

youth mental health and the new school year

by
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The start of the school year can be challenging for anyone, particularly after the last couple of years we've had with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. For students, returning to school after the summer holidays can be filled with many different emotions, from excitement and readiness to fear and dread.

We understand that educators are often the first to see mental health and wellness challenges emerge in youth, and that they can feel unsure of how they can help. As we prepare for another school year, Foundry wants to offer insights, support, and resources for educators of all levels across the school system.

Through Foundry centres across BC and the Foundry BC app, youth ages 12-24 can access free mental health and wellness resources, services, and supports including counselling, peer support, groups, substance use services, physical and sexual healthcare, employment services, and Indigenous wellness services.

How can service providers help?

Educators may be experiencing fear these days, knowing that the presentation of mental health challenges is only increasing. Our teams across Foundry want schools to know that supporting youth isn't all on your shoulders. Instead, we have come up with a list of ways that you can encourage youth to reach out for support with Foundry.

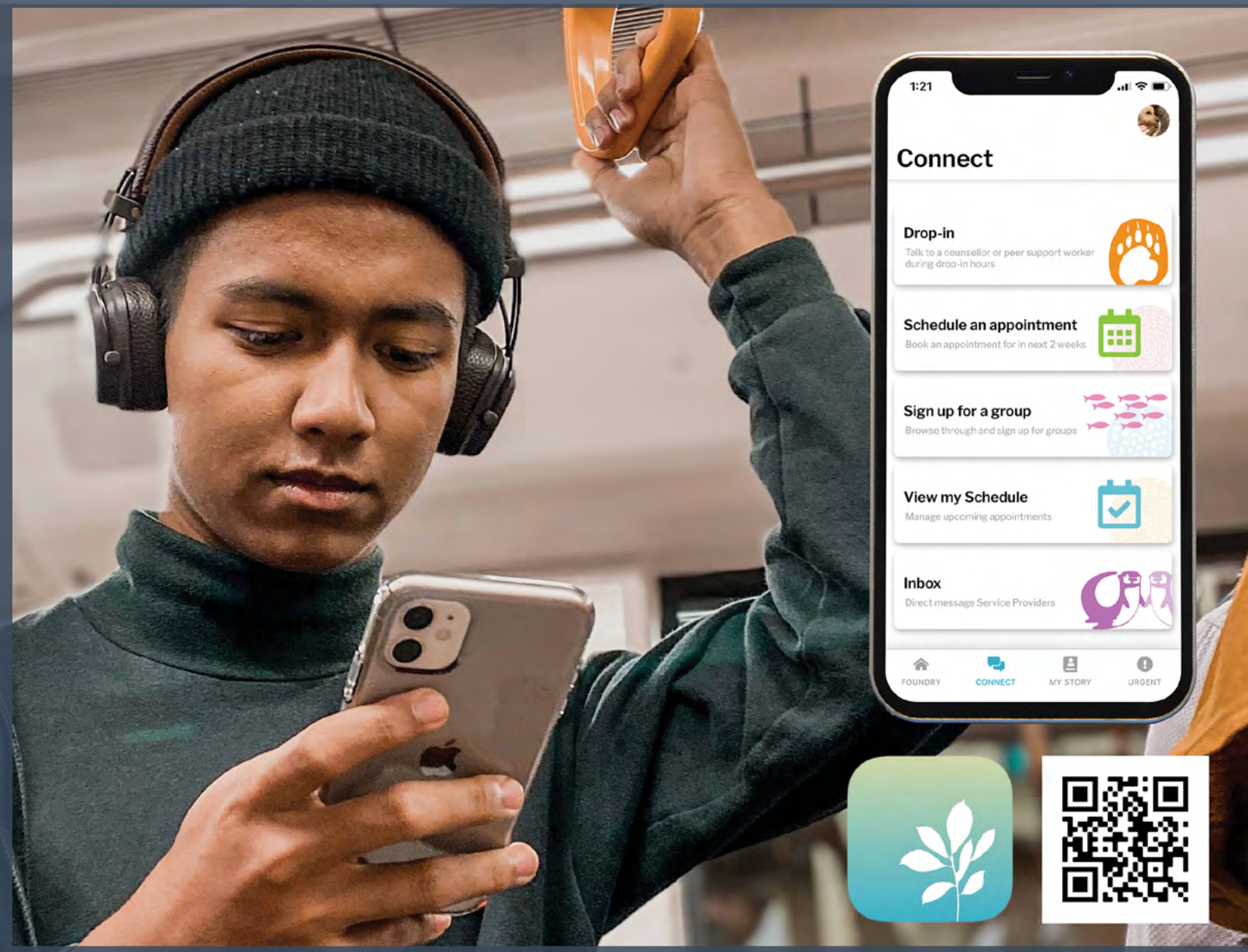
- Service providers can support youth by sharing information and resources about our virtual services, or by attending one of our Q & A sessions to learn more about Foundry Virtual services.
- While our services do not require a referral, taking the first step can often be the hardest part. Consider sending youth information about our virtual services or supporting them with booking their first appointment on the Foundry BC app.

