Council Direction

Not Applicable.

Information:

This report describes the process and the findings of the recent Situational Assessment completed for Child and Adolescent Services by the Applied Research and Evaluation section of the Planning and Business Improvement Division of Public Health Services.

Child and Adolescent Services (C&A), Public Health Services is an outpatient children's mental health program that is 100% funded by The Ministry of Children and Youth Services, The Youth Justice Sector, and The Ministry of the Attorney General. C&A is mandated to deliver high quality, evidenced based clinical services to children aged 2-18 years of age. Many of the clients seen at C&A are vulnerable children or youth dealing with serious emotional and/or behavioural problems. These issues include parent child conflict, aggression, issues related to bullying, anxiety disorders, conduct disorders and serious emotional and behavioural concerns such as depression and suicidal thinking or gestures. C&A also works with fire setters, adolescent sexual offenders, and youth referred by the Provincial Court under the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

In the fiscal year 2009/2010, 608 clients were admitted, which is a decrease from the 675 clients admitted in 2007/2008. Reductions of 1.0 FTE occurred in 2008/2009 (Child and Adolescent Services Budget 2008-2009 – BOH08026a), and a further reduction of
1.0 FTE occurred in 2009/10. (Child and Adolescent Services Budget 2009/10 BOH08026(b)). During the time staffing reductions were occurring, C&A experienced increases in wait times from an average of three months to five months. C&A also experienced a decrease in the number of clients referred (675 in 2007/2008, 657 in 2008/09 and 608 in 2009/2010). There may be a tendency for community agencies to reduce their referrals to the service as wait lists increase.

Due to the service delivery impacts of the staffing reductions experienced by C&A a Situational Assessment was conducted by the Planning and Business Improvement Division of Public Health Services. The goals of the Situational Assessment were to examine C&A services with a focus on community needs, perceived benefits of services, reported challenges, gaps and suggestions for improvement. Due to ongoing financial constraints, decisions need to be made regarding how to allocate resources to meet community needs.

**Situational Assessment**

There were three key questions identified that would assist C&A in future planning and decision making:

1. What are the core services for C&A to retain?
2. What are the recommended changes to current C&A services?
3. What are the services offered by similar children’s mental health treatment programs in other communities?

**Methodology**

The Situational Assessment included four main components:

1. **Literature Review:** Both published and unpublished literature was searched to retrieve relevant resources that could be applied to the Situational Assessment.

2. **Client surveys:** Feedback from current C&A clients was gathered. This feedback provided important information from those receiving services to comment on the extent to which their needs are being met and how services could be improved.

3. **Key informant interviews:** Interviews were conducted with both C&A staff and community partners. Both sets of participants were asked to respond to the same set of questions. Questions focused on both C&A services specifically, and on children and youth mental health in Hamilton more generally.

4. **Administrative Data:** Administrative data provided quantitative information regarding the services that C&A provided within a 12 month timeframe and characteristics of the clients served.
Summary of Key Findings:

- Clients reported being satisfied with the services they receive. Areas of concern noted by clients included the location of the service, access to services and the lengthy wait lists.

- Community stakeholders reported satisfaction with the services and specifically commented on the knowledge, dedication and flexibility of staff and the ability of C&A to address a wide range of treatment needs of their clients. Suggestions for improvement included increased communication and collaboration between C&A and the community and also examining issues related to accessibility (e.g. wait lists, hours of service, location of services).

