



COMMUNITY
SERVICES

see what's possible...

U-Link & Next Step Specialized Youth Residential Services Annual Program Report 2021-2022

About us

PLEA has a long history of providing residential care services to youth between the ages of 12 to 19 within a specialized family care giver model with wrap around services, based in the community. The success of these services is due to our strong commitment to providing care that is based on the unique strengths, abilities, needs, and circumstances of each youth that is placed with us. Strengths-based approaches have power in reshaping the lives of vulnerable people. They highlight the factors that create and support human health rather than those that cause distress. Strengths-based approaches value the capacity, skills, knowledge, connections and potential in individuals and communities and deploy these to foster development and empowerment.

Our U-Link and Next Step program provide family care placements, supported by our PLEA staff teams for youth who have experienced limited success in other residential programs and face significant challenges in their lives. Although the reasons for youth requiring placements vary widely, every youth is provided with a safe, nurturing, and healthy family environment, with the opportunity to access additional support services, many available in-house.

U-Link: We have been providing this service since 2015. In September 2019, we increased our capacity from eight to ten beds for youth and continue to remain at 10 beds with 5 caregivers. Placements may be made on a planned or emergency basis and are 6-12 months in duration although exceptions can be made for extensions when deemed necessary. We provide focussed individual support for each youth in the program. Stabilization and rapport building are essential to ensure that strength-based goals can be achieved through intensive wrap around support. Our homes are in Burnaby, Tri Cities and the Maple Ridge area. Our Services coordinators visit and support the care homes on a weekly basis and connect, in some cases, daily, to provide support and maintain connection. Our Youth Support workers provide intensive one to one to support and are excellent at making positive connections. U Link teams operate in a multi-faceted model that includes an outreach and home-based support and this model maximizes direct engagement with the youth we serve and provides ongoing support to our Family Caregivers.

Next Step: We have been providing this service since November 2017. This fiscal year Next Step operated from April 1, 2021, to September 30, 2021. This home located in Vancouver was a two-bed resource. Placements were made on a planned (not emergency) basis and are likely to be 6-12 months in duration. The Ministry of Children & Family Development worked with Vancouver Coastal Health to refer youth who could benefit from the program's support.

www.plea.ca

In collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Families Development (MCFD), as well as other service providers who are involved in supporting the program youth and our families, we ensure that our services are consistently youth-centred, strategy based, and inclusive. For both programs, we develop and implement comprehensive service plans with each young person that captures their strengths, ideas, and interests, and are sensitive to their culture and life experiences. Every youth has a safety plan that is a guide for caregivers to follow as well as strategy based to alleviate uncertainty in the event of an emergency. We work closely with the Family Caregivers we contract with, and value the significant time and energy they devote to supporting the day-to-day needs of the youth living with them.

Who we served...

U-Link

Profile	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
# of cases	23	18	22
# of youth ¹	21	18	21
% young women	35	39	41
% young men	56	56	55
% self-identified as transgender	9	6	5
% self-identified as Indigenous	13	22	41
Average age when cases were opened	15	15.5	15.6
Average # of days in program by discharged cases (N= number of discharged cases)	173 (N=13)	219 (N=8)	217 (N=12)

Next Step

Profile	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
# of cases	5	3	4
# of youth	5	3	4
% young women	60	100	100
% young men	20	0	0
% self-identified as transgender	20	0	0
% self-identified as Indigenous	60	67	75
Average age when cases were opened	14	17	17
Average # of days in program by discharged cases (N= number of discharged cases)	70 (N=5)	271 (N=2)	286 (N=2)

¹ # of cases can be greater than the # of youth because some youth receive multiple services or may be re-referred.

How we did...against last year's goals

U-Link:

1. Support a new caregiver to settle into the role and complete all required on-boarding and training.

This goal has been accomplished with supporting the new caregiver to our team as another caregiver transitioned to another program. She fulfilled a need within our program and has provided her wealth of knowledge of fifteen years with complex and high needs youth. She currently has two complex youth in her home that she supports and has reduced one youth's average hospital visits for suicidal ideation by half and the other one has increased her residential stay which in turn has reduced unsafe behaviour out in the community.

