



# Clarence Street

## Approach to working with families and carers

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## Why go to Clarence Street as a parent, other family member or carer?

"From my first visit to Clarence Street I felt really comfortable. I was able to talk about sensitive, personal issues without feeling judged. I was able to gain valuable knowledge and facts where I had very little. It was very helpful to have a third party to help me put some perspective on things, and give me some realistic ideas about how to cope with my situation. The support from Clarence Street has been invaluable to me because it can be difficult to get this support within the family where relationships are under strain, or from friends who just don't understand these issues."

**Erika, mother**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank all those people who provided input into the development of this document, especially the Clarence Street Family Advisory Group (FAM Group) including:

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# Definitions

## **ADAWS**

Adolescent Drug and Alcohol Withdrawal Service

## **Carer**

An individual who provides, in a non-contractual and unpaid capacity, ongoing care or assistance to a young person experiencing mental health difficulties and/or substance use concerns.

## **Circle of Collaboration and Partnership Framework**

A framework to describe the working relationships between Clarence Street staff, young people, families and carers, and other stakeholders. Under the Circle of Collaboration and Partnership Framework, all parties work together to identify and accomplish shared goals. Where possible, family members and carers are supported to participate as active members of the treating team.

## **Family member**

A person who is a relative and/or identifies as being in an Aboriginal kinship relationship with the young person accessing Clarence Street services. For example, is a spouse, mother, father, aunty, uncle, grandparent, sibling, niece or nephew.

## **Family and Carer Aware**

Understanding the perspectives and issues impacting on family members and carers affected by mental health difficulties and/or substance use concerns. Clarence Street staff members work in non-judgemental, respectful ways and are aware of issues commonly experienced by families and carers.

## **Psycho-education**

Refers to information and education provided to families and carers about mental health and substance use. It includes, information about mental health diagnosis, functional role(s) of substance use, treatment options, adolescent development and stages of change.

## **Young person**

A person who is aged between 13 and 25 years who is seeking support to address their alcohol and/or other drug concerns.

# Core principles

Clarence Street staff members work within the Mater Mission and its core values of mercy, dignity, care, commitment and quality. We have a commitment to the *Australian National Safety and Quality Service Standards 2017*, including Standard 2—Partnering with Consumers. We are committed to partnering with family members and carers in the care and treatment of their child or young adult living with a mental health difficulty and/or substance use concern.

We have a commitment to international best practice and we endorse the “Circle of Collaboration and Partnership” referred to in this document.

Overall, Clarence Street begins with a strengths based approach to supporting family members and carers by recognising their value, worth, lived experience and expertise in their own life and that of their child.

Clarence Street also seeks to strengthen and grow family resilience. We are here to support you and we acknowledge that you are the expert in you and your family. However, you may feel stuck and as though you have exhausted all possibilities. We encourage you to hold on to hope, as change is always possible.

# A human rights and respect for persons approach

All people are entitled to the support they need to function as citizens (Marshall 1868). At a broad level and through the Australian Human Rights Commission, Australia willingly complies with the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. This seeks to promote and protect human rights, and the *United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007)* states that, "family members should receive the necessary protection and assistance to enable families to contribute towards the full and equal enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities". The *Queensland Human Rights Act 2019* holds similar values and legislation.

Clarence Street employs staff members from various disciplines (nursing, social work, occupational therapy, psychology, medicine, youth workers and staff with lived experience). Professional groups such as the Australian Association of Social Workers holds that "every human being has a unique and inherent equal worth and that each person has a right to wellbeing, self-fulfilment and self-determination, consistent with the rights and culture of others and a sustainable environment" (AASW 2010). Similarly, Clarence Street endorses the human rights and respect for a person's approach when working with family members and carers affected by mental health difficulties and/or substance use concerns.

## What family members have told us

"It really helps to learn about drug problems in a health setting."

"Before I came to Clarence Street I felt ashamed and embarrassed about my child having a drug problem."

"Thanks for your support. I don't feel so alone now."



