



Pleo Annual Report April 2021 to March 2022

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Land Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, Pleo acknowledges the land on which it was originally established as the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation (Ottawa). Our team works across the territory now called Ontario, on the treaty lands of many First Nations. We recognize the people and the land in this way as part of our commitment to anti-oppression and decolonization. Beyond recognition this is a reminder of our collective commitment to make the promise and the challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities. In particular at Pleo, this means recognizing and valuing the experience and wisdom of Indigenous Peoples as it relates to our specific work with mental health and families, and making sure that delivering on our mission includes supporting Indigenous families and children to flourish.

A Message from our Chair and Executive Director

After an eerie quiet on our helpline at the beginning of the pandemic, parents started reaching out for help again, and in record numbers. Referrals from service providers were more than five times the year prior. The parents we supported were running two marathons at once – surviving the pandemic, and supporting their struggling child. The far-reaching effects of the pandemic on food, housing, and financial security, the increasing lack of access to services, the isolation, and the persistent hum of fear and uncertainty tested the resilience of our families and our system. *We want to recognize the unbelievable challenges kids and families faced this year: we see how hard it has been, how strong you have had to be, how you have tried new things and asked for help, and taken care of yourselves and each other.*

We have also seen our partners rally themselves through these challenges to adapt, and take advantage of the chaos to rethink and rebuild differently. Our remote and virtual way of working made it possible for more than twenty organizations to collaborate in the delivery of 1Call1Click, a new service of which Pleo has been a founding partner. Pleo was invited into new communities across Ontario, by partners who saw how families were crumbling, and understood the opportunity for Family Peer Support to help wrap around them.

From an operational perspective, our team adapted well to our new virtual service delivery and fully remote work, finding ways to build rapport and maintain connection through screens and text. Our Board prioritized stability and wellness for our staff so that they could continue to provide phenomenal care to our clients. We worked together to keep pushing forward towards our vision of families flourishing, expanding our reach in Thunder Bay and Sudbury Manitoulin, bringing a new evidence-based intervention in suicide prevention to Ottawa, and ensuring the family voice was represented where decisions are made across the province.

What we experienced ourselves as parents and in our work supporting struggling families was reflected in the feedback we collect: Parents are worried about their future, challenged to get the help they need and to cope, and the Family Peer Support we provide *helps*. We are grateful to the parents who trust us and teach us, our staff who consistently go above and beyond, our board for their steady guidance, our partners for their collaboration, and our funders for their investment in our mission. We have much work ahead of us, and are optimistic about what we can achieve together.

Denise and Elyse

Who we are

Pleo is an incorporated non-profit family peer support organization for parents whose children to age 25 are facing mental health challenges. We are staffed with parents who have supported their own children with these challenges – we have travelled the journey.

Our proven model of family peer support is unique within Ontario. Our integrated services include a Parents' Helpline providing support and guidance in navigating a fragmented mental health system; facilitated Parent Support Groups where families can share information and learn from one another, and a more intensive One-on-One Mobile service.

In addition to working directly with families, we champion positive system change to create a more effective, family focused approach to mental health care. Through collaboration with service providers and key stakeholders, we ensure that the real needs of the thousands of families we support are understood. We know first-hand that parents play a significant role in their child's outcomes and research supports this. We recognize that parents can't do it alone. We understand the challenges and the stressors on families and we believe that recovery is possible. Hope over despair.

Our Vision is that families facing mental health challenges can flourish, stigma-free, with the support and services they need.

Our Mission is to foster positive outcomes for families with children to age 25 facing mental health challenges by providing family peer support and by amplifying the family voice for system change.

Our Core Values

- We have a sincere and compassionate interest in the well-being of those we serve and we value the dignity of all families dealing with mental health challenges
- We believe in hope, inclusion, recovery and the capacity of families to provide support and advocacy for their children when supported
- We believe trust, respect, honesty and fairness are the foundations for all relationships
- We value equity and diversity in our community
- We value excellence and meeting the highest standards of professionalism
- We believe in continuous improvement with a bias to action

Our Strengths

Experience. We have been supporting families for more than 20 years. That, combined with our own lived experience, provides us with an in-depth understanding of the fundamentals of effective family peer support.

Proven Record: Results from ongoing evaluation consistently show that our model is working, and that we are making a positive impact.

Bilingual Services: All of our services are available in both English and French.

Scope: We support parents of children to age 25 to include transitional aged youth, clients identified as suffering from a gap in services elsewhere in the system.

