

CASE STATEMENT

The York Centre: Services and Programmes

The York Centre is a community-based children's mental health agency. On an annual basis, The York Centre provides a range of therapeutic treatment and intervention services for approximately 1500 children, youth and their families, who are experiencing social, emotional, behavioural or mental health problems. There is no fee for service. Day Treatment is the main focus of The York Centre's services. This intensive support benefits children and youth whose complex mental health needs cannot be addressed within the school system. These children receive therapeutic treatment and individualized academic programming during their stay at The York Centre and are reintegrated into the school system about a year later. At the same time, the Centre provides support for the entire family. The York Centre works collaboratively with other children's mental health agencies and partners with many community organizations, including school boards, Children's Aid Societies, Youth Justice, Family Life and Early Years Centres and other social service agencies.

Who Are the Children and Youth Who Require Mental Health Services?

....Many are children and youth who live in your community. The Ontario Child Health Study reported one in five Ontarians under 19 has a mental health disorder. Social, emotional and behavioural problems interfere with classroom learning; impede social skills development and cause tension or turmoil in families. Presenting symptoms of some of the more serious mental health problems may include:

- The feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and low self-worth felt by a youth living with depression.
- The constant worry, fear and anguish which permeate all aspects of the life of a child suffering from an anxiety disorder.
- The lack of self-regulatory control and associated maladaptive behaviours manifest by young people who, by the nature of their impulse control disorder, constantly speak and act (often inappropriately) before thinking.

The York Centre provides support services which help troubled children and youth to succeed and realize their full potential as healthy, productive young adults. The following Parent Testimonial provides an excellent description of the therapeutic process, facilitated by The York Centre's very competent and dedicated staff working in partnership with a strongly motivated family.

"There I was....with a child in obvious crisis – so uncontrollable at times in school it took 3 or 4 adults to hold her down, an angry child seemingly trying to communicate something but no one seemed to be getting it. More school suspensions than school attendance. Loss of friends because of my child's behaviour with peers. I was feeling desperate!

"Have you heard about the York Centre?" This was the beginning of a journey towards success.

I quickly realized that staff at The York Centre actually listened to my input of our experiences. They seemed to find my information important to understanding the issues my daughter was experiencing. They understood what needed to be done to stabilize her as they continued to analyze my daughter's behaviours – looking for clues, slowly developing a trust and safe environment for my daughter. My immediate feeling was – these guys know what to do....they have the right training to cope with my special needs child.

Because of the team approach, I feel we finally got a breakthrough in understanding what all the pieces and issues were for my daughter's situation. With combined input a plan of strategy was put together to enhance the initial progress my daughter had made. For the first time I felt like everyone was singing from the same page and felt a glimmer of hope.

One step forward, three steps backward. Little successes, fewer conflicts, more smiles and increased laughter for my daughter. Then larger successes, fewer setbacks, an obvious developing self-esteem, and a growing maturity. Growing respect from her peers and popularity. The plan and strategies seemed to be working!

Six integrations to the school system later, a process and journey that at times seemed hopeless, we are having our best school year and home life ever. Many thanks to the consistent commitment, support and expertise we found at The York Centre.

They have provided the resources for my daughter and me in laying the foundation for continued progress and success in our future journey."

In addition to enhancing the quality of life for these young people and their families, timely access to community-based mental health services reduces the need for more intensive and more costly long-term services, such as child protection, youth justice and psychiatric care. The average cost of treating children's mental health problems through community-based treatment agencies is less than \$2,500 per child per year. The cost of a pediatric hospital bed is more than \$2,500 per day and the average cost of youth detention is \$120,000 per year.

The York Centre Agency: Vision, Service Excellence, Strong Financial Management

The York Centre is incorporated as a charitable agency and is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services is our main source of funding. Our current annual budget is close to \$2 million. We also receive a grant from the United Way for our Community Outreach Service, which provides anti-bullying and anger management programmes for more than 1000 students in York Region schools on an annual basis.

The York Centre has a well-earned reputation for strong financial management and integrity. Over a period of 20 years, audited statements show a history of balanced budgets. The York Centre's successful fund-raising activities have augmented children's services, funded the purchase of 2 portables and helped to purchase the Leslie Street property, as well as making a substantial contribution to The York Centre Capital Campaign Fund.

While serving the residents of York Region over the past 30 years, "Service Excellence" has become the hallmark of The York Centre. The York Centre's Staff, Board of Directors and Volunteers are all committed to attaining The York Centre's Vision, "We will be a leader in providing timely and individualized mental health services to best meet the needs of children, youth and their families in York Region." In addition to their professional expertise and a strong work ethic, the work of The York Centre staff is characterized by care and commitment. These qualities facilitate the development of a trust relationship with clients, thereby enhancing treatment outcomes. The outstanding work of The York Centre was confirmed by the results of a rigorous assessment conducted by accreditors from Children's Mental Health – Ontario.