# Circle of Collaboration and Partnership

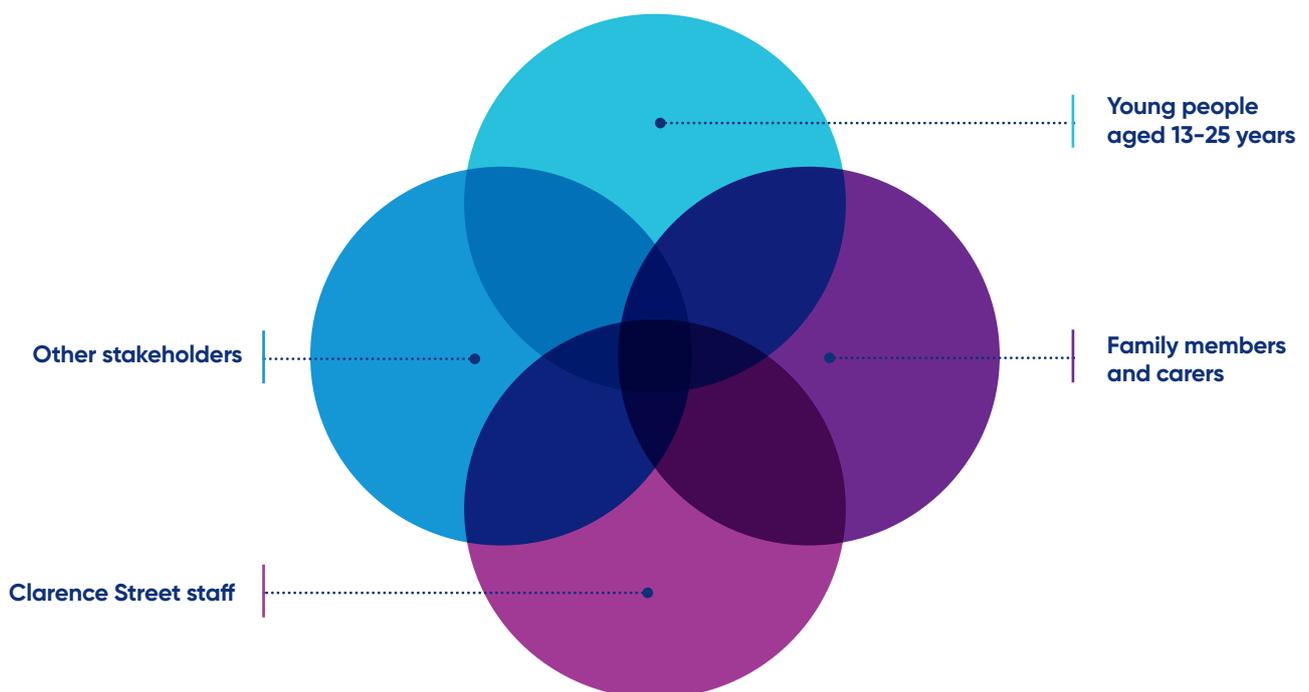
Clarence Street applies the Circle of Collaboration and Partnership Framework, which describes the working relationships between Clarence Street staff members (e.g., nurse, social worker, youth worker), young people, families and carers, and other stakeholders (e.g., GP, teacher, Youth Justice). Under this framework, all parties work together to identify and accomplish shared goals. Where possible, family members and carers are supported to participate as active members of the treating team.

## Key elements to achieving the circle of collaboration and partnership

Clarence Street aspires to achieve the following:

- 1 At first contact with the service, efforts are made to highlight the essential role of families and carers in their young person's treatment.
- 2 Staff members are 'family and carer aware'—trained in understanding issues impacting on family members and carers.
- 3 Policy and practice protocols regarding confidentiality and information sharing are in place.
- 4 Dedicated positions (e.g., family support counsellor) exist to provide family members and carers with support and counselling services.
- 5 Clarence Street care and treatment pathways are explained to family members and carers.

## CIRCLE OF COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP (2018)



# Family and carer psycho-education, support and counselling

Clarence Street offers a range of free services for families and carers. These include counselling and support for individuals, couples and families, as well as skills-based groups and support groups. Clarence Street is also collaborating with families and carers to publish a book.

## Individual, couple and family sessions

These sessions usually last for one hour at a time and are available for as long as a family member wishes them to continue. Sessions include information sharing, education about alcohol and other drug use, details on useful services and how to access them, skills training, strategies for coping and counselling to grow family resilience.

