



COMMUNITY
SERVICES

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U-Link Specialized Youth Residential Services Annual Program Report 2022-2023

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 caregiver 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 program provide 5 family care placements, supported by our PLEA staff teams for 10 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.

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. 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. 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.

www.plea.ca

Who we served...

U-Link

Profile	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
# of cases	24	23	18	22
# of youth ^[1]	22	21	18	21
% young women	50	35	39	41
% young men	29	56	56	55
% self-identified as transgender	21	9	6	5
% self-identified as Indigenous	33	13	22	41
Average age when cases were opened	15	15	15.5	15.6
Average # of days in program by discharged cases (N= number of discharged cases)	280 (N=15)	173 (N=13)	219 (N=8)	217 (N=12)

How we did...against last 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.***

This past year we identified the unique training needs of our team members as well as caregivers and developed tailored training plans to address the needs of the more complex referrals that we are receiving. Positive Behaviour Support training was provided to the U-Link Services Coordinators and managers were a part of a 2-day training with a professor from Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Two staff members were identified to continue the PBS program with their youth and caregivers throughout the year. The Program Manager, who specializes in PBS, made herself available for any questions, support or consultation. All Services Coordinators also had a day of specific training in sensory processing and substance use and addiction.

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

- 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 be reviewed monthly on CAMS and discussed with each team member.***

This goal has been accomplished in the U-Link program! The direct service to youth has increased from 1953.50 hours in 2021-2022 to 3581.75 hours in 2022-2023. This was a direct reflection of monitoring and support from the Program Manager and internal in-house training that was facilitated by the U-Link Services Coordinators on caregiver connections, time management and activity planning. U-Link also implemented a weekly Youth Support Worker Schedule to assist with planning and ensuring that no appointments were missed for the youth. U-Link specializes in the wrap around services of the needs of each individual rather than based on hours per week. The Youth Support Workers have been encouraged to maintain their autonomous and flexible schedules and allow for emergencies and sudden changes, but still adhere to programming needs.

- 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.***

U-Link has had an amazing year of increasing job satisfaction and enjoyment through connection as a team. Two team members have gone on maternity leaves during this reporting period. In the meantime, a Youth Support Worker was the successful candidate in the acting Services Coordinator role and a new staff member has been hired to backfill the leave and will be an amazing addition to our team! We also have hired another regular full-time staff member to start with our team in May.

- 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.***

Although Covid 19 restrictions have been reduced, it's taken some time for us to get back up to speed and be back in the community! PLEA has not had three public events occur to promote our program at job fairs and community events this year, but our team has actively been recruiting and currently have one caregiver in with our CAT team and two more potentials that may lead to two more skilled caregivers within our program! Our recruitment team at PLEA has been very busy advertising and screening potential caregivers. It remains a focus for our program as well for PLEA to continue to strive to recruit new caregivers for the program.

Selected accomplishments...

U-Link

1. Previous client accepted to Kwantlen and is now becoming a Youth Support Worker due to the impact of the PLEA U-Link program and the supports on their life. They have retained connection with trusted team members and were recently able to be provided a laptop to support with furthering their education.
2. Previous client has remained in contact with their caregiver and has been hired to replant and help design their garden. Their comment to their previous caregiver is that it feels good to be needed and productive! The new garden is referred to lovingly as the "scratch and sniff" garden due to the wonderful smells it emits.

3. Supported a youth previously engaging in organized crime to obtain legal employment and hold employment for a period of time. They are now currently looking at a youth agreement and they are also attending school regularly, not going AWOL and building lasting relationships with the caregiver and family.
4. Red Dress Day: May 5th, has become an agency wide recognition day for the murdered and missing indigenous women, that was implemented by one of our own Services Coordinators and adopted by the agency on an annual basis.
5. We have weekly team meetings and have adopted land acknowledgements and discuss the truth and reconciliation calls to action at each meeting.
6. Refocusing culturally specific goals for each youth, not limited to indigenous goals.
7. Out of 10 youth, 10 youth are attending school and educational programming. An increase from the year before.
8. Our program has been at capacity with a running waitlist and working closely with MCFD to have mindful and intentional placement.

Selected stories¹ ...

