



Upstream's Youth Program

A systematic look

Upstream's Youth Program (YP) provides intensive case management to youth aged 16-24. Clients are dealing with severe and persistent mental illness. They may have suffered early episodes of mental illness, or may be in the process of transitioning from children's to adult mental health services. These youth enter the program lacking the skills, resources, and/or support networks to achieve/maintain an improved quality of life.

The Youth Program helps clients to develop the skills and connections they need to reach their optimal level of functioning and achieve self-sufficiency. Each client meets with her/his case manager at least once a week to talk about their goals, challenges, and progress.

In order to formally evaluate the Youth Program, Upstream hired an external consultant (Cathexis Consulting Inc.). Cathexis took a systematic look at the YP to assess the extent to which it was meeting its goals, identify strengths/weaknesses, and identify opportunities for improvement and funding

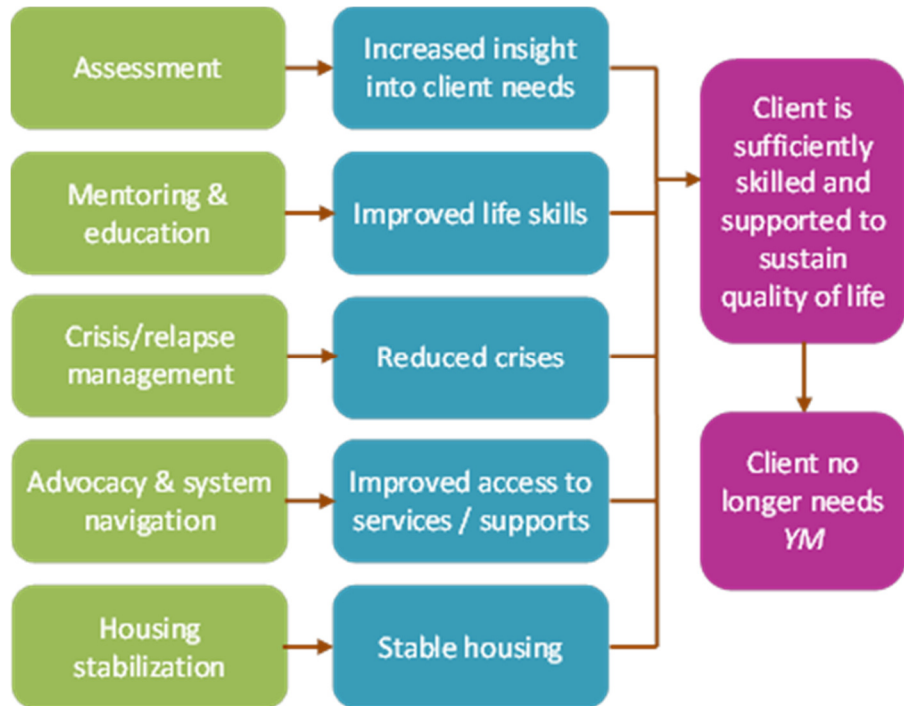
This highlights report is a summary of what we have learned through the evaluation. Detailed findings are available in a separate document titled *Upstream's Youth Program: Evaluation Report*.

About the Youth Program

- Officially launched in 2012, but serving youth since 2008
- Has 1 full time case manager and 7 current clients
- 1 client has successfully graduated from the program
- Takes a holistic approach, addressing: mental health, housing, access to education, and socialization
- Services are highly flexible, tailored for each client's goals
- Serves Transitional Youth clients who don't qualify for youth programs but need more support than they would get in an adult program

Does it work?

Mental health is complex, and it is expected that each client's journey through the Youth Program take 4-5 years. As we interviewed clients served in the past year (there were 7), it's premature to identify long term impacts. We can, however, affirm that that significant progress is being made.



Clients and their family members genuinely appreciated the program and believed it made a positive difference in their lives.

Most YP clients:

- Feel more motivated and able to tackle their challenges;
- Took steps towards attaining additional education;
- Switched to more appropriate medication regimes; and
- Moved into more stable housing situations.

How would your life be different if you didn't go to Upstream's YP?

"I'd probably be dead right now, because I would have killed myself."

"I don't know. It's just great having someone to talk to."

"Before it was like there was a ladder and everyone is climbing, but I was stuck at the bottom. Now I am starting to climb."

What are we doing right?



Clients, family members and staff all agreed that the Youth Program (YP) was an important program that worked well. The YP was also well aligned with best practice literature on intensive case management.

Aspects of the YP that are particularly effective and/or appreciated include:


- **Flexible approach** – Clients are encouraged to define their own successes and move forward at their own pace. The YP is uniquely flexible about the services it provides such as driving clients to appointments, funding client directed activities, etc.
- **Building relationships** – Clients trust their case manager and believe that he cares about them. For many clients, this is one of the few stable relationships they enjoy.
- **Opportunities to socialize** – Many individuals dealing with mental illness can become isolated. The YP addresses this both through the client-case manager relationship, and group recreation activities.
- **Family supports** – The YP was instrumental in helping some families support and interact with their children.
- **Niche client base** – The YP addresses a gap that is not widely met in Ottawa. Most clients moved to the YP after becoming ineligible for other programs, often due to age or time constraints.

“Upstream realises that in dealing with people with mental illness you’re going to have to deal with their symptoms too, like not showing up for appointments.”

“We have the flexibility to address our clients’ needs and adapt to changing situations.”

“Like most teens, [our son] doesn’t listen to us. This program allows him to live his life and have privacy... while also getting support.”

How can we improve?



Upstream takes a learning focused approach, recognizing that there are always areas for improvement. A few of the areas identified for improvement include:

Expanding capacity: A single case manager means a low turnover rate and long wait list. By adding more staff, Upstream could serve more clients and provide opportunities for clients to build relationships with more than one staff person. In any expansion it will be important not to lose the flexibility that the YP currently has.

Finding new ways to help clients understand their service plan: Clients/case managers complete the Ontario Common Assessment of Needs every six months and have ongoing discussion about goals. But many clients don't seem to have a clear idea of what they want to accomplish in the YP. Upstream could look for new ways to communicate with clients about goals, service plans, and the indicators that they are ready to graduate.

Adding more socialization opportunities: Several clients asked for more recreation/socialization opportunities, particularly those that are youth only. Upstream may want to host more youth specific activities and/or partner with another youth serving agency to offer joint activities.

Engaging family members: The Youth Program uses a family focused approach. However, some family members wanted to be more involved in their child's treatment. There may be ways to further engage these family members or help them understand when/why greater involvement is not appropriate.