

# Support without barriers: why The Foundry matters

Across BC, it's a place to turn to for help for young people and their families

**CHRISTINE DALGLEISH**

*Citizen Staff*

The Foundry is a province-wide network of integrated health and wellness services for young people in BC ages 12 to 24 and their families. There are 19 Foundry centres open in BC, including one in Prince George that was established in 2018.

There are 16 more in development and a virtual service available anywhere in BC.

The Foundry, celebrating 10 years in the province, brings together mental health and substance-use health supports, peer support, physical and sexual health care, and work, education and community services in one location where no referrals are needed.

*The Citizen* sat down at a round table with Prince George Foundry representatives who shared insight as those who have lived experience accessing, advocating, governing and working at the centre in downtown Prince George, where 267 people accessed the service in 2025 during 2,642 visits.

Since June 2018, which is the first data available, there have been 3,800 registered users, including parents and caregivers, who visited more than 30,000 times.

"For Foundry the model is no barrier and integrated youth services," Piumi Lakchani, peer support coordinator, Foundry Prince George, said.

"Like at any Foundry, in Prince George we have supports for mental health, substance use, including harm reduction, primary care and sexual health, and we have an amazing peer support team and what we work on is wellness and we provide connections with social services."

Lakchani said the statistics for the Prince George Foundry show 25 per cent of youth who accessed its services said they would not have anywhere else



CITIZEN PHOTO BY CHRISTINE DALGLEISH

Piumi Lakchani, peer support coordinator at Prince George Foundry, left; Max Hirt, youth support worker; Anne Mattis, Foundry family advisory committee, front left; Michelle Miller, Foundry family advisory committee, back right; and Donna Eckert, family advisory committee, front right, gathered to talk about what the Foundry does for youth and caregivers right here in Prince George.

to go for help, 43 per cent were guided by family or a friend to visit Foundry, and 84 per cent of the youth who visited said their stress level was high or very high at the time they walked into Foundry.

"So here the focus is to create a safe space for all youth," Lakchani said. "So when a youth comes in the idea is they will get all their needs identified and then get the support to achieve their goals by creating a safe space and building trust, and most importantly, as they get the care they need, they are empowered to make their own decisions about their health within that care plan."

Lakchani said as the peer support coordinator she has an amazing team.

"All of them have very unique lived experiences and have lived through a lot of stuff and navigated the systems, resources and supports with many difficulties and challenges, and they are

now in a space in their lives where they can help others navigate the same kind of challenges," Lakchani said.

"So when a youth comes in it might be to see a counsellor and then when they go to the peer support room, which is a warm, welcoming space, they might find a peer support person who will listen to the youth and provide that non-clinical emotional support they are looking for. From there the peer support person can identify what the youth needs, advocate for the youth's needs and help them navigate."

Lakchani gave the example that a peer support worker can accompany youth through the process of getting a copy of their birth certificate and literally walk with them to Service BC and help them go through the process of what might be considered a stressful event.

Max Hirt is a youth support worker who has accessed Foundry services

for the last five or six years, including gender-affirming care, he said.

"And that was massive for me," Hirt said.

"And through that I was also connected to a psychiatrist and both of those things have been huge."

As part of the youth advisory committee for Foundry, Hirt said he attended a conference about queer disabled persons addressing the intersection of those two identities.

"People tend to be very siloed," Hirt said. And those issues were addressed during the conference and the information provided was very helpful.

There is a youth advisory and a family advisory committee, which provide feedback to Lakchani, who then presents a report to management using their input.

**CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**