

BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARDS



2016

Strengthening Collaboration Within the Interprofessional Team Couchiching Family Health Team

School Success Program



A culture of collaboration allows teams to look beyond their internal challenges to bring better health care to their whole community. Building a strong team takes work, trust, and open communication among interprofessional health providers, their patients and caregivers.

The Couchiching Family Health Team recognized that patients and their caregivers are at the centre of every strong primary care team. When the patient is a child, the team surrounding them must extend beyond primary care providers to include the child's entire circle of care. The team understood that if everyone involved in the child's care could work together, they would see huge improvements in outcomes for the child and their family.

An important aspect of patient-centred care for children with mental, physical or behavioural difficulties is ensuring that they succeed in school. The Couchiching Family Health team realized that in order to make this possible, they needed to expand the team by building partnerships with local caregivers and educators, and the result was the School Success Program.

Previously, there was minimal communication among the school system, families and care providers when a health issue arose that interfered with a student's progress in school. Parents were forced to juggle appointments, treatment and pharmacotherapy without any support; all while repeating the same information to each person they met between appointments.

Today, if the school identifies a child with a health issue that affects their ability to learn, educators can refer the family directly to the School Success Program, and an interprofessional health team evaluates the child. The primary care team works closely with the family and the school to design and implement a program tailored to the needs of the individual child, whether that involves medical treatment, pharmacotherapy or counselling.

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Each program involves as many educators and interprofessional team members as necessary to facilitate the child's learning success and communication among all parties, including parents and caregivers, is regular and ongoing.

The program boasts excellent results. A survey shows that parents who have been frustrated by the system in the past have commented that "All school success staff have been fantastic to work with; they are clearly working WITH schools and families," and "Every community should have this umbrella of support services."

From a professional point of view, the statistics show that 82 per cent of the schools involved and 93 per cent of providers are satisfied with the quality of the service being provided, while 91 per cent of schools and 100 per cent of providers agree that the program makes a positive difference for the children and youth who are taking part.

The Couchiching Family Health Team's efforts in expanding and strengthening the team through these partnerships has demonstrated that not only the patient, but the team, benefits. Patients are succeeding in school, parents are delighted by their children's success, clinicians find it rewarding and school partners are eager to build on the program's success.

In redefining the team by including partners, the Couchiching Family Health Team has challenged traditional ways of thinking about care and has helped the primary care team break out of its silo. As such, it has helped the team begin to look for innovative ways of approaching other community needs.

The program is currently available in the public school system and the primary care team is working to expand it to additional schools and integrate it into the Catholic school board.

Key Facts:

- Program supports children with mental, physical or behavioural health issues succeed in the classroom.
- Grew out of community need identified by primary care team
- Extending the team through partnerships helped ensure success.
- Feedback allows the program to make continuous improvements.
- Both schools and providers are satisfied with the quality of services and want more.
- 91 per cent of schools say program makes positive difference.
- 100 per cent of providers agree.

Breakdown of silos offers ideas for other possible programs.