Meet Claire

Claire came to U-Link after residing at a family members home in which the placement broke down resulting in her being moved to an emergency placement. The primary concerns expressed by her care team pertained to her substance use and aggression in her home. Claire's mother struggled with her own substance misuse and mental health concerns and therefore, was unable to care for her children. Once placed in U-Link; Claire began building a positive and safe relationship with her caregiver. Not only did Claire build a strong relationship with the caregiver, but she also became very attached to the caregiver's dogs. She would often take them for walks and play with them in the home. Claire had a history of frequent AWOL's and would often stay at her friend's residence for a days at a time. It was discussed with Claire by her care team that she could lose her placement if she continued to not engage in the program services. Claire begun staying at the care home during the week and spending some weekends at her boyfriend's house. Due to the frequency in AWOL's; Claire was not engaging with her YSW's. Claire now has been connecting with her YSW's on a frequent basis and been engaging with them during activities. Claire had ups and downs regarding attending at her alternative school. Over the last few months, she had recently began attending all required days and has been engaged in completing her work and has reported to be enjoying her time there. Claire connects with her family when she feels safe to do so and understands her mother's struggles. She has hopes to one day live on her own to support her younger siblings. Claire has supports provided by her school, PLEA YSW's and an Addictions counsellor. Claire has developed great independence skills in the program and is able to make meals in the home, complete laundry and clean her room without needing any supports. The hope is to continue to build upon Claire's life skills and independence to potentially prepare her for a youth agreement or adequate skills for when she ages out.

Meet Megan

Megan came to U-Link after living with various family members in the Vancouver Island and Greater Vancouver regions. At intake, Megan was struggling with concerns around sexual exploitation, negative peer influence, substance use and was resistant to meeting and engaging with supportive care team members. The goal at intake was to support Megan with rebuilding her connection to her Indigenous culture, foster supportive family connections and to provide a safe home environment for stabilization. Shortly after intake, Megan would often be AWOL from the care home overnight and there were significant safety concerns in community with regards to sexual exploitation. The care team noticed that Megan struggled with personal hygiene and trauma induced enuresis; also known as incontinence. This impacted Megan's ability to engage in educational programming, meet with supports

¹ Names have been changed to protect client privacy and confidentiality.

in community and work on life skills due to the odour and poor self confidence that came with the behaviour. The care team also determined that due to these concerns, Megan would benefit from weekly support with bedroom cleaning and maintenance which was provided by the Youth Support Workers. Megan was connected to counselling professionals via PLEA, Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) visuals and in home supports and the care team also underwent additional training facilitated by a Counselling Specialist to learn how to best support Megan and understand the needs behind the behaviour. Megan attended regular respite at another U-Link care home in November 2022 and built a strong relationship with the caregiver during the two-week period that negated the enuresis behaviours entirely. As a result, Megan was invited to transition to this home permanently and since then, all concerns around bodily functions have ceased. Megan's hygiene, self-confidence, and ability to engage more in community supports has increased since her transition to the new placement and the goal is to continue to foster the growth of this relationship with her new caregiver.