Integrated Approach: Our model allows for parents and caregivers to access our services when, where, and how they need us. Together, they provide a comprehensive approach that can respond to a family's individual and changing needs.

Real-time, on-the-ground data: Our customized database and surveys capture in detail the experience of thousands of families, providing invaluable insight into real needs and journeys – the collective 'Family Voice.'

Strong collaborative partnerships: We work closely with service providers, system leaders, and researchers to exchange knowledge and support efforts towards more effective care.

Our bias to action: We respond to the urgency for change.

Board of Directors



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President



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Chair



David Millen
Vice Chair



Connor Shea,
CPA, CMA
Treasurer



Purnima Sundar, Ph.D.
Director



Dhaval Shah,
P.Eng
Director



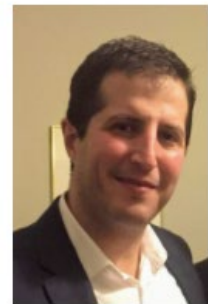
Margaret DeCorte,
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Michelle Neville, RN,
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Director



Maddy Toca
Director



Noah Spector,
M.S.W., Ph.D.,
RSW
Director

How we Help

We help parents of children facing mental health challenges find their way forward.

The Parents we Support

The parents we support have children, youth, or young adults up to age 25 who are struggling with their mental health. The range of challenges is broad – ADHD, addiction, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, autism as there is often overlap or dual diagnosis, eating disorders, and many others. Their child may or may not have a diagnosis, and can be at any stage of their journey.

We know that the challenges these parents face are significant – from our own experience as parents, our work within the mental health system, and directly from parents themselves through our ongoing Family Experience Survey.

Watch this video about Pleo: <https://youtu.be/0ypDYyJcn> 8

What did parents find most challenging this year? A year over year comparison, based on the percentage of parents that reported the following as extremely or very challenging:

2021-2022	2020-2021
77% : worrying about the future	83% : worrying about the future
67% : finding mental health / addiction services for their child	83% : getting the right educational supports
67% : being on wait-lists for services	67% : finding mental health / addiction services for their child
66% : getting the right educational supports	67% : being on wait-lists for services
66% : having other people understand their situation	67% : being involved as much as they would like in their child's treatment
66% : understand their child's situation	66% : managing crisis situations
66% : managing crisis situations	66% : having other people understand their situation
55% : being involved as much as they would like in their child's treatment	66% : financial pressures associated with their child's situation
55% : supporting other family members	66% : being able to cope and care for themselves
55%: Being able to cope and care for yourself	50% : supporting other family members
44% : stigma and judgement from others	50% : understand their child's situation
33% : financial pressures associated with their child's situation	49% : stigma and judgement from others

Our Services

We provide Family Peer Support through integrated services specifically designed to support parents when, where, and how they need it, and to work together so that parents can move seamlessly between them.

Thanks to the support of our funders, all of our services are available at no cost. Parents do not need a referral to access our services, and, we are thrilled with referrals from hospital emergency departments, mental health service providers, family physicians, walk-in clinics, schools, and community health centres connecting our care.

We help parents find and access the right services for their child and family. We help them build their own capacity to support their child, and to cope with the tremendous challenges they face. We work together to figure out how to manage suicidality, substance use, co-parenting, setting boundaries, school difficulty, medication, violence and safety, housing, lack of motivation or insight, and all the other issues and stressors that the whole family faces when a child is struggling. And we're here alongside them as peers – as parents who have been there ourselves and really get it – so that they never have to feel alone or isolated.

Our **Parents' Helpline** is answered Monday to Friday from 9am to 7pm. Any parent or caregiver of a child up to age 25 can call – any time and as often as is helpful. There's no waitlist, no fee, no paperwork. You call and get support right away.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Number of unique families served through our Parents' Helpline

2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
848	416	685	510	350

"It has been my best support through our family crisis."

"The person I've been speaking with helped calm me down and really made a difference in helping me help my son. She was able to provide me with a ton of resources that I didn't find on my own or through the medical system. I'm so thankful for her experience and knowledge."

"It did help me feel like, I'm not alone, there are help and people who care, was life changing to me."

"When I called the telephone helpline, I was amazed at how many other resources were available that fit my families specific needs."

Our **Parent Support Groups** are confidential, no judgement, small groups of parents who meet to support each other, share valuable information, and connect with a community. These are facilitated by two Family Peer Supporters who bring their own experience, wisdom and

knowledge of the services and resources available in the community. Groups offered this year included SMART Recovery Family and Friends, for Parents of Children to age 12, for Parents of Children ages 13 to 25, as well as groups local to Toronto, Thunder Bay, Sudbury & Manitoulin.

