

Youth and Family Engagement at CASA

CASA Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health is constantly striving to improve the quality of the services we provide to children and families with mental health or addiction concerns and we recognize the importance of youth and families voices in our ongoing quality improvement . CASA believes—as is widely acknowledged in academic literature—that the involvement of families in service delivery is strongly linked to improvements in the quality of services provides and outcomes¹.

Accreditation Canada has also recognized the importance of the patient voice in all aspects of health care and has added client and family involvement to many of their standards and Required Organizational Practices. As an Accredited organization, we are proud to align with Accreditation standards by incorporating the youth and family voice into many aspects of CASA services.

CASA Family Advisory Council

CASA works to include family voice in our service planning and community presence through the Family Advisory Council (FAC). Established in 2014, the FAC is a committee of caregivers with lived experience who meet monthly and work to: combat the stigma surrounding youth mental health care and addictions; encourage a deeper understanding of youth mental health and addictions in the community; and, provide feedback on CASA services and provide suggestions for improvement.

The FAC is busy with the following activities and projects:

- Assisting with the annual CASA Gala Fundraising event
- Presenting to board members and community stakeholders about family needs in the mental health care system
- Producing the CASA Family Handbook
- Updating the CASA Caregiver Village resources website
- Representing FAC on the five year pan-Canada initiative *ACCESS Open Minds*
- Developing a mentorship/peer support program for families and caregivers

CASA Youth Council

Founded in May 2016, the CASA Youth Council (CYC) is a mental health action group for youth ages 13-26. CYC has 18 council members (and 2 project-based members) who meet monthly to bring awareness to youth mental health issues, create projects that will improve the youth mental health experience, and catalyze positive change through continuous action. Although many of the members on CYC are not current or previous CASA patients, all have experience with mental health or the mental health care system and are passionate about youth mental wellness.

The CYC is busy with the following activities and projects:

- Working on their second issue of *Unseen*, a youth mental wellness magazine created entirely by CYC members that addresses a variety of mental health topics
- Public presentations at schools and at various community organizations
- Taking Mental Health First Aid training
- Participating in speaking and writing workshops.

Complexity factors: Patient-driven research

Another way that CASA hears family voices is through patient-oriented research. CASA is currently leading a research project to explore the factors that impact how families and children achieve their mental health goals. We have conducted focus groups with parents at CASA House and ADP as well as the Family Advisory Council that explore the factors that have hindered or supported families in their health care journey, both at CASA and in the broader health care system. The results of this research will be compiled with clinician feedback about what factors they believe impact mental health goal achievement. This research will be used to inform CASA practices and approaches to family-centered mental health care.

Looking forward

As Accreditation Canada continues to acknowledge the importance of patient involvement with the addition of patient surveyors in 2019, CASA will respond by continuing to grow the roles of the FAC and CYC in advocating for youth and family mental health. CASA hopes to adopt the model of BC Family Smart's *Parent in Residence* program which employs caregivers with lived experience as formal supports for caregivers and youth in their health care journey. We also hope to expand our patient-oriented research activities with the addition of the CASA Research Chair who will meet with families and youth to focus research projects on community-identified issues.

ⁱ Rachel Haine-Schlagal and Natalia Escobar Walsh, "A Review of Parent Participation Engagement in Child and Family Mental Health Treatment," *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 18, no.2 (2015): 133-150, doi: 10.1007/s10567-015-0182-x