2. Facilitate learning and connections with other caregivers via networking events either in person or via virtual meetings on a quarterly basis.

This goal is ongoing within PLEA's programs. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we have continued our support by virtually connecting with our caregivers for events such as: the Caregiver Appreciation Day, Caregiver holiday party and Orange Shirt Day. As we see restrictions being lifted, we are excited to host events in the future, back in person. Training during this time focused on: San'yas indigenous cultural safety training, Mandt conflict resolution, Naloxone Administration Training, Living Works Suicide Prevention, Medication Assistance and Administration Training, Trauma Informed Practice Training and MCFD Privacy Training. There was some individual caregiver training when deemed appropriate on Sexual Exploitation Trafficking and Awareness, Overdose prevention as well as information and specific training on eating disorders called Image to Wellness.

Caregivers are engaging with our recruitment specialist to assist our agency in the current need of caregiving recruiting, including respite caregivers. We also continue to learn from our caregivers on quality improvement ideas related to the assessment process.

3. Identify and develop innovative work incentives for youths that are relevant to their future employment goals or provide opportunities for meaningful exploration of career paths.

We have assisted youth in their transition to adulthood through housing support and discussed budgeting and supported them to find quality work to meet their needs. We have assisted youth in exploring different post-secondary school opportunities and provided life skills development support in the areas of finding employment, understanding the interview process, creating a professional resume and the importance of volunteer or work experience in bolstering their resume. A local landscaper donated a truck full of planting soil for the creation of a vegetable and herb garden where the fruits of their labour were shared with the program. Sage was dried and bundled and given out to participants in the program for creating culturally appropriate smudging bundles. Examples of work experience provided include: the building and creation and upkeep of the garden mentioned above, garbage pickup in community, recycling and bottle depot, construction experience around the caregiver home and dog walking, grooming and care.

4. Increase team connections and understanding of individual strengths and values that influence our work.

Team connection was difficult early in the year as there was change within the supervision of the team. As we navigated the second year of the global pandemic with restrictions, it was difficult to retain consistency and connection. The new Program Manager began with the team in October 2021 and started building team rapport and support. The team met weekly (virtually) for team meetings for service coordination updates on youth, strategy support, passing on of agency information as well as team training. The team had an in-person team day in December which increased connections and relationships. Additionally, training was

provided on positive behavior support, time management and caregiver connection team training. The program was also spotlighted in a PLEA Management meeting which proudly celebrated the many successes of the program. Later in the year, the team worked on an agency initiative centered around the PLEA values, which resulted in a legacy time capsule project, which is displayed in the Surrey office and demonstrates the value of resilience.

Next Step:

1. ***Establish an appropriate model of care with MCFD and Vancouver Coastal Health that best meets the needs of young people in the Vancouver Region.***

Over the period of April- September 2021, there was a shift in the profile of youth being referred to Next Step. MCFD identified they were receiving referrals for youth with more complex needs around behavior (such as self-harm, suicidal ideation, aggressive behavior, eating disorders), instead of youth with addictions needs. This meant MCFD took the lead on screening referrals to the program and conversations would include Vancouver Coastal Health as needed. The caregivers were adaptable and able to support a different population than the one the program initially was supporting.

2. ***To identify emerging trends and training needs amongst the Next Step staff and facilitate team learning opportunities to build greater capacity to support specific needs of the youth in the program.***

One of the young people at Next Step experienced ongoing suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. As this was a daily occurrence, the staff and caregivers identified they wanted additional support in how to manage this behavior and the importance in providing consistent themes of messaging to the young person. The caregiver and Services Coordinator were able to meet with teams from BCCH to establish and implement safety planning. They were provided concrete strategies to implement with the youth when they were feeling suicidal.

3. ***Continue to develop the skill set of staff and family caregivers in relation to concurrent disorders, eating disorders and sexual exploitation.***

As one of the youth was pregnant during their time in Next Step, the team sought out resources to be able to provide information and appropriate pre-natal support and care as this was new to the team as well. Eating disorders continued to be another trend that continued from the previous year that staff identified as an area of ongoing learning and support that would be beneficial. The team sought out trainings with the Services Coordinator of the program completing a training called One Day Image to Illness - Eating Disorders. She was able to share this information with the caregivers to better support them in planning within the home. Lastly, many of the youth placed in Next Step were being sexual exploited or engaging in sex worker. Staff took a training on Human Trafficking which helped provide content to the work they were doing.

