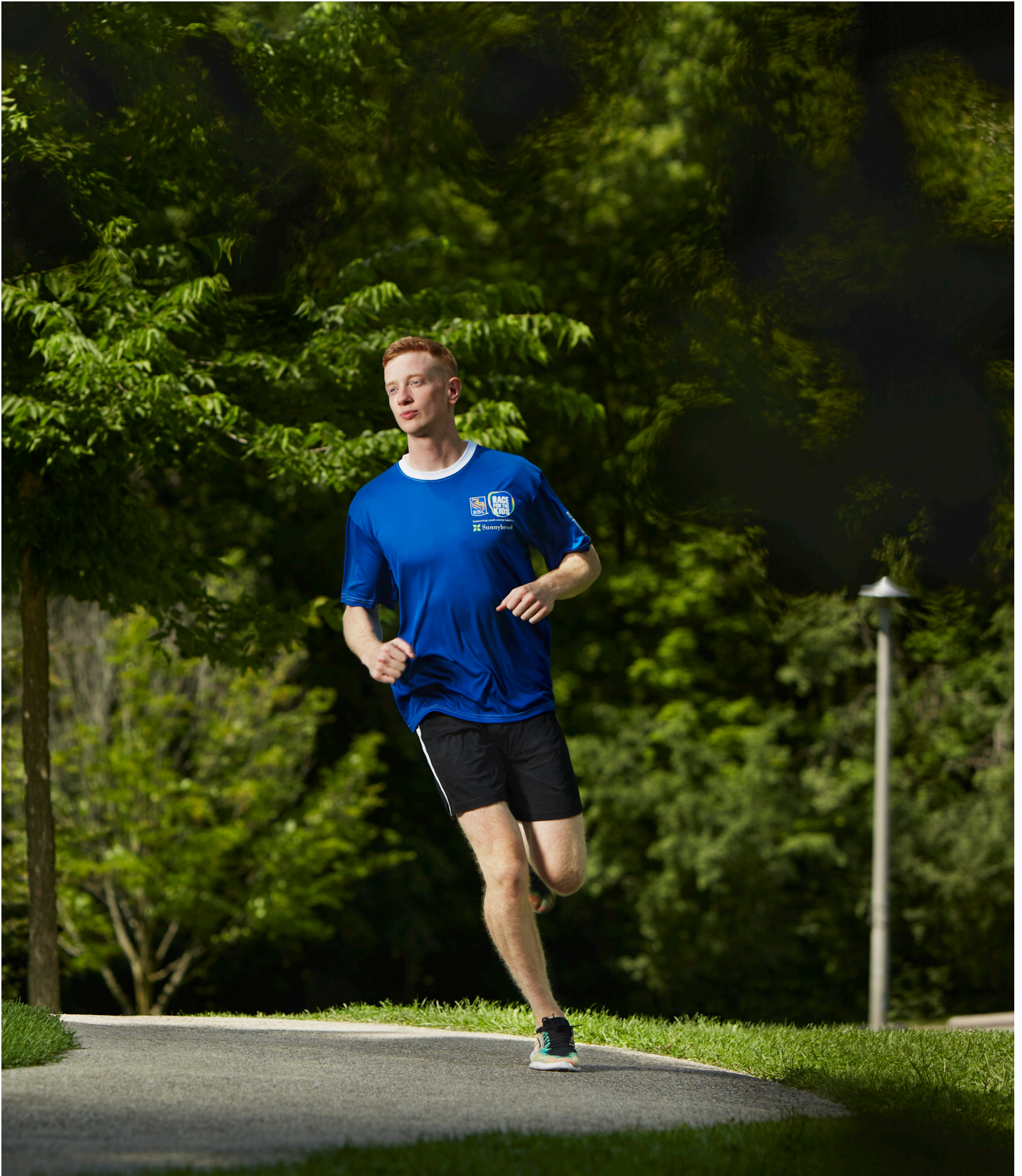


YOUR IMPACT

FAMILY NAVIGATION PROJECT



WINTER 2022

Answering an unprecedented growth in the need for youth mental health services, Sunnybrook's Family Navigation Project continues to step up amid the pandemic to help all families. Your support has been more important than ever. Thank you for your generosity.

