

A serious problem for youth in our community has become a crisis, and it needs our collective support.

The basic problem is this. Canada's health care system is a jigsaw puzzle with many different pieces that can be very hard to navigate – even for health care professionals. For youth seeking help, navigating the system can be a nightmare, and it often fails them. This was a serious problem before Covid, but now with the added mental distress from lockdowns and uncertainty, it has become an even bigger and more urgent problem in helping our young people to cope.

But there is a solution at hand, and our 100 Women Who Care Guelph team can help move it forward with our donations.

The solution is most simply described as having “Youth Hubs” where young people can access a range of services through one place. More technically, here in Guelph Wellington we're building an “Integrated Youth Services Network.” The intention is to provide INTERVENTION and PREVENTION services utilizing the service providers we already have in our community, so we are all working together. In fact, over 30 community organizations have already come together in this shared vision. The Youth Hubs are being designed to be welcoming spaces that provide help to young people in navigating the system, both physically and virtually. Youth Hubs are not a magic bullet that will solve our youth crisis, but they are a piece of the puzzle that will make it easier for youth to access services.

Here in Guelph Wellington, we're building on successful Youth Hub experiences from other Canadian cities and regions, and we've enhanced the local model to have not only one centre but SEVEN locations in Guelph Wellington where youth between the ages of 12 and 26 can have immediate access to services, including tutoring, housing support, employment counselling, primary care, mental health and substance abuse. The seven micro-sites will be networked together so service providers can access files, and youth will not have to repeat their story each time they request help. Furthermore, youth will be deeply engaged in the design of these sites to serve them in the most meaningful way.

This Guelph Wellington Youth Hub program is a highly significant new development for our city and county, partnered with CMHA-WW (Canadian Mental Health Association – Waterloo Wellington) for health care and the Guelph Community Foundation to help raise funds.

I am asking 100 Women Who Care to invest our collective donations so we can immediately provide virtual care to 70 youth in our community. These funds would be used to provide youth with activities in helping to design the Youth Hub space they want to see, for access to the services that are often out of reach. This will also help us determine the necessary steps to scale up across all of our micro-sites.

Our community needs this, and our young people need it, now more urgently than ever. Please help the program move forward with our donation.

Cyndy Moffat Forsyth

*Member of 100 Women Who Care Guelph*

*I began working on the IYSN concept in November 2018 as a Rotary volunteer. In July 2020, I accepted a fulltime role as the IYSN's first director.*