Selected accomplishments...

U-Link

1. Our U-Link team actively participated in diverse committees across PLEA. We have team members participating on the Culture and Diversity Committee, Joint Health and Safety Committee and Policy, Procedures and Practice committee. We also have a certified Mandt systems trainer on the team. These committees continue to contribute to the learning and development of each team member.
2. U-Link had 7 youth enrolled in school. All the youth that came to us, wished to reintegrate into educational programming. Most had been disconnected for multiple years.
3. One youth and their caregiver adopted a family to care for over the Christmas holidays and provided them with gifts and food. The youth facilitated helping this family and the caregiver wanted to teach the youth in her home about the importance of giving back.
4. Caregiver satisfaction has increased. Our Service Coordinators provided robust support to our caregivers. The caregivers express very positive views regarding their experience of caregiving with PLEA and provided high praise for the supports and guidance.
5. One of our team members completed their Bachelor of Social Work degree, while maintaining her role and working full time.
6. Our U-Link Services Coordinators successfully completed two targeted in-house training sessions on caregiver connection, time management strategies as well as an internal system support for our youth support workers for recording their interactions and sharing goals with the team.
7. The Program Manager provided training on positive behaviour support and behavioural strategies for the youth in the U-Link program.
8. Two youth successfully moved to independent living and were supported by the team with advocacy, planning, life skills support and training and support with post-secondary education options.

Next Step:

1. Next Step successfully supported a youth who was pregnant and transitioning to a new placement right before the birth. The program provided stabilization and allowed this young person to consistently receive the appropriate medical care and support to prepare for becoming a new mom. The Family Caregivers and Youth Support Workers helped her acquire the items she would need for the transition into the next stage of her life.
2. Although Next Step's contract ended, the Family Caregivers for that home were able to transition back to the U-Turn program and remained with PLEA as caregivers. As such, U-Turn acquired a two bed Vancouver home to support the needs of the youth in that service area.

Selected stories²...

Meet Mia

Mia completed her intake for the PLEA U-Link program in April 2020. At that time, the primary concerns as voiced by her care team related to significant sexual exploitation, partner and domestic violence, concurrent mental health symptoms, a prolific history of substance use, manifestation of an eating disorder, and challenging family relationships. For the first year of being in the U-Link program, Mia was AWOL at her boyfriend's home and had limited connection with her support team due to his controlling behaviours. Mia completed respite at another PLEA Caregiver home and found that she connected strongly with their family. Due to the compatibility, Mia was transitioned to her new PLEA Caregiver placement in January 2021. Since that time, she has completed an assessment at the Maples Treatment Center, begun to engage in EMDR therapy, enrolled in school and is now up to date on her educational programming with hopes of attending post-secondary to become an engineer and has worked hard on repairing the relationship with her family. Mia now attends Sunday night dinners at her mother's home and is working to be a positive role model for her younger siblings. As a result, the care team's concerns around substance use, mental health symptoms and safety in community have significantly decreased. Mia has expressed that this is the first time she has felt hopeful for her future, and she has attributed this to the supports received from the wrap around services offered in the U-Link program.

Meet Adam

Adam joined the U-Link program in November 2021. Previously to entering U-Link, Adam was moved four times in one month as he did not feel safe or comfortable in any of those homes. At intake, Adam did not say a word to any of his professionals except, "I don't want to be here". After some negotiation, Adam decided to stay for one night and went directly into his room. Adam did not engage with any of the PLEA professionals or the caregiver for the first couple of weeks and isolated himself in his room. Adam was provided with a set of rules to follow in the home, and PLEA started to implement daily engagements with youth support workers to provide him with predictability and the opportunity to engage with pro social and safe supports. These supports were able to slowly expand Adam's zone of safety and helped him learn the skills to trust in others. Adam now socializes and engages with his caregiver and youth support workers, goes out for bike rides and walks on his own around the neighborhood, and has met with his family on multiple occasions. Adam has worked hard to expand his zone of safety and now will ask to go out in community to engage in activities, which is an important milestone in his service planning. The hope is to continue to assist Adam with building his confidence, creating meaningful and long-term relationships with his family, support him with reintegration into school and developing the necessary life skills that will aide him when he transitions to a more long-term placement.

