population of Niagara residents served by the mental health, addictions and justice sectors.

For example, Kelly Falconer spoke on the history and role of the [Niagara Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee](#) and its work to coordinate and develop resources for individuals with mental health and addictions issues who are involved with the criminal justice system. In addition, members of the Niagara Youth Justice Service Collaborative provided background regarding the implementation of a youth court in St. Catharines, through which dedicated court time is servicing youth more effectively, and highlighted the process and early results from the successful collaboration of community partners on the **Niagara Youth Court Screening Initiative (NYCSI)**.

Afternoon keynote speaker Bill Helmecki, Director of Mental Health Services at [Pathstone Mental Health](#), provided participants a deeper understanding of the youth-justice client with mental health and addictions needs. A panel of local service providers then shared information on their services and programs, and highlighted the intersection between justice and health issues.

Youth Justice, Mental Health and Addictions: Understanding the Intersections in Niagara

List of Presentations and Speakers

MORNING SPEAKERS		
Topic	Speaker	
Niagara Connects and the Niagara Mental Health and Addictions Charter	Mary Wiley, Niagara Connects	
Niagara Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee	Kelly Falconer, Canadian Mental Health Association, Niagara Co-Chair Niagara Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committee	
Niagara Youth Court Screening Initiative	Marla Banning, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), overview NYSCI Screening Team Members Andrea Flynn, CAMH, NYCSI grounding in evidence Joy Stewart-Riffle, CAMH, NYCSI database and evaluation	
AFTERNOON PANEL		
Topic	Organization	Speaker
Extrajudicial Measures	Niagara Regional Police Service	Sergeant Rich Gadreau Constable David Thiessen
Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team	Canadian Mental Health Association, Niagara	Brandy Sand
The Court System	Crown Attorney's Office Legal Aid Ontario	Rick Monette, Asst. Crown Attorney Elisabeth Cassavoy, Duty Counsel
Extrajudicial Sanctions	Pathstone Mental Health Port Cares	Michelle Price Heather Ranger
Early Intervention Program/Pathstone Programs	Pathstone Mental Health	Magda Puzio-Fisenko
Adult Court Support Worker Justice Program (Transition-Aged Youth)	Canadian Mental Health Association, Niagara	Debbie Alder
Aboriginal Court Support Worker Program	Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre	Kathy Sloggett
Youth Justice Services – Youth Probation	Ministry of Children & Youth Services – Justice Division	Paul Daoust
Secure Custody and Detention for Youth	Banyan Community Services	Sara McLean
Community Supports for Youth	Contact Niagara Community Addiction Services of Niagara	Eva Berswick Paul Niesink

Justice-Involved Youth with Mental Health and Addictions Issues

Mental health disorders impact the lives of approximately 1 in 5 Ontarians under the age of 19. Unfortunately, Ontario’s mental health system has the capacity to serve less than 1 in 3 of these children and youth.¹ The combination of mental health needs and/or challenges and insufficient supports can contribute to intersections for youth with the justice system. Approximately 65-70% of the youth who come into contact with the justice system meet the diagnostic criteria for one or more mental health disorder. Developmental disorders, intellectual disabilities, acquired brain injury, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder are also over-represented in this population. Many of these issues go unrecognized and undiagnosed among justice-involved youth.² Demand is high for access to quality mental health and addictions services and for system-level transformation.

Community Context

The Niagara community has many partners and programs that intersect with youth with mental health and addictions challenges and the justice system. In addition, much work has been done in recent years to advance the collaboration and system-level response to the needs of the community and individuals and families within the community.

One of the great things about Niagara is that we are able and willing and we have a desire to work together to make things better for our kids and our families.

Joy Stewart-Riffle, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Niagara resident

[Niagara Connects](#) is a Niagara-wide network for collaboration, planning, learning, innovation and community action to form a stronger Niagara. The network gathers evidence across 12 sectors (such as arts, culture, heritage, health and wellness), develops knowledge tools and links networks together to inform planning. Niagara Connects and [Healthy Living Niagara](#) facilitated a process in which 65 diverse organizations collaborated to develop the [Niagara Mental Health and Addictions Charter](#). The Charter, released in 2014 and supported by nine key principles, forms the foundation of Niagara’s mental health and addictions continuum in an effort to facilitate the achievement of optimal mental health and wellbeing across the lifespan for all Niagara residents, and serves as a framework to support collaboration, integration and cooperation.