BY THE NUMBERS:

	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
# of Parent Support Groups	309	173	178	201	146
# of Parent participants	1243	670	544	533	622

“I look forward to attending the Thursday groups as I have certainly found they help me cope and for the first time, I can talk to parents who actually get it - such a comforting feeling!!”

“Pleo staff Rock! Keep up the amazing work you do. Not only are you helping families and loved ones come to a safe place, the way you help people influences communities. Knowledge is power.”

“So thankful for this safe place to be among other parents in a safe space to be vulnerable to share their struggles without judgement.”

“I feel good about the options I’ve learned from hearing others describe their self-care. Self-compassion is definitely easier when you speak to a room full of parents doing their best regularly. Telling another person why they shouldn’t be hard on themselves drove away negative self talk. “

Our **One-on-One Mobile Service** is for parents who, for whatever reason, would benefit from more intensive support and guidance. Our Family Peer Supporters meet with parents in their community, one-on-one, usually over about 8 weeks. Due to COVID precautions, this year meetings remained almost entirely via video or phone, with regular communication via text.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Number of families supported by our One-on-One Mobile Service

2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
111	78	142	151	(pilot year)

“(My Family Peer Supporter) was a critical life line for me during a number of crises with my child. She was always available when I called for urgent support... I feel more comfortable and less overwhelmed by my LO’s behaviors.”

“Thank you for providing a service that no-one else is. Got me through a very tough time.”

“This experience made a huge difference in my personal well being. It gave me resources and strength to continue on. The support was invaluable.”

“Her support and encouragement got me through the darkest days of my life.”

“The invaluable support of someone with the insight and experience without judgement. The support was the first that I have had through this journey and it gave me strength to get through some serious situations.”

“It helped me define, establish, maintain, remember and revise as necessary my healthy boundaries with my child.”

“Helping me communicate better with him in regards to treatment options and support groups as well as other resources to support him as he would like to attend College.”

“It helped me to judge myself less and stay strong when dealing with my child.”

“If I have the support I need for myself, then my child indirectly benefits because I can then be supportive and responsive to my child's needs. Also assisted in getting forms done so my child could get a psychiatrist appointment and diagnosis.”

“It helped me to see the addiction/mental health issues as separate from the person my kid is. I was able to step back and not take the behaviour personally. I became less angry and more objective which enabled me to access help more effectively.”

“It was a lifesaver for me. Without it, I would not have made it through the hardest days. My family would have lost me and that would have been devastating for my child to deal with, along with the other traumas.”

“As a parent, I can see hope and light.”

“I feel more calm and relaxed. I can think of most situation like a mom with love and care rather than a fighter.”

Our **on-site hours** remained in flux again this year due to COVID precautions. To ensure that the bridge from our partners to Pleo support for parents was maintained, Family Peer Supporters worked closely with service providers and provided on-call virtual support for their clients. A significant increase in **referrals from our partners** this year over last indicated how valuable this pathway was in lockdown conditions, and also how hard service providers worked to ensure connected care for families, including: *1Call1Click, Crossroads Children’s Mental Health Centre, Children’s Aid Society, CHEO, Pembroke Regional Hospital, Child in Mind, Children’s Mental*

Health Leeds Grenville, Queensway Carleton Hospital, Superior North Catholic School Board, The Royal, Ottawa Police Service, NorWest Community Health Centre, Laurencrest, Mental Health Services Renfrew County, St.Leonards CSPRC, Youth Services Bureau, Children’s Centre Thunder Bay, Frederick Banting Alternative High School, Seaway Community Health Centre, Family & Children’s Service Renfrew, Valoris, Equipe Psycho Sociale, Home and Community Care North East LHIN, AccessMHA, Open Doors For Lanark Children & Youth, Youturn, Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre, Conseil des Ecoles Catholiques due Centre-Est.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Number of Referrals from our partners in health, education, and social services:

2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
710	130	365	264	(not yet established)

Impact & Highlights

- Our first year of delivering Family Peer Support to parents in Sudbury and Manitoulin was a successful first step in a growing partnership with Compass/Boussole/Akii-Izhinoogan, Sudbury Catholic District School Board, Rainbow District School Board, Conseil scolaire catholique Nouvelon and Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario. The collaboration between these partners provided an incredible foundation for Pleo to reach parents through virtual support groups and our Helpline. More than 100 parents with children between the ages of 3 and 18 joined us, hoping to *“reach out to other people going through the same thing,” “feeling very isolated and alone,”* and wanting to learn *“how to cope better and help my child better.”* Participants told us that after using our services they felt empowered, not alone, stronger, and encouraged. We are excited to continue our partnership with these communities.

