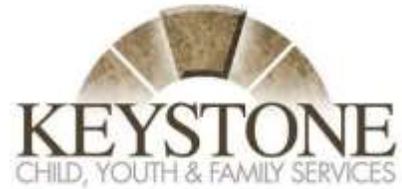


Keystone Child, Youth & Family Services
1793 3rd Ave. W., Owen Sound, ON
519-371-4773
www.keystonebrucegrey.org



April 30th, 2021
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Investing in Rural Communities- Focus on Children and Youth during Mental Health Week- May 3-9, 2021

Owen Sound, ON, April 30th, 2021- Each year, Ontarians mark the first full week of May as Mental Health Week. This year, as we continue to face the unknowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, the looming mental health crisis facing our children and youth has been brought to light. Before the pandemic, as many as 1 in 5 youth in Ontario experienced some form of mental health problem and now, after a year of social isolation, online schooling, and lack of sports or social groups, we are witnessing the seriousness of its toll. With a population of approximately 161,000 people in Grey and Bruce County and 33,000 under the age of 18, the volume of parents and professionals contacting the local children's mental health lead agency, Keystone Child, Youth & Family Services, searching for help and support for their children has risen in the past several months.

"The full weight of the pandemic on the mental health of our children and youth in Grey and Bruce Counties is yet to be known, but we can assume that those numbers are continually going to rise and that additional investments and resources will be required to be able to meet the needs of our families," notes Phil Dodd, Executive Director of Keystone Child, Youth & Family Services.

"By supporting the early intervention of children's mental health, we will be investing in the futures of our children and the future of our communities as our young people transition into adulthood."

Dodd also made reference to the need for the agency to mobilize quickly in light of the ever-changing landscape and the strain being felt across all sectors, especially healthcare.

"The increase in numbers of young people being seen in the 11 emergency rooms within our communities has prompted us to pivot in how we are managing the increased demands on the health care system. With the ever increasing pressures in the hospitals to manage and deal with COVID related situations, it is essential to address the acute care mental health needs of our young people in a timely manner and use our community based services to take the pressure off our hospital partners."

For this reason, Keystone has invested existing funding from the Ministry of Health to enhance system navigation for those presenting to any of the Emergency Departments in Grey and Bruce. This involves the addition of a newly created System Navigator position to support the Emergency Departments in the outlying rural communities across Grey/Bruce. With connectivity to Keystone Clinical staff in an expedited fashion, young people and their families will not have to spend any more time in the ER than necessary to manage their mental health crisis situation.

The one-time emergency Covid-19 relief funding helped the agency with technological upgrades and the procurement of safety PPE. This allowed their counselling staff the ability to work remotely and provide services virtually and enhanced the health and safety measures of those programs that require in-person contact, such as the youth Live-In Treatment (LIT) program.

In 2020, the Live-In Treatment program was fortunate to receive additional investments from the Ministry of Health. These resources allowed the program to operate fully-funded, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, for the first time since its inception in 1989. Historically, this live-in treatment program was only funded for 5 days a week.

However, the steadily growing number of youth in crisis is indicating that one-time payouts and short term investments may assist for the time being, but that further investments will be needed and the current state is not sustainable.

Dodd fears that without additional resources to the children's mental health sector, wait times will climb and other crucial support services for children and youth in Grey/Bruce, like schools and family health teams, will be overcome with having to manage more severe mental health needs that Keystone would typically have managed.

"We still haven't seen all of the affected pieces, and I am afraid that the future fallout will be great. We saw it here locally with the Walkerton Water Tragedy. The impacts of a large scale event within rural communities might not show up right away and the mental health issues we are facing currently in the wake of the pandemic, may be tenfold in the future."

The organization is also seeing the domino effect that the pandemic is having on its staff. Quickly and without hesitation their dedicated staff stepped up to the task and adapted to new ways of providing services, such as offering virtual and telephone sessions, to support the growing needs of families in the community- many of them also having families and children of their own at home to support.

"We've shifted. We've adapted," Dodd remarked, "But with a mental health system in the Province that is already taxed to the limits, it is anticipated our services and our staff will be overwhelmed even more."

As we raise awareness during Mental Health week, it's also important to recognize the state of children's mental health in our communities and across our province as our young people are struggling to thrive within a worldwide pandemic. Early intervention is key and investing in the future of our children is monumental.

In recognition of Mental Health Week-May 3-9, 2021, Keystone Child, Youth & Family Services, will be lighting up their Owen Sound office building in green to bring light to child and youth mental health. The colour green is used to celebrate child and youth mental health as it represents hope, resiliency and transformation, especially poignant after a year of living through a pandemic. They ask community partners to 'shine green' with them during May 3-9th by lighting up their offices or wearing green in support of Children's Mental Health. Share your images with Keystone by emailing them to communications@Keystonebrucegrey.com.

Take a moment to drive by the office, located across from Kelso Beach at 1793 3rd Avenue West, Owen Sound to see the building all lit up in green.

To learn more about how you can support Keystone Child, Youth & Family Services, please contact: communications@keystonebrucegrey.com

To find help and mental health resources for children and youth in Grey and Bruce County, please call Keystone Child, Youth & Family Services at 519-371-4773 or check out their website at: www.keystonebrucegrey.org

About Keystone Child, Youth & Family Services

Keystone Child, Youth and Family Services is a not-for-profit organization, the designated Children's Mental Health Lead Agency for Grey and Bruce Counties and is funded through the Ministry of Health. We offer mental health support through counselling, prevention and well-being programs, short term live-in treatment program, crisis stabilization, youth justice program, special needs programming and coordinated access planning for our community. With a focus on youth and family engagement, we provide compassionate, responsive services for children, youth, and families through customized, multi-disciplinary programming for children and youth ages 0-17.

Contact

Brandi Gowan

Manager of Quality Assurance & Communications
1793 3rd Avenue West, Owen Sound, ON

☎ Office: 519-371-4773 ext. 195 Cell: 519-270-0361

✉ brandigowan@kcyfs.com

🌐 www.keystonebrucegrey.org

Find us online: [Facebook](#) – [Twitter](#) - [Instagram](#)