Established in 2004, the [Niagara Human Services & Justice Coordinating Committee](#) coordinates and develops resources for individuals with serious mental disorders, and/or developmental disabilities, who are involved with the criminal justice system in the region of Niagara. The Committee includes a diverse membership and supports a wide continuum of community projects, including the Niagara Youth Justice Service Collaborative (described below), which align with Niagara’s other work on the Charter.

In addition to systems-level activity, multiple organizations in the Niagara community provide direct services and supports to justice-involved youth and/or youth with mental health and addictions needs and challenges. Several organizations shared information about their programs and services with the common goal to increase awareness, improve the system, and facilitate future collaborations. Refer to **Appendix A** for a brief description of the following programs/services:

Extra-Judicial Measures	Adult Court Support Worker Justice Program (Transition-Aged Youth)
Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team	Aboriginal Court Support Worker Program
The Court System	Youth Justice Services-Youth Probation
Extrajudicial Sanctions	Secure Custody & Detention for Youth
Early Intervention Program/Pathstone Programs	Community Supports for Youth

¹ Ontario Child Health Study: Six-Month Prevalence of Disorder and Rates of Service Utilization. Boyle et al. Archives of General Psychiatry, 44:832-836, 1987.

² Shufelt, J.S. & Cocozza, J.C. (2006). Youth with mental health disorders in the juvenile justice system: Results from a multistate, multi-system prevalence study. Delmar, NY: National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice.

The Niagara Youth Justice Service Collaborative: Supporting System Alignment and Capacity Building

The Niagara Youth Justice Service Collaborative (the Collaborative) was formed in September 2013 in response to [Open Minds, Healthy Minds, Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy](#). The initiative intersects with six different provincial ministries and aims to improve the system for justice-involved youth with mental health and addictions issues. The Collaborative consists of approximately 30 active members from the justice, education, health, Aboriginal services, child welfare, mental health, and addictions sectors. It was brought together to identify a gap in the community and to support the community to collaboratively work towards a successful approach to address the gap.

The Service Collaborative allowed us, from a community, to come together from a variety of different perspectives to look at what we can do to better improve the services for youth with mental health and justice issues.

Mike Taylor, Youth Resources Niagara

Niagara Youth Court and the Niagara Youth Court Screening Initiative: Facilitating Early Intervention and Enhanced Access to Care

Through extensive discussion, engagement and planning, the Collaborative developed a shared vision to support the development of a Youth Court in St. Catharines. Launched in February 2015, the Youth Court offers dedicated time for youth court appearances separate from adult court. Youth Court is facilitating system-level improvement by building a platform to provide better services and supports to justice-involved youth with mental health and addictions.

There was an enabling environment in Niagara – the people, the leaders, the environment were ready to support effective collaboration and implementation.

Andrea Flynn, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health



The Collaborative also established the Niagara Youth Court Screening Initiative (NYCSI), which was implemented within the newly formed Youth Court in May 2015. The NYCSI facilitates the screening of all consenting first-appearance youth in court by a cross-sectoral team of mental health/addictions and justice professionals. A screening team, representing a diverse range of community agencies, uses evidence-based mental health/addictions screening tools to identify each youth's need for further assessment and connection with community services.

We thought the youth would be resistant to what we do. We've actually discovered that, once the youth understand the types of services we offer, they are very open and willing to participate.

Magda Puzio-Fisenko, Pathstone Mental Health, Screening Team Member

The team offers specialized screening for youth who self-identify as having native heritage and/or youth who prefer screening in French. Results of the screening are used to direct youth along established pathways to community-based services and supports, based on level of identified need. Refer to **Appendix B** for a map of the Youth Court screening process.

The youth didn't just appear in front of the court that day. There is a story involved. The screening team is really important in developing an understanding of that story.

