

Creating an Integrated Services System



Members of Jessica's Care Team, Resource Teacher Linda Abernethy (left), Occupational Therapist Laurie Rife (centre) and Physiotherapist Barb Wenzel (right), worked together at her nursery school to integrate therapy activities into Jessica's day-to-day life and prepare her for entering Grade 1.

Theresa and Darrell Sanders' goals for their daughter Jessica might seem like nothing out of the ordinary. They want to see Jessica walk, learn to speak clearly, dress and help care for herself. However, these are challenging goals for the six-year-old who has developmental delays and multiple physical disabilities as a result of seizures that started at the age of two. This sunny little girl needs a range of therapies and rehabilitation supports to help her keep up with her twin brother Alex and her friends at school.

"It's been a full time job to find services, schedule appointments and keep all the therapists up to speed," says Theresa. "Travelling, sometimes for hours, to appointments with specialists and therapy sessions is stressful and exhausting."

Parents of children with multiple disabilities like Theresa and Darrell, struggle to navigate fragmented healthcare, education and community service systems to obtain the range of rehabilitation services and supports needed for their children to develop and participate fully in daily living, school and play. Battling waitlists, travelling long distances, briefing numerous professionals on their child's history and coordinating services from multiple agencies are all daunting day-to-day challenges.

As a strategic and innovative response to the need to provide more integrated, coordinated services closer to home, parents and service providers in Simcoe and York advocated the provincial government to form the Children's Treatment Network.

The Network's goal is to create a new service delivery model that links existing service providers across sectors so they can take a team approach to each child's care. Through one point of contact, the Network and its partners will provide a single plan of care and coordinate services from many agencies for children and youth from birth to age 19 who have special physical, developmental and communication needs.

Network partners include over 50 healthcare, education, recreation, social services and community organizations including school

boards, hospitals and rehabilitation providers in Simcoe and York. Almost half of these partners receive enhanced resources to provide a range of rehab services on behalf of the Network. The Network is funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and works in close collaboration with agencies and organizations funded by the Ministries of Education and Health and Long Term Care/LHINs (Local Health Integration Networks).

Since the Network was officially launched in 2006, Network partners have worked together to break down silos to expand and add critically needed services. Local Team Sites, co-located with Network partners, provide kids with access to a range of enhanced and integrated services, equipment and professionals closer to home.

Network partners collaborated to create the new 'single plan of care' tools and processes that provide children and families with coordinated and integrated care. These include a shared electronic record and a privacy policy that allow professionals from multiple organizations to develop integrated care plans, share clinical notes and monitor each child's progress - in real time. In addition, families and professionals receive training and education that provide them with more capacity to work interprofessionally, as equal partners of a child and family team focused on providing best outcomes for each child.

The path to large-scale systems change is not smooth. But keeping everyone firmly focused on shared goals, while collaborating together to resolve issues, has been key to driving progress and innovation.

Collaborative leadership will continue to fuel the evolution of this new care model as Network partners in education, healthcare and community services sectors integrate the new single plan of processes into their systems. Currently, pilot projects are underway to consolidate, refine and meld these new processes within the school system.

"We are strongly committed to our partnership with Children's Treatment Network because we recognize that only through collaboration can we have seamless, consistent supports that meet the needs of each and every student," says Bill Hogarth, Director of Education for the York Region District School Board. "Only by working together can we turn barriers to learning into a ramp for learning success."

There are over 4,500 children with multiple disabilities in Simcoe and York. Hundreds of professionals who serve these kids passionately believe this new integrated, team approach will provide overwhelmed families with better support; significantly improve outcomes for children, and make more efficient use of resources and facilities.

Theresa Sanders says she knows first-hand what kind of difference the Network approach is already making. *"Having a team that's working together and focused on Jessica is helping us meet goals faster,"* explains Theresa. *"Her therapists talk to each other on a regular basis and help each other find ways to help Jessica progress, both at home and in school. Jessica can stand now and is working towards walking. She's feeding herself and is gaining new words every day. As parents, we know Jessica's progress is a direct result of teamwork and a single plan of care. We feel truly blessed that this new Network system is helping everyone work together to help our daughter."*

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