FAMILY NAVIGATION PROJECT SEES RISE IN NEED

In Canada, 1.2 million youth experience mental health issues, but only one in five will receive the care they need. The Family Navigation Project (FNP) at Sunnybrook is taking action. FNP is a life-changing program funded entirely by donors like you. The free service pairs families who have youth aged 13 to 26 with mental health and/or addictions challenges with clinically trained navigators. With your support, our staff connect families to the services they urgently need. FNP serves youth and families in the Greater Toronto Area.

Since its launch in 2013, FNP has seen a 45-per-cent increase in the number of its clients. **During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, that need has only intensified, with nearly twice as many youth reaching out to FNP for help.** "In my 35 years as a practising psychiatrist, I've never seen anything like this. The growing need for youth mental health care is, quite simply, unprecedented," says Dr. Anthony Levitt, founder and medical director of FNP and chief of the Hurvitz Brain Sciences Program at

Sunnybrook. Dr. Levitt and his team are well aware that the pandemic has contributed to the sudden onset of a number of known stressors for youth and their families, including increased social isolation, economic insecurity, interruption to school, lack of access to the usual coping mechanisms, concerns about the virus itself, and stress among family members. On average, about 62 new clients reach out to FNP each month.

With your support, the FNP team has demonstrated remarkable resilience and perseverance. While charting unknown territory – with issues such as higher case volumes, service closures and the transition to remote work – our team ensured there was no interruption to the support they provided for clients. Navigation services have always been virtual, delivered by email and phone, so this carried on without disruption. In addition, "The team is incredibly supportive of each other," says Dr. Levitt. "We don't just preach it; we practise it."

30%

of Ontario families have at least one youth with mental health and/or addiction issues

(Source: FNP study conducted pre-pandemic)

70%

of youth say their mental health worsened a year into the pandemic

(Source: FNP)

67%

of Ontarians believe the mental health impacts of COVID-19 are going to be serious and long-lasting

(Source: Children's Mental Health Ontario)

On the cover: Sam Medland, now 23, participated in the virtual RBC Race for the Kids in 2020 and 2021 to support the Family Navigation Project (FNP). Read about the event on page 4.

EXPANDING AND LEADING IN YOUTH NAVIGATION

Thanks to the generosity of donors, Sunnybrook's Family Navigation Project (FNP) continues to innovate, expand and lead while staying true to its roots.

Sugy Kodeeswaran, FNP's executive director, has helped the team building toward this moment.

Harnessing FNP's data

Thanks to donor support, FNP launched a new client management system in March 2021. The informatics system allows navigators to keep track of their clients' needs and progress, while also ensuring managers can effectively monitor caseloads and quality. "This new system creates a dashboard for us so we can easily see our data," says Sugy. The type of data collected includes longitudinal information on who FNP is serving, what the needs of families are, what guidance was provided, which services were accessed, and client outcomes.

With this new system in place, Sugy and the FNP team are committed to helping even more families by making navigation services part of the pathway to access and transition through care. They are working with system partners provincially and nationally to create awareness about navigation and to share the learnings from FNP's unique model.

"The original vision of the founding families was that no family feels lost in the mental health and addictions system," says Sugy. "No family anywhere. Our growth and leadership aligns with that vision in every way."

Leading by example

FNP is one of the most robust navigation programs in Canada in terms of its size and number of families served. Its leadership was evident in April 2021 when FNP co-hosted the inaugural



Sugy Kodeeswaran

Canadian Health Care Navigation Conference in collaboration with NaviCare/SoinsNavi at the University of New Brunswick. This pan-Canadian conference, which had initially been postponed due to COVID-19, was attended virtually by 200 delegates from more than 80 organizations.

In addition, FNP is working individually with various regions around Ontario to help shape what youth and family navigation could look like in their communities. Interestingly, the province has defined navigation as a core element of its new Ontario Health Teams structure. Sugy says that one of the main reasons FNP is so unique is because the service was designed from the perspective of the client.