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How can service providers be involved?

- Foundry Virtual BC aims to work collaboratively alongside other service providers across the province in supporting young people to access the most appropriate services.
- Service providers can share information that may help Foundry Virtual BC providers while supporting a young person. Email us at online@foundrybc.ca to share information or discuss options to work collaboratively in supporting the youth you're working with.



New ways to provide support

As Foundry continues to expand and new centres across the province are opening, we have noticed increased usage of the Foundry BC app. Over the past year, Foundry Virtual BC provided services to 2,500 unique youth in communities across the province. We've spoken with youth in their bedroom, at the park, on their school grounds, in their school bathroom, and even out on hikes. The Foundry BC app allows youth to seek free and confidential support whenever they need it, and wherever they are at.

“Accessing the Foundry BC app has given me a place to seek help and comfort with a sense of anonymity. From listening to my ramblings to offering advice, I've learned to reflect and understand my day-to-day emotions better. I think that it's important to normalize speaking out about mental health, regardless of who you are so that we can lessen the negative stigma towards it. Organizations and services like Foundry are contributing to creating a safer space for individuals to open up, find consolation, and heal.”

- Jane, Foundry Virtual BC Client

Talking to someone who ‘gets it’: Peer Support

Sometimes talking to someone who understands you and has walked a similar journey can be just what a youth is looking for. Peer support offers youth the opportunity to speak with another individual who has lived experiences struggling with mental health/wellness or substance use challenges. Through goal setting, validation, empathy, and sharing tools, peer supporters work alongside youth in a low-barrier way, which is often the first step someone takes to move forward in their health and wellness journey.

One of Foundry Virtual BC's Peer Supporters shared that she is noticing more youth feeling distress about their physical appearance and social lives. *“The spring/summer season typically is a time where I see heightened body image distress in youth, but the past year as a whole I've seen a significant increase in youth seeking out disordered eating and eating disorder behaviors to cope with feelings such as hopelessness, uncertainty, stress, and anxiety.”*

She has also noticed the strain that the warmer weather has on youth who self-harm. Youth with visible scars or cuts on their body feel the need to hide and cover up, leading to increased isolation, and leading to further self-harm behaviours.

Each day the Peer Support team speaks with youth of all backgrounds and diverse upbringings, often those who have never sought support for their struggles in life. *“It's heartbreaking seeing how alone these youth feel. But it's more rewarding knowing that our team is helping each one of them feel a little bit less alone and supporting them to start their journey to wellness.”*

Increasing stressors and pressures

“Many youth come in feeling overwhelmed by multiple responsibilities and may or may not have a lot of family support, which leads to a large sense of uncertainty and/or inexperience in the workforce.”

With pressures to perform, succeed, and attend post-secondary education, many youth admit to using substances and isolating themselves at home as ways of coping. Seeing the need to support youth further, Foundry launched a new supportive employment and education program in late 2021, [Foundry Works](#), which is a **free** supportive employment and education program for youth between the ages of 15-24 who are interested in working, going to school, or completing a training program.

Foundry Works helps youth build the skills and experiences they need to achieve their goals. One of Foundry Virtual's employment specialists notes that more and more youth are coming to her feeling overwhelmed with the stressors and pressures of what often is referred to as 'adulthood', and feel lost in determining what their next step might be. *"There is also a lot of loneliness and isolation, so our early work starts with taking small steps to support youth with social integration (e.g. joining a MeetUp group or volunteering) and then moving toward readiness to start work or further schooling."*



How are we helping?

Foundry supports youth by offering wrap-around care through a collaborative team of service providers. We often see youth accessing youth peer support as their first step, and subsequently being connected to counselling and primary care as they feel more comfortable and ready. Foundry aims to support youth from all walks of life, whether they are questioning their gender/identity, dealing with tough topics, or looking for inclusive spaces, whether virtually or in centres.

One of Foundry Virtual's Nurse Practitioners highlights the central focus of mental health across the board in all primary care appointments. Regardless of the reason youth are accessing physical and sexual healthcare, there seems to always be an underlying mental health concern.

"The increase in presentations of anxiety and depression are unlike anything we've seen before. Coupled with this, we are seeing a lot more youth struggling with disordered eating/eating disorders, and substance use. So, my goal as a Nurse Practitioner is really to listen to these youth, validate their concerns without judgement, and find ways to support them both mentally and physically before things get to a point of crisis."



To learn more call 1-833-308-6379, email online@foundrybc.ca or visit www.foundrybc.ca/virtual