“I would tell a friend this group is very helpful. I would tell them it is accepting and peer lead and informative. I would certainly recommend the group to other parents and families with children experiencing mental health challenges.”

- Following the success of our partnerships in Toronto and Sudbury Manitoulin, we had the privilege of working with the Children’s Centre Thunder Bay team and Parent Council to bring Family Peer Support to their communities. As we’ve learned over several years of growth, every community has unique needs best understood by the local families and providers. We relied on these experts to guide how best to deliver our services, and welcomed a Thunder Bay local parent to our team as co-facilitator of our

first round of virtual Parent Support Groups. We're grateful for the warm welcome, and looking forward to reporting on the evolution of this partnership!

Hello Thunder Bay! Launch video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fo2oMgHNnoU>

- We launched our Youth Nominated Support Team (YNST) project and received our first referral! In partnership with Suicide Prevention Ottawa, and with generous funding support from Bell Let's Talk, we are now delivering this evidence-based intervention to Ottawa as a pilot year. Geared to young people who are vulnerable to suicide, this intervention supports youth to identify four adult, natural supporters in their lives, and then equips these helpers with tools to allow them to be even better allies to the youth. Created and evaluated by clinician-researcher Dr. Cheryl King at the University of Michigan, randomized clinical trials of this intervention showed reduction in suicidal ideation, greater treatment adherence, and significantly lower mortality at 14 year follow up. (King et al., J Consult Clin Psychol. 2012, King et al., JAMA Psychiatry. 2019). Parent advocate Hilary Allen first brought this intervention to our attention, and a phenomenal team of clinicians, researchers, public health professionals, and family peer supporters made it happen. During our pilot year, we will be working with youth accessing inpatient services at The Royal and evaluating our outcomes, with the aim of expanding further to where youth and families need us most.
- In a year where organizations faced tremendous challenges with employee burnout and resignations, we were particularly proud to be named a finalist for *Best Nonprofit Employer – Workplace Mental Health (20+ staff)* by the Charity Village Conference & Awards. Our incredible team extends the same compassion and care to each other as they do to our clients, they model the self-care that they teach, and they help to constantly improve and adapt how we work together. Our vision of families flourishing includes the families that work with us, and the recognition was a welcome encouragement that we are on the right path.



- 1call1click.ca officially launched in June 2021. An initiative of Kids Come First Health Team, this unique service coordinates more than twenty organizations offering mental health and addiction care for children, youth and their families — addressing a need that families and Kids Come First Health Team partners across the region have often highlighted. As founding members of Kids Come First and partners in the development and delivery of 1call1click, we were thrilled to see this family-led project realized, and for our Family Peer Support to be a core ‘spoke’.

It’s critical that what we do works – that the support we provide to parents delivers on our mission to help their families flourish. We measure this in a few ways, including through our anonymous Family Experience Survey available year-round, through pre-and post support group surveys for our time-limited sessions, and when our one-on-one mobile clients transition to our less intensive supports. Each survey is unique to the program being evaluated, except for the following five questions which speak to the role Pleo plays in a larger theory of change for a struggling child and family: the ability for parents to effectively support their child, including maintaining their own wellness.

The parents who completed our surveys in 2021-22 reported that Pleo helped them to:

Feel less alone and isolated: 92%

Feel less anxiety and stress: 92%

Feel better able to get the services you need: 89%

Feel better able to cope with challenges related to your child’s mental health/addiction struggles: 92%

Feel empowered and encouraged towards self-care and self-compassion: 100%

Gratitude

We are grateful for the continued committed from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, United Way East Ontario, United Way Prescott-Russell, and Happy Roots Foundation. We would also like to recognize United Way Lanark for helping us support the families in their communities.

We have many donors to thank for their generous contributions through our Giving Tuesday and Annual Campaign, donating a new-record breaking \$23,201.50 in support of our services. This was made possible by the Tomlinson Group of Companies and Remax Hallmark Group of Companies, who led our campaign with matching gifts, and the incredible Katherine Dines who championed our cause and helped share our message with her many loyal listeners.