Meet Erika

Erika joined the Next Step care home in the fall of 2020. At the time of intake to the program, there were significant exploitation concerns as she was going out with older men in exchange for money and gifts. Erika was open with the team about actively participating in sex work and safety planning with her was a priority. Erika additionally struggled with concurrent mental health symptoms, an eating disorder, and her relationship with her family. She also described feeling polarized from her family due to her involvement in the LGBTQ community and her relationship with her girlfriend. Over the course of her engagement with the program, Erika was able to reintegrate into school, repair her relationship with her family, connect with a CYMH clinician, complete job readiness training via PLEA Onyx Works, work on her mental health and eating disorder symptoms, continue to connect with supports to circumvent her sexual exploitation concerns and ultimately transition into a semi-independent living suite in April 2021 with the confidence from her care team that she would be successful moving forward.

² Names have been changed to protect client privacy and confidentiality.

Biggest challenges...

1. As COVID-19 restrictions remained into our second year, they significantly impacted how both programs delivered service. In-person supports for participants were maintained while implementing safety protocols for staff, caregivers, and participants. Virtual service delivery was utilized more frequently as a creative alternative. Additional supports were put in place to ensure the wellbeing of staff and caregivers during this difficult time.
2. Finding housing and conducting effective transition planning for youth transitioning to adulthood was a significant challenge. Many landlords were resistant to signing intent to rent forms for young adults.
3. Most homes have secure and stable respite support on a regular basis, however, availability of daytime respite remained problematic as many respite caregivers have day jobs and are only available on evenings and weekends only.
4. The BC mandated vaccine card requirement, resulted in difficulty finding activities in the community with youth that were unvaccinated in the community and less healthy, drive through options for food choices.
5. As MCFD began receiving more complex clients, many with CYSN profiles, Next Step began receiving referrals that were not best suited for a family care home and required awake overnight respite support. This resulted in bed vacancies and the ultimate decision that funder needed a different kind of resource to meet the service needs of the youth in their care.

Our team...staffing³



³ # of individuals as opposed to FTEs as per March 31st, 2019

Our team...learning and relationships

Our team has been involved in the following learning activities:

- Caring About Food Safety
- MANDT De=Escalation
- Eating Disorder: From Image to Illness
- Medication Assistance Training
- Livingworks Suicide Prevention
- Naloxone Administration
- Addictions and Substance Use
- MCFD Privacy and Information Sharing
- Respectful workplace Module
- Cyber Security
- Preventing Communicable Diseases
- Positive Behavior Support
- Caregiver Connections
- Time Management

Next year's goals...

U-Link:

1. To identify unique training needs of team members and caregivers and develop tailored training plans to address identified needs of the more complex referrals that we are receiving with a focus on autism, mental health, substance use and cultural safety. U-Link will provide ongoing specific positive behavior support training to staff and caregivers. Two staff members will be identified to work closely with the manager to become a trainer in this area of support with our youth There are currently 3 specific training sessions identified over the course of the year and we are expecting to have a team ready and trained by the end of December of 2022.
2. To continue to increase the direct service to youth and caregivers. This will continue to be a focus of in-house team training and the outcomes including direct service will reviewed monthly on CAMS and discussed with each team member.
3. To increase job satisfaction and enjoyment through connection as a team, connections with the youth and caregivers and increased activities. This goal will be tracked through retaining our trained staff with minimal turnover as well as internal surveys of job satisfaction.
4. To raise the public profile of caregiving and employment opportunities at PLEA. U-Link staff will participate in at least three public events to promote our program at job fairs and community events.

For more information...

Contact Tina Tomyk, Program Director at 604-616-1057 or email tomyk@plea.bc.ca