Bill Helmeczi, Pathstone Mental Health

Enhancing Quality through Evidence

Under the direction of the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, and as part of the first three years of Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) facilitated the provincial Service Collaboratives initiative, including the development of the Niagara Collaborative. Using evidence-based Implementation Science, Quality Improvement frameworks and health equity principles, a PSSP team has provided coordination, coaching, and evaluation support as well as health equity and knowledge exchange expertise to the Collaborative.

It's the doing, and doing it right.

Andrea Flynn, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

An evidence lens was used to inform both the selection of the Youth Court and Screening interventions as well as the process for their implementation. Both the broader Collaborative and the smaller NYCSI screening team consistently monitor and assess the effectiveness of the intervention as a whole as well as its sub-components, including analysis of each day in Youth Court and each screening team intervention. Using quality improvement tools such as "Plan-Do-Study-Act" cycles, enables appropriate adjustments to be made as the intervention evolves, facilitates alignment and accountability for team members, and improves the effectiveness of the initiative as a whole.

Our screening team is amazing. We have our process map, but we run into bumps and hiccups all the time. Youth are unique, circumstances are different, nothing is ever the same. The team quickly works through all these hiccups to support each youth appropriately and to improve the process.

Andrea Flynn, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

We are constantly making revisions based on different cases, feedback and what we've found.

Magda Puzio-Fisenko, Pathstone Mental Health, Screening Team Member

The Collaborative has developed an evaluation plan, including outlining data tracking, reporting, and performance monitoring needs of the NYCSI. The establishment of an electronic database and appropriate tracking of information will facilitate quality improvement initiatives; identify/ confirm priority youth/system needs; inform planning and decision making; and track the prevalence of mental health and addictions and other basic needs among justice involved youth.

Early evaluation results are developing a baseline that will inform ongoing planning and decision-making regarding the intervention. Consistent with other statistics,² approximately 75% of the youth screened by the NYCSI appeared to have mental health and/or addictions issues, boys were over-represented, as were youth aged 16-17 years. In addition, youth who reported more severe mental health and addictions challenges also reported greater exposure to trauma.

We need to understand kids in context so that we can build the appropriate interventions

Bill Helmeczi, Pathstone Mental Health

Success Creates Interest for Sharing, Spreading, and Scaling

The Niagara community has responded very positively to the development of the Collaborative and the implementation of the Youth Court and the NYCSI. In addition to the successful creation of the Youth Court and implementation of the NYCSI, anecdotal reports highlight the Collaborative's success in uniting the Niagara community to discover common ground and a shared purpose.

This is collaboration in its truest and most effective fashion.

Mike Taylor, Youth Resources Niagara

Involving the diverse group of community partners in the engagement, goal-setting, decision-making and planning processes from the outset means partners are invested in the process and its success, and supports sustainability of the initiative. The intervention is:

- Supporting early identification of youth with mental health and addictions issues;
- Facilitating transitions between systems (justice, health, social, education, other);
- Streamlining court processes;
- Helping youth and families access appropriate services; and,
- Through evidence gathering, supporting community efforts to advocate for resources and improved services

The feedback we are getting on the novel concept and process that we are doing makes us very proud and speaks volumes to the fact that we are not alone in this need.

Mike Taylor, Youth Resources Niagara

Based on the success of the intervention in St. Catharines, the Collaborative is beginning to explore implementation of a similar process in Welland, Ontario. In addition, there has been significant interest from across the province about the intervention and the implementation process.

As a result of what we've done, we have a much better system than other jurisdictions. This is something we can be really proud of.

Elisabeth Cassavoy, Duty Counsel

Partners are sharing their experiences and the network of collaborating community organizations in Niagara continues to grow, creating opportunities for future collaboration, and supporting the sustainability of the current initiative.

We have made a really good name for ourselves and built a really good intervention. There is a demand for what we're doing in other places.

Magda Puzio-Fisenko, Pathstone Mental Health

Summary

The event, **Youth Justice, Mental Health and Addictions: Understanding the Intersections in Niagara**, built community awareness about the Niagara Youth Court Screening Initiative (NYCSI), and provided an opportunity for members of the community to learn and share knowledge about the spectrum of services for justice-involved youth with mental health and addictions issues in the Niagara region.