## Group programs

The *Strength 2 Strength* group sessions are based on the concept of growing family resilience. We accept that family members are usually already quite resilient as they have been coping and managing a loved one's mental health difficulty and/or substance use concern for some time before they access additional support. It is also accepted that their 'batteries need charging' because they feel they have exhausted all possibilities and the problem has not been resolved. The Bounce group program is a family support group held monthly for people who have completed the *Strength 2 Strength: Growing Family Resilience* program.

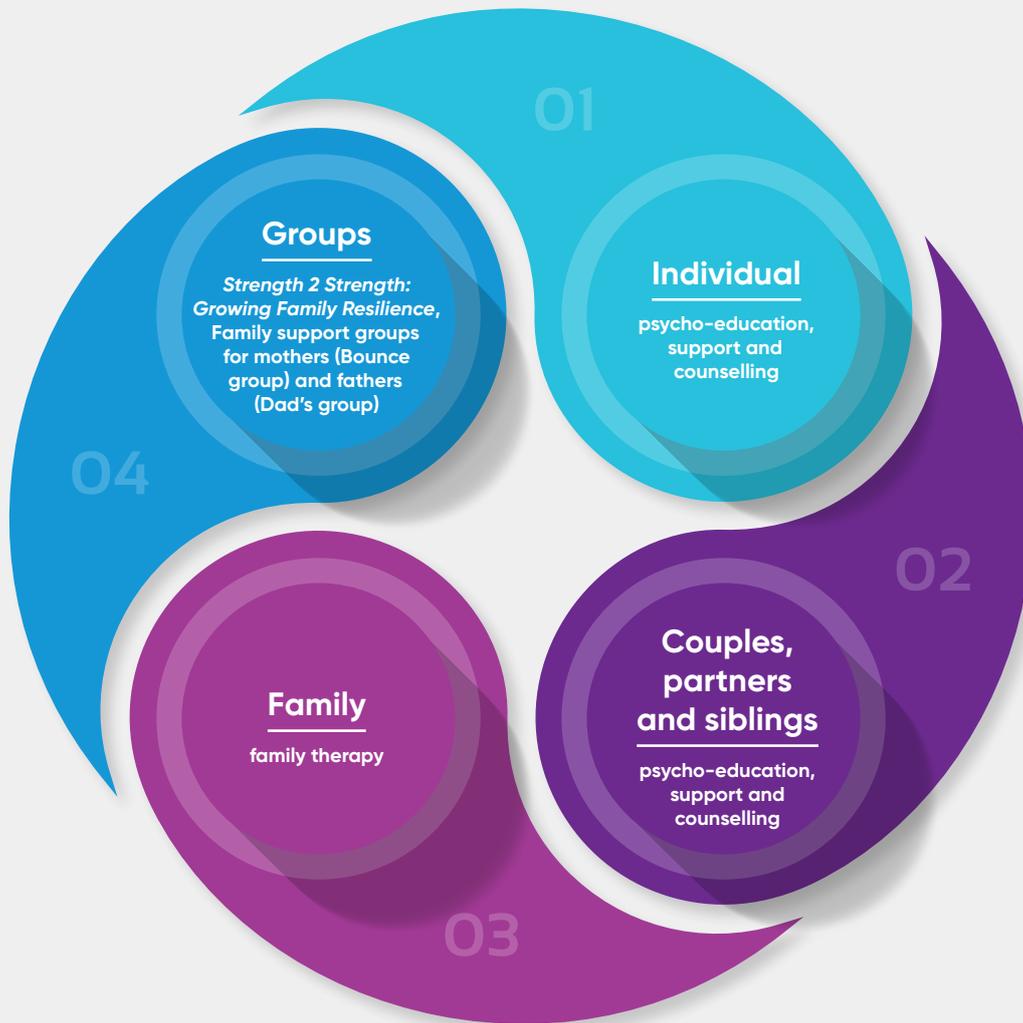
## Family and carer projects

The *Book Project* is a project that commenced in February 2018. The aim of this project is to grow family resilience through writing. In collaboration with Clarence Street clinicians, family members are writing a book about their lived experience of supporting a young person with a mental health difficulty and/or substance use concern.



