

# 2021 Partnership Update

## Pathstone Mental Health and Brock University

In March 2019, Pathstone Mental Health and Brock University signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalize a shared commitment to improving mental health outcomes for youth and children in Niagara and beyond. The agreement represents the mutual advantage of working together through research, knowledge mobilization and experiential learning to better understand and address challenges and barriers to increasing mental health support for children. This collaborative partnership is a reflection of Brock's commitment to community engagement, knowledge mobilization, experiential learning, and the shared priority of research and increasing support for childhood mental health.

### Projects and Initiatives in 2021

Pathstone Mental Health and Brock University collaborated on various projects and initiatives in 2021. This included:

#### **Research**

Pathstone Mental Health and Brock worked in partnership on numerous studies and co-created research in 2021 with faculty from across the university:

**Institute for Lifespan Development Research:** The Institute involves over 88 faculty members representing Social Sciences, Applied Health Sciences, Education, and Business, as well as 40 community agencies, who collaborate to investigate psychological, social, health, neuropsychological and educational aspects of life from infancy to old age. In 2021, researchers from the Institute for Lifespan Development Research collaborated with Pathstone Mental Health on a variety of research projects including:

- An Integrated Approach of Recreational Dance and Behaviour Therapy: Evaluating Psychological and Physical Benefits for Children and Youth with Neurodevelopmental Disorders
  - Collaborated with Tricia Vause, Associate Professor, Child and Youth Studies. 2 undergraduate and 5 graduate students evaluated the psychological and physical benefits of recreational dance and behaviour therapy for children with neurodevelopmental disorders.
- Cognitive, emotional, sensory processing and neurophysiological activity in children and youth with anxiety and ADHD
  - Partnered with researchers:
    - Ayda Tekok-Kilic, Associate Professor, Child and Youth Studies
    - Tricia Vause, Associate Professor, Child and Youth Studies
    - Erin Panda, Assistant Professor, Child and Youth Studies
    - Sid Segalowitz, Professor Emeritus, Psychology
  - Researching:
    - The temperamental, cognitive, and sensory transdiagnostic risk factors underlying anxiety and attention deficit spectrum in youth ages 8-17 years using parent reports.

- EEG data to study the neurophysiological correlates of attention systems and how it may vary as a function of temperament and executive functions in children and youth with externalizing and internalizing challenges.
- Sensory, temperament and cognitive risk factors in anxiety and attention spectrum using parent questionnaires in a younger group of children (5-8 years).
- Neurophysiological correlates and predictors of intervention outcomes.
- Neuropsychological Predictors of Adaptive Behaviours Among Children and Youth
  - In partnership with Dawn Good, Associate Professor, Psychology
  - Understanding the complex mental health needs of children and youth in Niagara and exploring how to improve pathways to care, identifying shared factors among children/youth that predict long-term complicated/dual diagnosis status and failed treatment/recidivism.
- Parental Relationships and At-Risk Traits Among Children and Youth
  - In partnership with Dawn Good and Angela Book, Associate Professors, Psychology
  - Investigating the bi-directional influence of parental relationships on at-risk youth (e.g., those with executive functioning challenges) in order to understand, and better inform, parenting intervention programming.
- The Brock Healthy Youth Project (BHYP)
  - BHYP, led by Teena Willoughby, Director of the Institute for Lifespan Development Research, Taylor Heffer, PhD student in Psychology, and Jayne Morrish, Knowledge Mobilization Officer at Brock, presented their research findings to staff at Pathstone Mental Health.

**Interprofessional Education for Quality Improvement Program (I-EQUIP):** I-EQUIP was created in 2012 by Dr. Madelyn Law at Brock University in the Department of Health Sciences. I-EQUIP aims to provide experiential education opportunities for students to learn about and apply change management, quality improvement and teamwork principles to projects to enhance health services and programs. In 2021, I-EQUIP collaborated with Pathstone Mental Health on several key research initiatives:

- Youth suicide: Through this project, students work with Pathstone to evaluate and help to optimize the care pathway for youth who present at hospital for self-injury and/or suicidality so they receive timely follow-up with the most effective and appropriate outpatient mental health counselling/therapy program(s). Students work collaboratively with Pathstone Mental Health and community partners in researching, developing, implementing, and measuring outcomes of a self-injury/suicide screener.
- High Risk Youth: Through this project the current Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) protocol is reviewed to measure the effectiveness of interventions and create a feedback loop to optimizer this care pathway for high-risk youth. Students work collaboratively with Pathstone Mental Health and community partners to collect and analyze data, as well as plan and enact changes to the VTRA protocol and relevant intervention programs.