It is days like today that bring varied audiences together into a common circumstance and allow us to build something that is far better than we could ever build on our own.

Mike Taylor, Youth Resources Niagara

Appendix A

Services and supports for justice-involved youth and/or youth with mental health and addictions needs/challenges described by Niagara-region Panel Members

Extra-Judicial Measures (EJM) are tools that police officers can use in discretion when a crime has been committed without having to go to criminal court. They occur at the pre-charge level with the goal of helping youth contribute to their community and enabling them to make better decisions without leaving them with a criminal record.

The **Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team** is a first response program in which mental health workers respond alongside the Niagara police to 911 calls if a mental health and/or addictions issue is identified. It provides an immediate response to individuals in crisis and connects them with appropriate services.

This is the first time that we have seen such success in such a fast time in connecting the right people to the right places. We are getting it right.

Brandy Sand, Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team

The St. Catharines' **Court System** has evolved to include dedicated time in court for youth, a team of screeners to facilitate identification of mental health and addictions needs and challenges among these youth, and referral to programs specific to the youths' needs. This evolution is supporting a diversion away from criminal charges for youth, and allowing youth to see justice taking place effectively.

We are not seeing kids over and over again. It has been successful. It is a system that works.

Rick Monette, Assistant Crown Attorney

Duty counsel very much appreciates what the screening team does. They've made our job a lot easier.

Elisabeth Cassavoy, Duty Counsel

Extrajudicial Sanctions (EJS) are tools that are used after individuals between the ages of 12 and 17 have been charged with an offense. Referrals are made by Youth Court to community programs where the youth have an opportunity to make amends and take responsibility for their actions.

Pathstone Mental Health has a number of programs supporting justice-involved youth with mental health and addictions needs. In collaboration with Youth Court, the **Early Intervention Program (EIP)** provides referral supports to reduce barriers and quickly link the youth with community-based mental health services, addictions services, educational supports, and medical-psychiatric referrals. Pathstone also provides EJM, EJS and a Community Service Program which supports youth with their probation requirements.

The **Adult Court Support Worker Justice Program (Transition-Aged Youth)** offers a diversion to adult mental health services for youth who are ineligible for EJS and whose needs would be better met by an adult program (where no future transition is required). Additional services include bail support programs and system navigation.

The **Aboriginal Court Support Worker Program** provides culturally specific supports to individuals who self-identify as having indigenous ancestry and who are involved in the justice system. Examples of ways

in which staff advocate and provide support include attending court hearings, assisting in bail court, facilitating legal aid, and connecting to traditional and/or mainstream community resources.

Youth Justice Services and Youth Probation are services provided by Ontario's Ministry of Child and Youth Services for young people with Youth Court orders. Services can include monitoring and ensuring compliance with court orders, preparing reports for Youth Court, providing EJS programs, case supervision, and supporting reintegration back to the community following custody. Community development work is completed in collaboration with community agencies and justice partners to meet the needs of young people in the Niagara community.

Secure Custody & Detention for Youth is the last point of contact for youth along the justice continuum. Typically youth come in with at least one prior mental health and/or addiction diagnosis, and often return at least once. Programs and supports focus on trying to ensure the youth have supports in place so they do not return to custody.

The best outcomes come from when we have immediate contact with the community agencies and understand what services are available to the youth.

Sara McLean, Banyan Community Services

Community Supports for Youth

Contact Niagara provides a central information and referral access point for local children and youth, ages 0-18, who are experiencing emotional, behavioural and/or developmental concerns.

Community Addiction Services of Niagara (CASON) provides voluntary services to individuals who self-identify as requiring addiction supports. Services are provided to individuals of all ages, and can include supports for parents of youth with addictions, and youth who have a parent with an addictions issue. Approximately 25% of CASON's client base comes directly from justice services.

NIAGARA YOUTH COURT SCREENING INITIATIVE (NYCSI): PROCESS MAP