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## CLARENCE STREET SERVICES



## Accessing Clarence Street services

Clarence Street offers free services state-wide across Queensland. Young people and their families and carers can access Clarence Street during business hours. Some individual and group sessions are offered in the evenings. Services are offered face-to-face onsite at Clarence Street and/or are available by phone and Telehealth. Family support and counselling services can also be offered in the home across the Brisbane metropolitan area.

# Family and carer inclusive practice

Our commitment is to building and maintaining effective relationships with families and carers affected by mental health difficulties and/or substance use concerns. At Clarence Street, we partner with family members and respect their lived experience role and expertise in supporting a young person seeking to improve their mental health and/or substance use. We listen to family members and carers and invite them to be involved in the care and treatment of the person living with the identified concern.

## **Challenging stigma and discrimination**

We acknowledge that stigma and discrimination can impact families affected by mental health difficulties and/or substance use concerns. We seek to overcome this by using non-stigmatising language.

## **Family support counsellor role**

The Family Support Counsellor provides a service for individuals, couples, family members and carers seeking support to develop new skills and strategies to manage or resolve difficulties related to their young person's mental health and/or substance use. Family Support Services are available for families whether or not their child/young adult is accessing Clarence Street services. In cases where the young person is accessing Clarence Street services, the Family Support Counsellor works in tandem with our team to provide the best support for the whole family. The central focus of the Family Support Counsellor role is to recognise the strengths of individuals and families and to grow family resilience.

## **Statewide triage and referral coordinator role**

This role is often the first contact point for young people and families accessing Clarence Street. The role assesses and coordinates referrals and is held by an experienced clinician who has the ability to identify and respond to acute and chronic risk issues (e.g., harmful substance use, domestic and family violence). The coordinator works with young people and families to link them in with appropriate treatment and support.

## **Youth drug and alcohol outreach role**

This role provides support to young people who have identified that they would like to address substance use or a related issue. The team offers young people the opportunity to develop an individualised program to suit their level of motivation. The Outreach worker will see young people at Clarence Street or in a place that is

more familiar to the young person e.g., coffee shop, park, school or at another agency such as the Child and Youth Mental Health Service. If a young person is ready to change and agrees to access Clarence Street services the youth drug and alcohol outreach team may have some contact with the young person's parents or other family members but primarily works with the young person to build trust and focus on their substance use concerns. During this time, family members can access family support services which are available regardless of whether or not the young person is ready to change.

## **Adolescent drug and alcohol withdrawal service role**

The Adolescent Drug and Withdrawal Service (ADAWS) is a residential program for young people 13 to 21 years. ADAWS is an 11-day 'live in' program supporting young people to safely withdraw from substances. Whilst in the program, young people are supported by Youth Workers and Residential Support Workers to participate in skills groups focused on coping with cravings and relapse prevention. During their stay, young people participate in recreational activities and have access to mental health and general health support. Family members can have phone contact or may visit their child who is participating in the ADAWS program.

## **Area 40 drop-in service role**

Area 40 is a youth-friendly space where young people can be introduced to Clarence Street via a safe and creative environment. Engaging in this space can lead young people to talk about their substance use concerns and seek more intensive and/or targeted support. Family members can support their child to access Area 40. In the Area 40 space, young people can relax, create their own music and participate in art activities.

Young people can also chill out in the sensory room or participate with staff members to develop their cooking skills and enjoy the food. The Area 40 space also offers education and training for young people interested in developing skills in hospitality.

### Thread and X-Tend programs

Clarence Street recently opened the Thread and X-Tend programs for young people aged 13 to 17 years.

Thread offers an extended stay option for young people who have completed the ADAWS program and feel they would benefit from additional time in a therapeutic live-in environment. At Thread, residents have the opportunity to engage in ongoing relapse prevention work and activities that are meaningful to them. Young people's care plans are individualised and may include educational, vocational, recreational, psychotherapy and life skills interventions. At Thread, residents are offered to extend their stay in 3-week blocks to allow for more targeted work around specific goals identified by the young person.

The X-Tend program is an intensive outreach program for young people who have tried to access different types of Alcohol & Other Drug (AOD) support and found it difficult to gain traction in these traditional models. For example, it might be difficult to attend appointments due to transport issues or stressors at home. X-Tend may also be helpful for young people who have struggled to build a relationship with workers at other services. At X-Tend, young people have the opportunity to engage with their worker multiple times per week to allow for the development of a strong therapeutic alliance. X-Tend outreaches to the community across southeast Queensland.

