



George Hull Centre Day Treatment Program

Issue #14

A Place Where Youth Find Success!

By: Meg Doherty

Manager, GHC Day Treatment Program.

Across Ontario, Canada and around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all of our lives through illness, quarantine, social distancing, economic hardship and extreme isolation. The timeline to return to “normal” life is lengthy and the future is uncertain. No one is feeling these effects more than our population of young people and especially those with mental health challenges.

The George Hull Centre Day Treatment Program runs in partnership with the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board. We have two elementary classrooms and three high school classrooms offering placement to over 40 youth each school year. The students come to us with a wide variety of mental health struggles including but not limited to; anxiety, depression, addiction, ADD/ADHD, extreme school avoidance, learning disabilities, obsessive compulsive disorder, family issues and in many cases serious childhood trauma. For all the students that come to our program mainstream school has been difficult; they often feel hopeless, alone and unseen.

We seek to offer them a different experience - one of acceptance and understanding, and the firm belief that with the right support for their mental health, students can find success in school. We work with the youth and their families to understand what the struggles have been and where the gaps are in their learning. From this we are able to address their challenges with a holistic and individually created therapeutic and academic plan for each student.

We like to refer to our Day Treatment Program as “The Gentle School”. Our trauma informed approach allows the needs of each student to be met and their past experiences honoured in every thread of our academic and therapeutic programming. The teachers and Child and Youth Workers are trained in trauma and understand how the experience of childhood trauma can affect the brain and a young person’s ability to learn. They understand that the behaviours being displayed are not because the student wants to be difficult or defiant but are instead the brain's response to feeling unsafe or under stress. We seek every moment to understand the WHY behind the behaviour and work as a team to create an environment of safety and security to allow the learning brain to operate. With time and support from program staff, their families and the George Hull Centre clinical staff, we see many students flourish, gain confidence and learn new coping strategies.

In March 2020, all Ontario schools, including Central Tech and Dixon Grove where we have our classrooms, were shut down suddenly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and we quickly had to pivot to provide online programming and virtual school and therapy. We are a relationship-based program so this had many challenges. We were fearful the gains the students had made might be lost.

As the school year comes to a close, we are so proud of the continued engagement from our youth, both academically and therapeutically, and with the success of our adapted program. Over the past three months, we have offered virtual groups to our students that were both therapeutic and activity based; we have had counselling sessions with students and their families; and we have continued to offer individual academic support. Our students have found success! In our High School Program alone, 107 credits were earned this year.

We are very happy that 18 students are returning in the fall, and we are deep into the process of assessing new students to join us. We have also been working with our students who are ready to transition to another school, to help support their plan. Our team will continue to support all our youth and their families over the summer months to ensure they are ready for the start of another school year in September.

At this point, it remains to be seen what school will look like in September. We are confident though that whether it be virtual, in-class or a combination of the two, we will continue to offer

an enriched environment that allows our students to learn, grow and build skills and lead to their long-term success.

