



Committee Minutes

Mental Health and Addictions Task Force June 7, 2022 – 9:30 AM

The Mental Health and Addictions Task Force met on the above date through electronic means with the following members participating:

Present: Councillors Carleton, O’Leary, Burley, Mackey, Keaveney and Clumpus; Phil Dodd, Clark MacFarlane, Naomi Vodden, Dr. Arra and Sandra McLay-Winters and Warden Hicks

Regrets: Councillor Hutchinson

Staff

Present: Kim Wingrove, Chief Administrative Officer; Tara Warder, Clerk; Anne Marie Shaw, Director of Community Services; Rob Hatten, Communications Manager, Heather Morrison, Clerk/Recording Secretary

Alison Govier and Dr. Zayed were also in attendance.

Call to Order

Chair O’Leary called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM.

Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations.

Delegations

Summer Kueneman, Mental Health Lead-Bluewater District School Board

Dave Roy, Manager of Mental Health Services-Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board

Summer Kueneman and Dave Roy were introduced to the Task Force. Ms. Kueneman noted that BDSB’s mental health team has expanded to seven professionals that have

direct interaction with students across Grey and Bruce. She noted the high level of demand from increasingly complex students and their need to navigate through the system. Both school boards are working with the province to look at the direction of mental health in Ontario, who are the students that need direct interaction and when to rely on community partners. They spoke to the tiered process of supports.

Tier 1 provides “good for all” supports. These include emotional regulation skills and mental health literacy to ensure students have good information and are able to participate in learning. This level is well funded and includes more resources that are jointly created with a number of partners for lesson plans and resources to be evidence based with an equity lens. It was noted that more supports are coming each month. There is a need to ensure that curriculum is being implemented appropriately using the resources available to staff and students.

Tier 2 provides supports for mild to moderate mental health needs in the school system.

Tier 3 supports are for those with the highest amount of need who will be referred to numerous community partners for more focused supports. At this level family supports are also required.

The school boards work with community partners very closely to ensure the children are receiving the right supports necessary. Both Ms. Kueneman and Mr. Roy noted the need for more discussion on expanded resources with School Mental Health Ontario.

Ms. Kueneman noted that the schools have seen increased needs and if necessary, a referral is created with the school’s mental health worker. This worker will then refer out appropriately to other community providers as necessary. It was noted that the average amount of times a student is seen is four with some requiring more or less supports depending on circumstances.

It was also noted that family stress and trauma have significant, negative impact on children’s mental health. Recently, food insecurity has increasingly become a cause for concern in the schools. The challenges with accessing community supports were highlighted as a major concern. There are supports within the schools to make it easier for students to access various community partners, but more is necessary to deal with the increasing need.

There has been an increase in needs in the youngest learners being those in kindergarten to grade 2 with behavioural referrals having increased tremendously this year.

The Mental Health team is part of the school learning services and it is made up of a variety of specialists who support school teams and create plans for support.

The presenters outlined the process for how families access supports which can either be through accessing the Mental Health team directly but noted that most referrals come from the school teams.

A question was raised related to whether addiction issues are increasing in the schools.

The presenters noted that the Mental Health team has seen some of this and would refer students to the appropriate resources. Most students with addiction issues (family or otherwise) will be referred to Choices which is part of the Canadian Mental Health Association with a mandate to work with youth on substance use issues. The staff work with students of all ages within the schools. There are four workers at Choices, with a need to increase those staffing numbers in order to provide adequate supports within the schools. Both boards are looking at education support for students on harm reduction in order to provide that awareness on this growing issue.

A question was raised on whether there has been an increased level of violence in the schools. Mr. Roy noted that the schools try to focus on relationships and having caring adults to help students understand that the school adults are there when needed. The need at this time, does not support an increase in security at the schools.

Further discussion took place on the tiered system. The presenters noted that referrals to community partners include Keystone and Choices for those at Tier 3. Sometimes they are seen in the emergency room for immediate mental health services if the circumstances warrant. School Mental Health Ontario says that ideally schools should be living in Tiers 1 and 2 however it was noted that the level of available services is not the same in Grey and Bruce counties as it is in larger urban centres.

Consideration was given to looking at this model and determining if it was the right one. Ms. Kueneman noted that Tier 3 often requires those outside supports to provide stabilization and specialization for the students. Phil Dodd stated that the dynamics around the tier levels was created by the provincial government with schools dealing with 1 and 2 and community providers dealing with level 3. He did note that there are no lines that bind to specific levels, and everyone is just trying to provide the best supports possible for students.

It was stated that mental health services in our area are under-resourced with more resources and staffing needed.

Mr. Roy noted that if parents are under stress, it takes a tremendous amount of courage to make that first call and that first call needs to be the right call with the right level of support. Keystone now has a supervisor of intake who assists parents right from the start. It starts with building a relationship with the parent to take the first step in getting the necessary help.

A question was raised related to how staff are prepared to support families. Mr. Roy stated that the Mental Health team are social workers and child and youth workers and well-trained in offering this type of support. He also noted that educators are working to increase their capacity with soft skills and the Mental Health team is working with them on the skills they do have to be used when working with students. It can be as simple as knowing how to take a moment to validate students' feelings, provide that simple support, which is often what is needed.

A Circle of Security approach was outlined which provides a training approach to provide what students need from staff when they are at the top and/or bottom of the

circle.

Clark MacFarlane noted that more resources are needed but they also need to be used differently. The challenge is finding a means with connecting children efficiently and smoothly to those resources to ensure children and families receive the right supports at the right time. He also noted the importance of having healthy communities and the design interventions or considerations to make communities mentally healthy in order to promote positive mental health and well-being.

Discussion on what more resources would be beneficial was then discussed. Mr. MacFarlane noted that increasing staff at community partners, providing street level service, active outreach, and building infrastructure with a greater use of data in a more meaningful way would all assist in provide the required level of support. He also stated that the Ontario Health Team could come together to provide more meaningful insight for services from a broad view level rather than being siloed.

Naomi Vodden noted the need for expertise in substance psychosis, eating disorders, and autism as areas of future resources.

Chair O'Leary thanked the presenters for their expertise.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Next Meeting Dates

June 21, 2022.

On motion by Councillors Burley and Clumpus, the meeting adjourned at 10:31 am.

Brian O'Leary, Chair