- Virtual Care: Through this project students engage with Pathstone to evaluate current practice and develop a decision guide/aid which will support a standard in opting to use a virtual or in person service pathway. The focus is to measure the impacts of the traditional method of service delivery as compared to a virtual pathway.

## Faculty of Education

- Investigating Caregiver/Family Experiences of Supporting Youth with Mental Health Challenges at Pathstone Mental Health Services
  - Supported by:
    - Michael Savage, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Studies Program Director, Master of Education
    - Ann-Marie DiBiase, Associate Professor and Educational Psychology Concentration Leader, Department of Educational Studies
    - Vera Woloshyn, Professor, Department of Education Studies, BEd Program Director, Masters Preparation Certificate in Education.
  - Phase 1: Establishing a baseline for family/caregiver experiences with Pathstone Mental Health Services.
  - Phase 2: Use the data obtained in Phase 1 to develop and test a psychoeducational program for family/caregivers that is designed to lessen caregiver strain and improve satisfaction with Pathstone's services.
  - Phase 3: Integrate the Psychoeducation Program into Pathstone's treatment process. Researchers will compare its efficacy for reducing caregiver strain, increasing caregiver understanding and empathy towards their child/adolescent's mental health challenge and increasing caregiver satisfaction with Pathstone services to the data obtained at baseline in Phase 1.

## Faculty of Social Sciences

- Delivery of mental health services for Ontario youth using Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) in virtual reality
  - Pathstone Mental Health, in partnership with Brock University and XpertVR, is offering CBT using a virtual reality model of delivery to children and young people with anxiety. Unlike typical modes of distance delivery, virtual reality facilitates the important social connection between therapists and clients. While virtual reality has been used to deliver CBT, it has never been used on children, young people or in Ontario
- Investigating individual differences in children's thinking in daily life using a parent questionnaire
  - Supported by Caitlin Mahy, Associate Professor, Psychology.
  - Examining the future-oriented cognitive abilities of young children with autism spectrum disorder and attentional deficit hyperactivity disorder compared to typically developing children. Five key future thinking domains will be examined (prospective memory, delay of gratification, planning, episodic foresight, and saving behaviour) to see if children with autism

spectrum disorder or attentional difficulties differ from typically developing children.

## **Service**

Pathstone Mental Health and Brock University supported each other through service-led initiatives to increase mental health support and research for children. This included:

- Brock University supported Pathstone Mental Health's Project Plaid by amplifying the campaign on Brock's social media platforms.
- Ayda Tekok-Kilic, Associate Professor, Child and Youth Studies, spoke to approximately 35 participants at the Pathstone Research and Training Institute where she discussed the role of experience in brain development during early years.
- The Child and Youth Studies (CHYS)-Pathstone Child and Youth Mental Health and Wellness Committee continued to meet in 2021. Members include:
  - Ayda Tekok-Kilic, Associate Professor, Child and Youth Studies
  - Tricia Vause, Associate Professor, Child and Youth Studies
  - Erin Panda, Assistant Professor, Child and Youth Studies
  - Bill Helmeczi, Director of Mental Health Services, Pathstone Mental Health

## **Student Experiential Learning**

Student experiential learning provides unique opportunities for students at the university to gain real world experience as part of their studies. In 2021, the partnership between Brock University and Pathstone Mental Health led to meaningful experiential opportunities for students including:

- Students acting as research assistants on projects providing them with direct research experience.
- Two students completed 600-hour co-op placements where they worked collaboratively on three research projects, two of which are based on adverse childhood experiences and one that is an exit survey regarding services provided at Pathstone Mental Health.
- 28 students volunteered their time to support Rotary House and Supervised Parenting Time programs.

## **Next Steps**

Brock University and Pathstone Mental Health collaborated on significant research and student experience opportunities in 2021 and advanced their collective goals of providing important student educational experiences and co-creating meaningful research that positively impacts children who are suffering from mental health challenges and disorders in Niagara and beyond.

In 2022, Pathstone Mental Health and Brock University will look to build on previously successful collaborations and explore new opportunities for the co-creation of research and ways to engage students in experiential learning. Together, Brock and Pathstone will continue

to mobilize knowledge gained through research and provide students with real world opportunities to apply their in-class learning. Both Brock and Pathstone are committed to improving mental health outcomes for youth and children in Niagara and will look to deepen their partnership to continue to address this important and mutually shared goal.