

Filling Gaps in Service for Children and Youth with Complex Needs

Step-Up / Step-Down

Children and youth with complex mental health needs are increasingly falling through the cracks of the existing care system. Current programs often lack the flexibility and intensity required to meet these needs, leading to frequent emergency department visits and hospital admissions. While hospitals can provide immediate stabilization, there is often no clear pathway to sustained care once a young person is discharged.

To help address this gap, Capitalize for Kids partnered with Youthdale to co-design, implement, and evaluate a Step-up / Step-down program. This short-term, intensive DBT-based program provides a structured transition between hospital and community-based care. The goal is to reduce hospital readmissions by preparing young people for longer-term treatment, while also offering an immediate and effective intervention during a critical window of need.

This program not only supports improved outcomes for youth, but also contributes to broader sector innovation. By developing this service pathway, Capitalize for Kids is helping to strengthen the continuum of care and build much-needed capacity in intensive mental health programming. It also marks an important step in expanding Capitalize for Kids' expertise in designing impactful, scalable solutions for complex mental health challenges.



The Problem

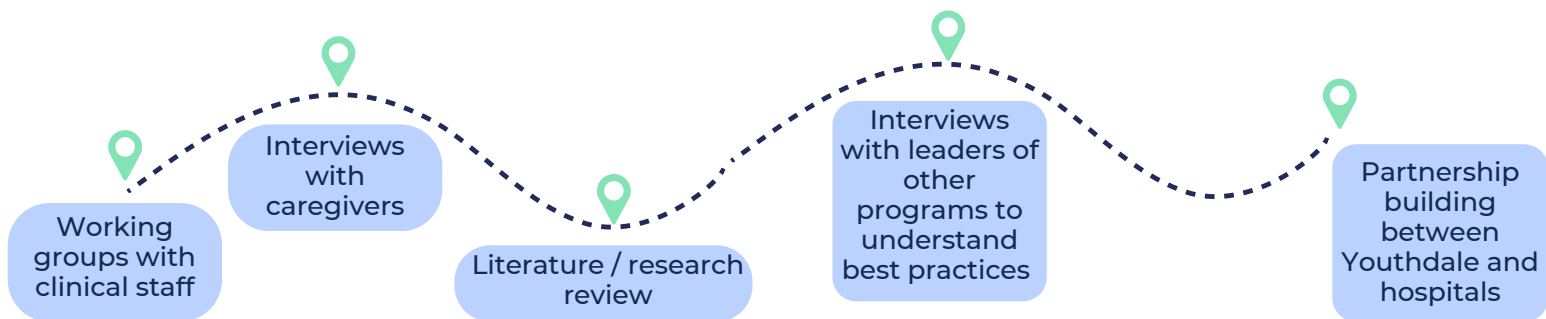
For children and youth with complex mental health needs, timely and appropriate care is critical—but existing services often fall short. Without flexible, intensive programs to bridge the gap between hospital and community care, many young people cycle through emergency departments without access to long-term solutions. This gap leaves youth without the support they need to recover and thrive, and places increasing strain on hospital systems.



The Solution

We partnered with clinical staff and program leaders at Youthdale to co-design and implement a Step-up / Step-down program that offers short-term, intensive DBT for youth transitioning out of hospital care. This innovative model provides a structured pathway between hospital and community services, helping to stabilize young people and prepare them for long-term treatment. In parallel, we supported the development of tools and processes to evaluate program outcomes and build internal capacity for ongoing service delivery and improvement.

Our Approach



Impact & Outcomes

Through implementing an innovative care model, we've expanded access and improved outcomes for youth with complex mental health needs by:



Increasing Capacity:

Added capacity for young people with complex mental health needs: 10 new beds added through an 8-week intensive DBT program.



Providing a Positive Clinical Impact:

Early participants showed significant reductions in risk levels, depression, and anxiety symptoms.



Driving a System-Level Impact:

Designed to reduce reliance on hospitals, lowering service costs and supporting better long-term outcomes.

Beneficiary Served:



Youthdale is a leading Toronto-based non-profit and charitable community agency dedicated to serving children, youth, young adults and families struggling with complex mental health needs. Youthdale serves children, youth, emerging adults and families from diverse backgrounds and communities across Ontario, with most of clients coming from the Greater Toronto Area.



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