

# Implementing Foundry: Regional & Virtual Expansion to Improve Youth Access to Integrated Services

**Skye Pamela Barbic, PhD, OT Reg(BC)**

*University of British Columbia, Vancouver Canada*

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Primary Author and Speaker: Skye Pamela Barbic, [skye.barbic@ubc.ca](mailto:skye.barbic@ubc.ca)

**PURPOSE:** Youth in North America across the world have high rates of mental health and substance use concerns compared to youth in similar high-income countries. In British Columbia, Canada, an integrated youth services organization called Foundry provides services through a Primary Youth Health Care Model. After the pilot phase involving 6 centres, Foundry ([foundrybc.ca](http://foundrybc.ca)) expanded to 11 physical centres (soon to be 23) and launched a virtual service. The study purpose was to evaluate 1) the demographics of Foundry clients, 2) the outcomes of service utilization, 3) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 4) the role of occupational therapy in expansion of the model.

**METHOD:** Data were analyzed using R for all youth clients accessing both in-person (April 27th, 2018-March 31st, 2021) and virtual services (May 1st, 2020-March 31st, 2021). Cohorts containing all clients from before (April 27th, 2018-March 16th, 2020) and during (March 17th, 2020-March 31st, 2021) the COVID-19 pandemic were also examined.

**RESULTS:** 23,749 unique youth received 110,145 services at Foundry during the three year period. For all services, the mean client age was 19.54 years (SD = 3.45) and clients most commonly identified as female (62%). Over 60% of youth scored 'high' or 'very high' for distress and 29% had a self-rated mental health of 'poor,' with similar percentages seen for all services and virtual services. These ratings stayed consistent before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Youth also reported low levels of occupational engagement, with more than 40% reporting doing less than 2-5 hours of meaningful activity each week. Of note, 13% of all youth reported not being in school, work, or training. These numbers were consistent with pre-pandemic values.

**CONCLUSION:** Overall, Foundry has reached the target age group of 12-24 years, with a 65% increase in number of clients during the study period compared to the pilot stage. The high levels of distress and self-rated mental health, and the lack of change during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggest there is a significant need for integrated youth services in British Columbia and justifies continued expansion and focus on the developmentally-appropriate needs of youth (e.g., work/study, social). As the Foundry model expands across BC and Canada, a critical role is to focus on promoting occupational engagement of youth, and to support the co-design of work/study programs to promote participation, health, and wellness of diverse youth throughout the province.

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