



Investing in the future

Faculty of Education's Single Ceiling initiative receives community support towards improving children's mental health care

“Every family has a child who at one time or another is at risk of mental illness. Parents and teachers know the importance of this project and are embracing it wholeheartedly.”

That's Vicki Schwean, dean of Western's Faculty of Education, discussing the community reaction to Phase 1 of her Faculty's Single Ceiling initiative.

The Single Ceiling initiative is designed to improve care for vulnerable children in the community by organizing children's mental health systems and experts under one roof, in a single ceiling approach. These experts will be able to help more children, while at the same time research a number of new, evidence-based treatments that will help alter the face of children's mental health care.

Phase 1 of the initiative began in February, when Faculty of Education experts started implementing an evidence-based needs assessment in London's Argyle community, where the Single Ceiling initiative will be located.

“We're talking to parents, children, teachers and other community leaders to look at a variety of social determinants and socio-economic factors in order to better understand the community's unique needs,” says Schwean. “Their willingness to work with us has been absolutely tremendous and we're just thrilled to have this first phase of the initiative up and running.”

The Faculty of Education is partnering with Merrymount Children's Centre, The Child and Youth Network and the Thames Valley District School Board on the Single Ceiling initiative, making it a true community endeavour. Funding for the initial phase came in the form of a \$150,000 donation from the London Community Foundation's Community Vitality Grant.

“We saw the Single Ceiling initiative as having huge potential to address a number of community needs,” says Martha Powell, CEO of the London Community Foundation. “A change is needed in children's mental health, and this is going to help break a negative cycle. Children are our future, so we will absolutely invest in them.”

The donation played a key role in enabling Phase 1 of the initiative to begin, says Schwean.

“We are extremely grateful to the London Community Foundation for their tremendous show of support,” she says. “We have been eager to begin working in the community to discover the nature of the current need, and this generous donation has enabled us to take that important first step and begin learning more about how we can help.”

The initial phase is expected to wrap up in June, at which point experts will analyze what they've learned about the strengths and challenges of the community, and begin developing individual, evidence-based treatment pathways to help meet the identified needs.

In the initiative's second phase, the team will help empower the local and broader community by training professionals – including public health nurses, social workers, teachers and community workers – to utilize and implement these strategies to help improve vulnerable children's chances for success.

“We want to share what we've learned and spread this knowledge as far and wide as we can,” says Schwean. “That's the truly important part. We'll teach anyone who wants to learn.”

Schwean hopes to spread the lessons learned from the Single Ceiling initiative not just to the local community, but also to communities across the province, across Canada and internationally through information sessions, online forums and journals.

“Communities, regardless of location, only become truly healthy when their children are healthy,” says Schwean. “Ensuring the mental health of our next generation is immensely important and we are thrilled to be working with our partners to play a role in making that happen.”



To support the Single Ceiling initiative or to learn more about the Faculty of Education's priorities, contact Tracy Fawdry, alumni and development officer, Faculty of Education at (519.661.2111, ext. 87643 or tfawdry@uwo.ca).