### Confidentiality and information sharing

We consider that sharing information with families and carers is best practice. In most cases, there is no conflict of interest between the rights of young people and the rights of their family members and carers. The matter of confidentiality and information sharing at Clarence Street is always considered in the context of the spirit in which we work with young people and their families and carers.

For example:

- We consider how we can '**walk beside**' a young person and their family, how we can be '**flexible, supportive, gentle, empathic and respectful**' of all people.
- We consider how we can gain an '**understanding**' of the young person and their family in the time that they are with us.
- We ask how can we '**nurture**' and '**empower**' the whole of family in the confidentiality and information sharing space.

Clarence Street must also meet its legal obligations under the *Privacy Act* to maintain confidentiality and privacy of all young people and their families and carers. However, consent involving young people and their families is sometimes complex. In cases where conflict arises regarding information sharing, Clarence Street staff members use their professional judgement to determine appropriate action. In some cases, confidentiality may need to be breached (e.g., if there is a risk of harm to self or others).

In relation to care and treatment, Clarence Street staff members may take into account the age and developmental stage of a young person to determine whether or not they have capacity to consent to treatment. The [Gillick competence test](#) may be applied in cases where a young person is assessed as a 'mature minor'. The level of maturity to provide consent is considered in combination with the complexity of medical or health treatment required.

For young people under 18 years, parental consent is usually needed for participation in recreational activities that occur within the Clarence Street residential programs e.g., going to the gym, rock climbing.

### Clarence Street staff and family and carer inclusive practice

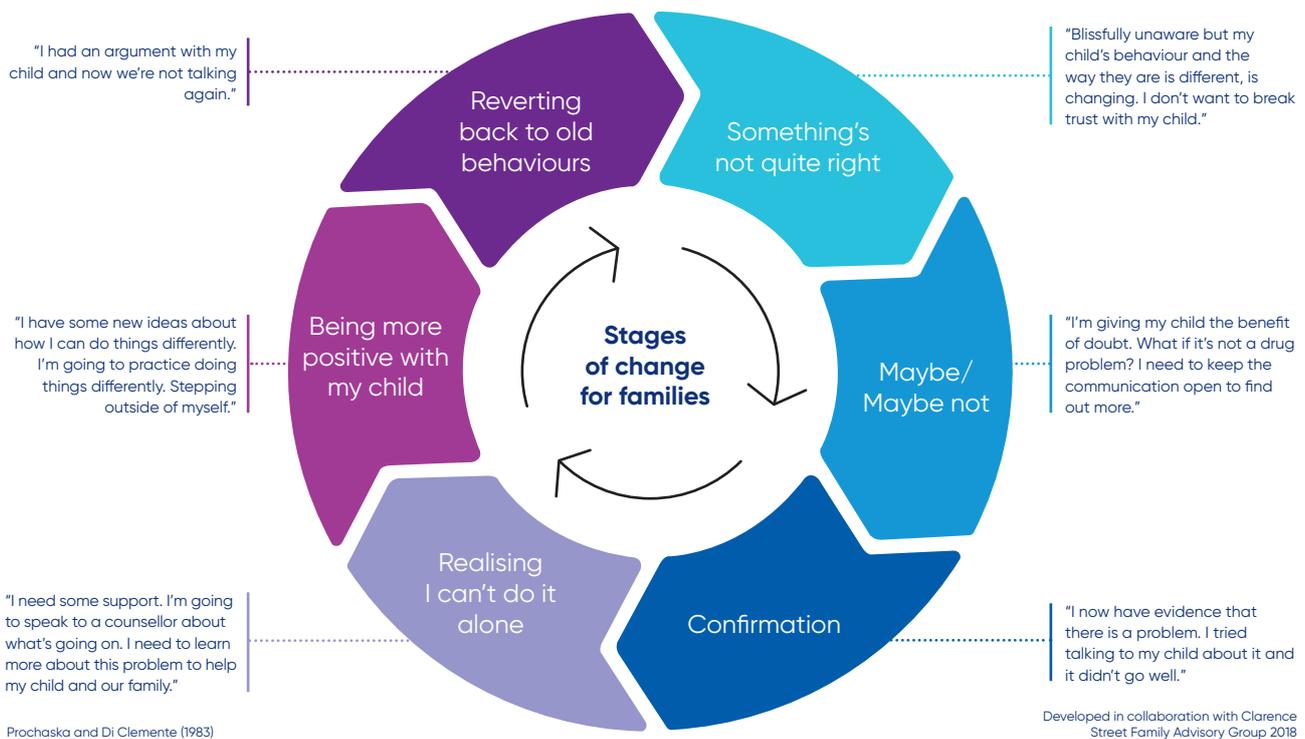
Clarence Street supports staff members to understand the issues impacting on family members and carers affected by mental health difficulties and/or substance use concerns. These include: carer stress and carer burden (Ormond 2009), family resilience (Simpson et al 2017) and stigma and discrimination. Staff members strive to include families and carers in their young person's treatment. All clinicians strive to uphold the Mater values of dignity, compassion, integrity and excellence.