Scaling FNP to help more youth

"This program was actually built by parents who met in the waiting room of the psychiatry wing at Sunnybrook," says Sugy. "They realized that even though they came from different backgrounds and journeys, there were a lot of similar pain points."

The most notable was difficulty in accessing the complex mental health and addictions system, a challenge FNP addresses directly by partnering families with an expert to help them navigate the system.

"How can we actually take it to the next level? How can we scale this? How can we help even more young people and families?" asks Sugy.



MOBILIZING FOR YOUTH

Sporting a deep belief in the mental health of youth, thousands take to the streets every year to raise funds for Sunnybrook's Family Navigation Project (FNP). In 2020 and 2021, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the run transitioned to a virtual and socially distanced format, becoming the world's largest virtual family fun run. The 2021 Toronto RBC Race for the Kids was held over the weekend of October 16-17 and attracted close to 6,000 participants. The event raised \$1.85 million for youth and their families.

FNP's impact at a glance:

79%
growth in number of
youth helped
since FNP started
in 2013

4,300+
the total number
of youth FNP has
helped

2X
Since the pandemic
began, the number
of youth reaching
out to FNP has
doubled

726
number of youth and
their families who
were helped by FNP
in 2020

VALIDATING FNP'S VALUE THROUGH RESEARCH

Thanks to donor support, our research program continues to validate and share best practices in navigation, so that more lives can be changed. For families that are struggling, this is vital. Here is an update on our research activities, which are led by Sunnybrook research scientist Dr. Roula Markoulakis.

Improving youth engagement

Before the pandemic, 85 per cent of those who first reached out to FNP were parents or caregivers and 15 per cent were youth themselves. In an effort to learn more about what youth need when seeking navigation, and ultimately with the intention to change those percentages, FNP launched a bold research initiative to discover how to better engage youth. The initiative was formally launched with a research catalyst grant from the Canadian Institute of Health Research in March 2020.

One of the first activities was to engage with youth mental health organizations who already have strong youth engagement, such as local non-profits Stella's Place, Jack.org, and Hope + Me. FNP collaborated with representatives from each organization to help guide and conduct this project alongside the research team. Together, they conducted interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, especially youth, revealing how navigation services can help youth feel more engaged, supported, and empowered in their care by ensuring safety, respect, equity, and commitment to youth engagement. This feedback is helping FNP modify its materials and processes, such as learning how youth would prefer to communicate with FNP (e.g. via phone, email, or text) and the most effective strategies for outreach. **“A critical imperative of the youth engagement initiative is to ensure youth always feel heard, respected, and valued by FNP,” says Dr. Markoulakis.**



Roula Markoulakis

In the spring of 2020, FNP received a research catalyst grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to ensure its youth engagement strategy is truly youth-informed. FNP has leveraged that grant to obtain sustainable funding this year through the Ontario Brain Institute Growing Expertise in Evaluation and Knowledge Translation (OBI-GEEK) program and the Slaight Family Foundation's Mental Health Initiative.

While members of the FNP team already have several ideas for improving youth engagement, including a potential youth equivalent of the Parent Advocate with Lived Experience role or a Youth Advisory Council, they remain open to new ideas. “We believe that we shouldn't determine what to do without asking youth first, and the current literature supports this,” says Dr. Markoulakis. As noted earlier in this report, during the pandemic, an increasing number of youth have been reaching out to FNP, and that number has doubled. “This is very exciting because our youth engagement work will ensure we really understand what youth need that may be different from what a caregiver-client may need,” says Dr. Markoulakis.

Provincial survey results published

The FNP research team conducted a provincial survey on the mental health needs of Ontarians. That work has now been published in the prestigious journal *BMC Psychiatry*.

Researchers continue to do multiple iterations of the provincial survey in parallel with waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is crucial real-time research that provides ongoing snapshots of Ontarians' mental health. Three additional manuscripts from that work are being prepared.

Navigation proving effective

FNP researchers have completed a proof-of-concept project comparing FNP's navigation model to self-navigation. In self-navigation, families seek out and secure care independently using an online list of resources.