- Staff identified strengths in the staff and working environment as well as the ability of C&A to meet the treatment needs of clients by offering a high quality of service. Staff also made suggestions for things they felt could improve their work environment. (enhancing the clinical supervision model; policies to support work)

Situational Assessment Recommendations:

1. What are the recommended changes to current C&A services?

   a) C&A to clearly define the target population and develop a clear detailed description of each program and service. Explore various strategies to disseminate this information to children’s services system members and potential clients. This recommendation will meet the needs expressed by the community for more detailed information regarding the programs and services of C&A.

   b) Communicate policies and communication practices to community partners so that they have an understanding and realistic expectations as to what information C&A will be communicating at specific points in treatment. Feedback from community partners indicated that they would like more information about the clinical work C&A provides in order to track progress of the clients they refer. Given that there may be consent and privacy issues, the community has requested C&A develop a policy that provides guidelines related to when information can be shared and when there are restrictions.

   c) Explore with community stakeholders opportunities to increase accessibility to the services of C&A. Feedback from the community suggested that accessibility for clients might be increased if C&A considered increasing hours of service to include more evening appointments and consider providing services in multiple locations in the community.
d) Facilitate a dialogue with children’s services system members with the goal of examining ways to improve access to child psychiatry in Hamilton. Community stakeholders identified the lack of child psychiatry as a systems wide concern and requested that C&A engage in a dialogue within the children’s service system to examine ways to improve access.

e) Explore further ways to shorten wait lists for service and establish an evidence based priority setting mechanism. Community partners expressed concern about waiting lists for all children’s services including C&A. They acknowledge that without increased financial support this is unlikely to change however they recommended C&A ensure that referred clients are given priority ratings using an evidenced based model.

2. What are the services offered by similar C&A organizations?

a) C&A should examine whether or not there is any duplication of its services within the children’s services system. The Community Child Abuse Council and McMaster Children’s Hospital are two key organizations to communicate with in this regard. Given the lack of resources within the children’s mental health system as a whole, community partners recommended C&A ensure there is no duplication of services by engaging in a discussion with agencies that may provide similar services.

b) Share with children’s services system members’ suggestions from key informants regarding unique services provided by other communities. Community partners identified gaps in services within the City of Hamilton and gave examples of services provided in other geographic locations that they felt would be helpful for our City. The recommendation is that C&A share these suggestions with all members of the Hamilton children’s services system.

3. What are the key issues related to staff?

Ensure continuation of an effective and positive work environment by addressing issues identified by staff:

a) Develop written policies that support open communication between C&A and other children’s mental health organizations, while respecting issues and legislation around privacy and confidentiality. This recommendation supports the staff and community feedback that clear guidelines be developed related to privacy and confidentiality, in order to support more open communication between organizations in regard to the sharing of client information.
b) Explore opportunities for C&A staff to increase collaboration with other PHS programs and services in order to reduce the isolation they articulated. Staff are interested in finding ways to contribute more to other programs within PHS.

c) Address concerns regarding the lack of resources and ensure current staff are using their skills in the most effective means possible. Given the concerns regarding financial constraints, staff are interested in conducting an internal examination to ensure C&A is making the most efficient use of the resources that we do have.

d) Continue to support and make staff learning and development key priorities at C&A. Feedback from staff indicated that they feel there is a strong and valued emphasis on learning and staff development at C&A and they wish to see this continue to be a priority.

e) Continue to use staff expertise to exchange knowledge and provide training opportunities to others in the community. Staff value the current training and exchange of knowledge C&A provides to the community and expressed a desire to see this continue.

f) Explore with staff their clinical supervision needs and requirements. Staff feedback indicated that they would like to enhance opportunities for clinical supervision. This might take the form of an increased emphasis on supervision by the current Manager or it may take the form of enhanced peer supervision models.

4. What are the core services for C&A to retain?

This question has not been answered to the extent that a recommendation can be made.

The next recommended step will be to develop a work plan and develop strategies to address this question.

Next Steps:

1. Share the results of the Situational Assessment with staff and MCYS area office manager.

2. Provide community key informants and partners with feedback.
3. Develop a work plan along with strategies that address the recommendations from the Situational Assessment. The work plan will include outcome measures and a performance measurement/monitoring process.

4. As part of the work plan, explore the feasibility of hosting a Community Providers Forum in order to dialogue further regarding the priority services required of C&A. This will provide further information on core services for C&A to retain.