

Unique Needs, Unique Connections: System Navigation during a Pandemic

TORONTO, ON – On Wednesday, MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam met online with representatives from Family Service Toronto (FST) for the virtual launch of FST’s innovative project to provide individualized service navigation to people with multi-layered, complex needs and who are struggling to find help. Last summer, FST received a \$88,600 Resilient Communities Fund grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) to help it with the costs involved with delivering on this initiative.

“Now more than ever, vulnerable people in Toronto Centre are experiencing different crises concurrently,” said Kristyn Wong-Tam, MPP for Toronto Centre. “It is hard to take care of your mental health when you don’t have a safe place to live, don’t know when you can get help for problematic substance use, or don’t know how you will afford your next meal, let alone all of those at once and more. It brings me hope that Family Service Toronto is working hard to serve the whole person and that the Ontario Trillium Foundation is supporting them in this work.”

The Resilient Communities Fund grant program was created by OTF to help non-profit groups rebuild and recover from the impacts of COVID-19. The year-long grant has helped with the costs of hiring a Service Navigator to support clients’ access to programs for food security, income supports, housing and online mental health resources. During the pandemic, FST has observed many people report feeling isolated and in distress due to their need to access resources but not knowing what is available.

Through the project, individuals have been connected to a service navigator who listens to their needs, situation and who works collaboratively with the service user to locate accessible, hyper local, culturally relevant services. The service navigator also provides follow-up support to determine if the person was connected to the appropriate program or service.

“This support of a service navigator has helped FST extend our mental health counselling supports to focus on the basic needs of service users by connecting them to a range of programs and services, such as economic and food security, housing resources, disability resources and supports, substance use supports, employment and other types of resources,” said Chris Brillinger, Executive Director, Family Service Toronto.

For more than 100 years, FST has worked to support families and individuals to overcome adversity and to thrive. Today, FST is one of the Toronto’s largest social service agencies assisting more than 80,000 citizens annually. Family Service Toronto works with individuals, families and communities destabilized by precarious mental health and/or socioeconomic circumstances, to achieve greater resilience, stability and equity.

FST achieves this through its understanding of poverty and the harmful effects of marginalization, discrimination and oppression. It directs its energies to support individuals and families in core service areas – community counselling and mental health, gender-based violence and developmental disabilities. At the same time, FST works to influence policy, build knowledge, strengthen communities and advocate for system change. It envisions a city in which people are resilient and thriving in more just and supportive communities.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), an agency of the Government of Ontario, and one of Canada’s leading granting foundations celebrates 40 years of grantmaking in Ontario and making a lasting impact in communities. Last year, OTF invested nearly \$209M into 2,042 community projects and partnerships, which included funding for the Government of Ontario’s Community Building Fund. Visit otf.ca to learn more.

FST Media contact:

Brian Porter, Director, Technology, Communications & Facilities

E: brianpo@familyservicetoronto.org T: 416-595-9230 x225 M: 416-464-0761