The Challenge

In striking contrast to the excellent ratings of The York Centre's programmes/services, the accreditors' report (2003) also described the inadequacies of our facilities with the following observation, "*The facilities are below the quality of those found in most Children's Mental Health Centres and create unnecessarily difficult conditions for staff and clients.*" The York Centre has 3 programme sites in Richmond Hill, which serve children, youth and their families from across York Region. The Children's Programme, located on the Leslie Street site, utilizes a building which dates back to 1868 and two 17 year old portables. The aforementioned need to be replaced and the remaining facility needs to be renovated. Lack of space for individualized counselling, case conferences, meetings, etc, creates additional stress for children, their families and staff. The Youth Programme is located in rented space in a commercial complex where overcrowding is a serious concern. Four groups of adolescents are crowded into a relatively small area for day treatment programmes. While this facility includes a small "make-shift" gym, there is no outdoor space for the physical activities which are very important, particularly for this age group. The programme for children 0-6 years old operates from rented space in a real estate office. Clearly the need for a more functional and appropriate facility in which to provide children and youth with essential services is paramount. In the past, requests for capital funding made by The York Centre to the Ministry of Community and Social Services were to no avail. Regretably, our current request for a \$1 M capital grant from the Ministry for Children and Youth Services was not granted.

A second major challenge is the lack of services to meet the present and expanding demand for children's mental health services. York Region's population continues to grow at an extremely rapid rate. The report "York Region's Children (2004)", states that approximately 39,000 children (0-18 years) experience mental health issues which require some intervention. Currently in York Region, the capacity exists to serve about 5,070, i.e., only 13% of children and youth who are presently experiencing mental health problems. Funding is urgently required for additional staff and accommodations to respond to extremely long wait periods for crucial services.

The York Centre has worked hard to address these two challenges. We have taken a lead role in advocating for the funding required to increase the mental health services for children and youth in York Region. The York Centre is in the process of initiating a Capital Campaign to raise the funds needed for an expanded, consolidated and improved building on the Leslie St. site.

The Solution: An Expanded and Consolidated Children's Mental Health Centre:

The Board of Directors for The York Centre initiated this Expansion/Consolidation Plan following the purchase (in December 2001) of the aging school building on Leslie Street, which they had been renting from the York Region Board of Education. Since that time, the Board has worked with dedication and determination to achieve one of the York Centre's strategic goals, "To provide appropriate, permanent accommodation for all York Centre Programmes at one site to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of services."

Additional positive outcomes of an expanded/consolidated community mental health centre include:

- increased capacity to serve more children and youth and shorter wait periods for needed services.
- increased inter-agency collaboration and partnership capability which will result in an enhanced continuum of community-based services for children and youth
- appropriate space will be available for meetings, parenting workshops, professional in-services, use by community groups, etc.

The cost of this project is \$3.5 million; this includes construction of the new building and renovations to the existing facility. The Council for the Town of Richmond Hill very generously approved a \$1 million capital grant from the Community Enhancement and Economic Vitality Reserve Fund for this project. In addition to providing a highly significant amount of the required capital, this \$1 million grant provides endorsement for the viability and fiscal responsibility of the agency, as well as recognition of the excellent and essential services provided by The York Centre. The York Centre Family has pledged \$500,000 to this project. As well, The York Centre has received a generous grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to help build its fundraising capacity so that it can amalgamate 3 programme sites into one central location, thereby enhancing children's mental health services in York Region. The Central East Region of the Ministry of Children & Youth Services has offered some assistance with carrying costs for a mortgage.

The York Centre is now turning to the Community to help us attain the remaining capital required for successful completion of this important Community Project.

Community Investment in the Well-Being of Children & Youth in York Region

Individuals, local businesses, service clubs and corporations from communities across York Region are urged to make a generous donation to The York Centre Capital Campaign. Over the next 3 years, \$2 million must be secured so that the Expansion/ Consolidation Plan can be actualized.

Throughout the past 20 years, children, youth and families in York Region have benefited from The York Centre's outstanding services. With your support, this agency has the potential, determination and commitment to achieve its Vision. *"We will be a leader in providing timely and individualized mental health services to best meet the needs of children, youth and families in York Region."* The York Centre reassures donors that their gift will have a very important and lasting impact on the communities in York Region. Your contribution to The York Centre Capital Campaign will help to ensure more efficient delivery of more effective services to a larger number of troubled children, youth and their families. Children and youth are our most precious resource. **PLEASE** listen to and respond generously to their request for support and understanding.

"We are children with mental health problems.

We have faces, we have names,

We have hearts, we have feelings.

We need your understanding.

We need your support.

With diagnosis and treatment

We can feel better about ourselves,

We can be like other kids." *

* We sincerely thank Parent's for Children's Mental Health for this inspiration.