**Clarence Street staff members strive to:**

- effectively communicate and build rapport and trust with family members and carers
- work in a non-judgemental way by listening and providing a safe space for family members and carers to talk about their experiences, learn skills and access support
- be professionally competent to engage with family members and carers
- be culturally sensitive and appropriate and, be genuinely respectful of diversity
- offer alternative referral and support services where appropriate
- be able to partner equally with the young person, family members and carers
- seek to reduce stigma and discrimination related to mental health and substance use
- identify and respond to the specific support needs of family members and carers in their own right (Fyffe 2011)
- be compassionate, understanding and sensitive to the needs of family members and carers
- advocate for family members and carers.

More broadly, Clarence Street is a health service operating within a harm minimisation framework. Within this framework we aim to reduce risk of harm to the young person using substances and to educate young people and their families about alcohol and other drug use. We are aware that there are often legal issues impacting on young people and their families in relation to substance use. We are not a law enforcement agency and our focus is on individual and family health and wellbeing. The diagram below outlines the family inclusive strategies that are practiced at various levels of the organisation.





## Partnering with young people and their families and carers

Clarence Street is committed to working in partnership with young people and their families and carers. This includes partnering in the care and treatment of young people and in improving quality and service delivery (NSQSS 2017). We support families and carers to be included in the care and treatment of young people and we assist them to understand the Stages of Change for family members. We understand that caring is a dynamic experience that changes over time.

## Stages of change for family members

The *Stages of Change for Families* (above) was developed in collaboration with the Clarence Street Family Advisory Group (FAM Group).

## Strength 2 Strength: Growing Family Resilience skills groups

The *Strength 2 Strength: Growing Family Resilience* group program provides psycho-education and skills training to families and carers experiencing stress and strain in the context of caring for a young person with substance use difficulties. The emphasis is on growing family 'resilience', that is, the capacity to tolerate and adapt to family challenges and stressful life events (Simpson et al [nd]). As family resilience grows, it becomes easier to problem-solve and/or apply strategies to manage or resolve these challenges. Growing family resilience is also about ensuring that family members are supported to continue to care for their child affected by substances. This group program provides information, psycho-education and support and focuses on the important role that resilience plays in ones' own health and wellbeing and that of the whole family.

## Clarence Street family support groups

These groups meet monthly and are open to family members who have completed the *Strength 2 Strength: Growing Family Resilience* program. The groups aim to provide a professional, safe, non-judgmental and supportive space for family members to share their stories and listen to others in a similar situation. Separate groups are available for individuals who identify as female/gender-diverse (e.g., mothers, grandmothers, aunts) and male/gender-diverse (e.g., fathers, grandfathers, uncles).

## FAM Consumer Group

We support families and carers to be included in service quality and improvement. To achieve this, the FAM Group was established in 2017. This group meets bimonthly to share information and make recommendations on policy, procedures and practices in relation to improvements to existing Clarence Street services and the development of new services.

## Research

We are committed to deepening our knowledge and growing our skills to provide a high standard of care to our young people and their families. Research is therefore an important part of our practice. We partner with universities to support us in developing new research and evidence about young people and families affected by substance use. Some of our latest research projects focus on understanding how growing family resilience can be helpful to families and how mental health stigma and discrimination can serve as a barrier to treatment engagement for young people and their families.

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