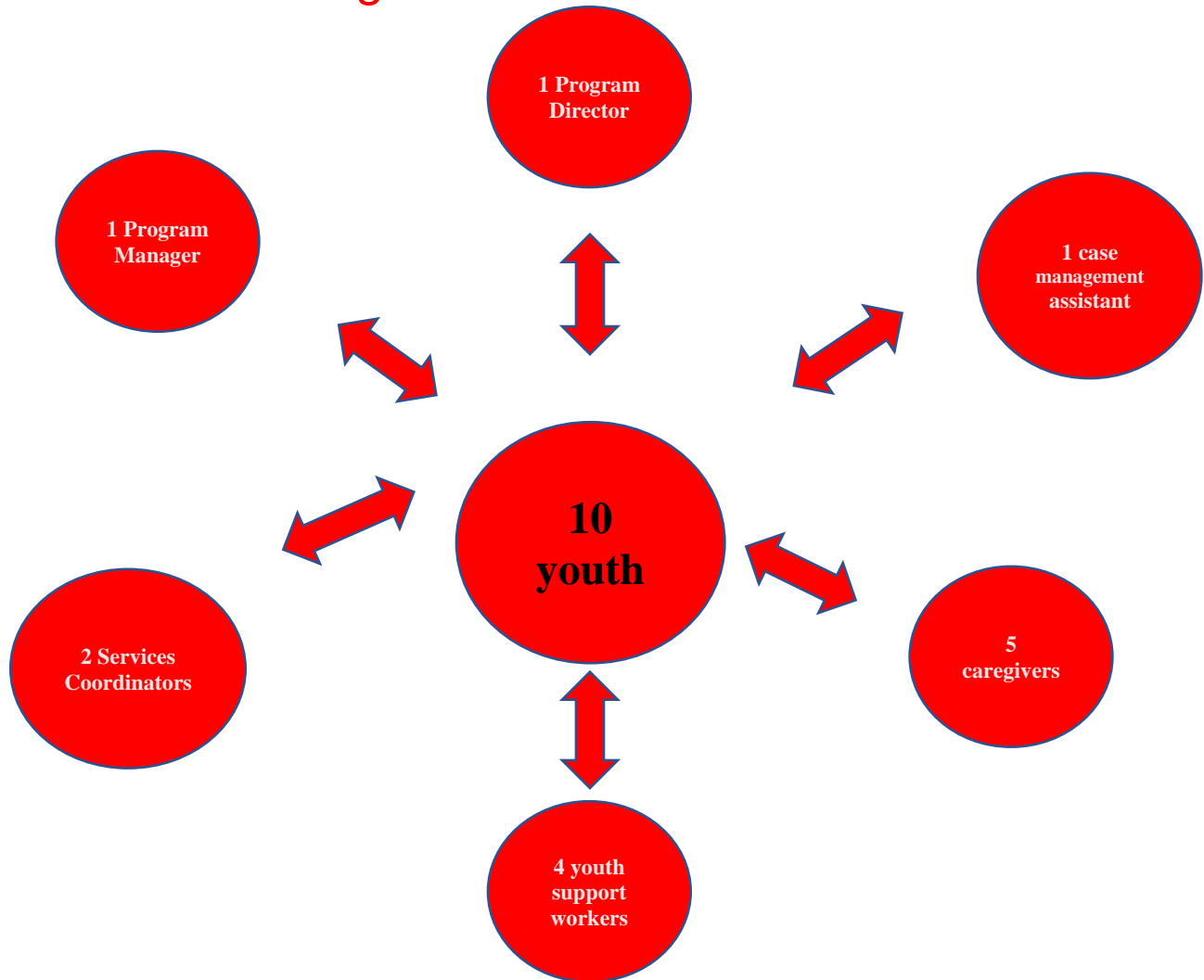
Meet Francis

Francis placed in U-Link due to family breakdown, increased concerns of exploitation and concerning online presence as well as her parents being unequipped to deal with her high needs and newfound sexual preferences. It was deemed by professionals that Francis would benefit from a skilled caregiver who could teach her life skills and prepare her for independence and the wraparound services that U-Link provides. U-Link was Francis' first placement as she did not have any prior MCFD involvement in her life. The focus of Francis' initial care was to navigate and decrease the risks of exploitation while building a strong rapport with her to allow for Francis to feel safe and heard at U-Link. Francis connected with PLEA supports and flourished during her time in the program. Exploitation concerns diminished significantly during her time at U-Link. As Francis came into the program at 18, the latter portion of her care focused primarily on preparing Francis for independence. PLEA was able to support Francis in completing an updated autism assessment as she hadn't had one completed since elementary school. The U-Link program worked vigorously on securing funding and exploring various housing options for Francis that would meet her specific needs and continue to grow her strengths as she transitions to adulthood.

Biggest challenges...

1. Once a youth turns 19 and is no longer under ministry care and is not eligible for CLBC funding for supportive housing, 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.
2. 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.
3. More complex referrals created difficulty in finding appropriate caregivers to fulfil their diverse needs.
4. Hiring for a Youth Support Worker temporary full-time position has been a challenge. A position was posted in November and was not filled until March. Our team utilized our casual pool of Youth Support Workers, and they were able to fulfil our backfill while our new hire was being onboarded.
5. Finding qualified Caregivers who are willing to share their home and time. Caregiver recruitment and slowed down significantly since the pandemic.

Our team...staffing²



Our team...learning and relationships

Our team has been involved in the following learning activities:

- Caring About Food Safety
- MANDT De-Escalation
- Positive Behaviour Support PBS
- 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

² # of individuals as opposed to FTEs as per March 31st, 2019

- Preventing Communicable Diseases
- Positive Behavior Support
- Caregiver Connections
- Time Management
- Let's Talk Overdose conference
- Federation of Social Work book club, specifically indigenous authors
- Gender and pronoun Training
- The Village Workshop with Kathy Camilleri
- Truth and Reconciliation training with Dr. Dustin Louie; witnessing sessions
- Indigenous Culture Appreciation versus Appropriation with Len Pierre Consulting
- Starry Night Prom for LGBTQ+ youth and families
- Cultural and Diversity LGBTQ+ holiday and movie event

Next year's goals...

U-Link:

1. Implement a stronger and more informed transition process for our youth transitioning out of care or into youth agreements. This will be achieved by creating and implementing a transition guide with resources that the youth can access with our support prior to leaving our program as well as creating goals with the youth and teaching them the life skills that they need to develop for adulthood, while supporting our caregivers to do the same.
2. Continue to have an emphasis on cultural goals and learning within the U-Link program. This will be measured by documenting on CAMS, receiving certificates for training and weekly team updates and will also be documented in our weekly meeting minutes.
3. To work collaboratively with all the U-Turn teams to increase our shared knowledge in Positive Behaviour Support training as well as utilize Complex Trauma Resources.

For more information...

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