The research team noted that the FNP navigation group experienced improved functioning within their immediate families and had fewer days of lost caregiver productivity compared to their self-navigation counterparts. The feasibility study was published in *SAGE Research Methods Cases* in 2020.

Building on this work, FNP has launched a full-scale randomized controlled trial comparing Sunnybrook's model of navigation to self-navigation. The research team added questions about the pandemic and how it is affecting help-seeking. Based on what they are hearing from the clinical team, many people are struggling because of service closures and rapid changes to in-person services. Now more than ever, FNP's unique supports are urgently needed.

Why people contact FNP

Thanks to donor support, FNP continues to hire students who are passionate about youth mental health, several of whom have now published their findings. In 2016, FNP did a chart review to determine the needs and background characteristics of clients contacting FNP and ultimately what services they were connected with. The analysis was published last summer in the *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.

Second annual town hall addresses youth mental health questions from community

On September 15, 2021, members of the FNP team gathered virtually for the second annual town hall panel, to answer urgent questions about youth mental health. Our experts provided practical advice to help youth and their families develop strong coping skills and build resilience. The recorded discussion can be viewed [here](#).

Town hall participants, clockwise from top left, were: Anthony Farnell, Chief Meteorologist, Global News (moderator); Kris Depencier, Regional President, Greater Toronto Region, RBC (opening remarks); Miriam Blond, Family Navigator, Sunnybrook's Family Navigation Project; Dr. Anthony Levitt, Medical Director, FNP and Chief of the Hurvitz Brain Sciences Program; Dr. Amy Cheung, Sunnybrook Youth Psychiatrist; Troy Maxwell, Chief Operating Officer, RBC Capital Markets.



Meet Paul, grateful parent: “FNP got us through this”

Sunnybrook’s Family Navigation Project (FNP) is there when it matters most for youth and families who are facing incredible challenges. Which is why people who get the help that they need and can’t find anywhere else are eternally grateful to donors like you who make it all possible.

People like Paul. A maintenance manager at a steel mill, Paul lives with his wife and two kids. Their 13-year-old, who we will refer to as “Patrick”, was often argumentative but Paul and his wife didn’t know there was something more serious going on.

In September 2020, one of Patrick’s friends reached out to Paul concerned that his son was having suicidal ideation.

Patrick left the house and Paul followed him toward a busy street where Patrick was planning to walk into traffic. “It was really scary,” Paul says. “In that split second, he didn’t think his life was worth living.”

Searching for resources

The incident triggered an emergency 72-hour psychiatric assessment for Patrick at a community hospital. Testing revealed the teen had oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). Later testing revealed he was also gifted.

The atmosphere in their household grew increasingly tense as Patrick became a danger to himself and the rest of the family. For the next few months, the teen was in and out of hospitals and treatment centres. In an agonizing turning point, Paul and his wife allowed the Children’s Aid Society to take him away to a group home. “This was heartbreaking for us,” says Paul.

The anxious father stayed up late at night searching the web for resources to help his family. That’s when he found FNP.

“I don’t know what we would have done without FNP”

After reaching out to FNP, Paul’s family was matched with navigator Naomi Algate. “Naomi guided us toward a three-pronged approach: Get our son out of the house for everyone’s safety, find the right therapy for him, and work on communication repair.” While Patrick received psychotherapy, Paul and his wife participated in Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (EFFT), which aims to support parents so that they can become active agents of healing in their children’s recovery from mental health issues.

“While he was getting treatment, we changed as well,” says Paul. “We learned to communicate effectively with him and to validate and support him.”

Patrick is now 14, back home, and just started Grade 9 at a new school that supports his enriched-learning needs. The family has settled into a much more harmonious way of life.

Paul is so grateful for his experience with FNP, he has since become a donor to the program.

“FNP got us through this,” says Paul. “I don’t know what we would have done if we hadn’t come across FNP. Naomi’s guidance and willingness to listen meant the world to me.”

OUR THANKS TO YOU

It is because of you that Sunnybrook's Family Navigation Project is leading the way in ensuring youth and their families can access vital resources to support their mental health.

Thank you for helping us be there for families when it matters most.

Together, we are inventing the future of youth mental health care.