



# A MINDFUL WAY TO SUPPORT YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

The Canadian Mental Health Association is reporting that the risk of developing mental health problems among youth in Ontario has increased by 50% since the onset of the pandemic. Mental wellbeing supports that are innovative, scalable, and replicable are more important than ever if we want to address the psychological impact of the pandemic on young people in Ontario. Accordingly, Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care has been providing an online and tailored mindfulness program to healthcare workers and youth in the North-Simcoe region. Leveraging our current initiative, **Waypoint is now expanding the program to other youth-serving agencies across Ontario, emphasizing youth engagement and equity.** Waypoint is partnering with organizations across the province, providing mentorship, implementation support, program evaluation, and sustainability plans to help integrate the program into existing service delivery models. We aim to assist in adapting the program model suitable to the partner organizations' cultural, secular beliefs, and specific needs. With partnerships established, we anticipate the scale-up initiative to take place in the spring of 2022.

## CURRENT PROJECTS AND FINDINGS

Led by Dr. Kim, a team from the Waypoint Research Institute is currently evaluating an online mindfulness program to support frontline healthcare workers and youth in the Simcoe-Muskoka region, two populations at heightened risk during the pandemic. Both projects are funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, in partnership with Georgian College and Mindfulness without Borders. These studies have informed program modeling to meet the specific needs of youth during and after the pandemic. **This research has found that online mindfulness programs build resiliency and empathy while buffering burnout among frontline healthcare workers, an outcome we expect to see in youth as well.** Testimonials from participants suggest how valued and timely the mindfulness program is for improving mental wellbeing.

*"This has been the hardest year of my life. Thank you for giving me a life-raft. I feel like I may actually be able to get through this." – CR, Mindfulness Program Participant*

## HELPING YOUTH RIGHT NOW, WHEN THEY NEED IT MOST

The psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic highlight why **we need to find solutions and have a plan to implement recovery measures that focus on building long-term social-emotional resilience.** The 12-week, online Mindfulness Ambassador Program takes into account the social and emotional learning (SEL) developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as a conceptual framework. After the 12-week Mindfulness Ambassador Program, **we expect to see youth improve in the following areas: 1) social engagement and social connectedness; 2) resilience; 3) empathy; and 4) mindful attention awareness.** A research team from the Waypoint Research Institute will undertake the program evaluation. The team also includes knowledge translation experts to communicate and share the findings with stakeholders and support program implementation.

*"Now more than ever, young people and their families need timely support for early intervention and prevention to give hope for the brightest possible future,"*

*- Carol Lambie, Waypoint President and CEO*

## COLLABORATE WITH US

Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care and the Waypoint Research Institute are seeking innovative partners who are passionate about changing the future of youth mental health in Canada. Waypoint and the program partners would like to formally invite you to become an official collaborator/partner in the effort to scale up this initiative to help Canadian youth. There are a number of ways to collaborate with us on this project; we hope you will join us in the capacity most suited to your organization.



### **No. 01 – Expansion and Implementation**

With a high response rate and demand for an evidence-based youth mindfulness program in other regions, the Youth Mindfulness Program is expanding. Please contact us to discuss opportunities to collaborate, learn from one another, and bring this programming to your organization or region. Special focus will be placed on tailoring the program to meet the needs of diverse and underrepresented youth populations.



### **No. 02 – Research and Evaluation**

We are seeking experienced researchers in program expansion and evaluation as we examine program efficacy on building social-emotional capacity. Researchers specializing in equity in healthcare or program delivery would be a strong asset to the program.



### **No. 03 – Funding**

We are fortunate to have a strong group of base funders for this program. We will continue to seek funds to support the expansion and future phases of the program. Your support as an official partner for funding requests or as a funder will strengthen this program and ensure that we can continue to support youth right now, when they need our help most.

*"Until COVID, I had never experienced a mental health challenge. Living through the pandemic the stress has been overwhelming. This program did not change my situation but it changed how I am dealing with my stress. It has made all the difference. Thank you,"*

*- KS, Mindfulness Program Participant*

**We hope you will join us. For more information, contact:**

#### **Program Evaluation and Design:**

Dr. Soyeon Kim, [skim@waypointcentre.ca](mailto:skim@waypointcentre.ca)

#### **Fundraising and Communications:**

Holly Archer, [harcher@waypointcentre.ca](mailto:harcher@waypointcentre.ca)

#### **Mindfulness Program Facilitation:**

Nicole Mace, [nmace@waypointcentre.ca](mailto:nmace@waypointcentre.ca)