Directory of Innovative Practices in Health and Social Services in Official Language Minority Contexts

PRACTICE #27

Accueil centralisé (Centre francophone du Grand Toronto, Ontario)

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Solange van Kemenade
Josée Benoît
Sébastien Savard
Jacinthe Savard

GReFoPS
Groupe de recherche sur la formation et les pratiques en santé et service social en contexte francophone minoritaire
uOttawa
Société Santé en français
Secrétariat national CONSORTIUM NATIONAL DE FORMATION EN SANTÉ
ACUFC
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ABOUT THE FACT SHEET

This fact sheet is part of the *Directory of Innovative Practices in Health and Social Services in Official Language Minority Contexts* (available at https://www.grefops.ca/directory_innovative_practices.html). The directory complements the *Organizational and Community Resources Self-Assessment Tool for Active Offer and Social and Health Services Continuity*, which was also developed by the GReFoPS.[1] It presents initiatives most often implemented locally that respond to community needs and are considered innovative by the various actors involved in their implementation. The practices were identified, analyzed and classified using an evaluation framework from the Health Council of Canada and definitions from the Public Health Agency of Canada. This enabled us to distinguish between emerging, promising and leading practices. Some of these practices were suggested by Société Santé en français and the provincial, territorial and regional French-language health networks, or by other collaborators.

We refer the reader to the Introduction and Method document for information about the authors and collaborators, background on the project, a description of the methodology used to create the fact sheets, and definitions of the following concepts:

- Leading practice, promising practice, emerging practice
- Quality of evidence, impact, applicability, transferability
- Service coordination, service integration, liaison
- Active offer

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1 The tool is available in English and French and can be accessed at the following web address:
https://www.grefops.ca/selfassessment_tool.html (English version)
https://www.grefops.ca/outil_autoevaluation.html (French version)

Practice #27: *Accueil centralisé* (Centre francophone du Grand Toronto, Ontario)

This practice contributes to improving:

- The values and principles of your organization: innovation and offer of services in the user's chosen official language
- Active offer (reception and visibility; continuity of services in the minority official language)
- Relations with service users

The organization implementing this practice:

The Centre francophone du Grand Toronto (CFGT, or the Centre) is the port of entry for Francophones living or settling in Toronto.[2] The Centre is a not-for-profit organization that offers a range of community services (health, social services and housing access) to the entire Francophone community of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The CFGT has created a tool to facilitate access to all services with a single request. Development of this project was made possible by funding from Health Canada through Société Santé en français and minor contributions from other sources.

The information contained in this fact sheet mainly comes from a telephone interview conducted with Malika Agzou, Manager of *Accueil centralisé*, on January 15, 2025. It was complemented by documentary research and information provided on the organization's website. These sources are cited in the footnotes.

Background

The idea for this project began germinating in 2017, but several years of design and development were needed before its launch as a digital platform in 2021, and later as a physical location in 2023. The former CEO of the CFGT explained that this was the first project she had wanted to develop when she joined the organization in 2017.[3] At that time, she had noted the lack of a system for efficient coordination and collaboration among the organization's various services.[4] This was essential given the nine points of service scattered across the GTA. The CFGT now also has a presence in North York, in Mississauga, in Scarborough and, more recently, at Pearson airport.

When the CFGT began growing and the above-mentioned service centres opened, the paper form that was usually used to register clients was no longer effective. Staff at the Centre struggled to manage client lists in a way that provided uniform reception and services between the different points of service. The existing system also made it difficult to refer clients from one service to another (with seven services in 2025)[5] and from one point of service to another (with 12 points of service in 2025). The form in use at the time did not enable the creation of client profiles,

2 CFGT website https://www.centrefranco.org/qui-nous-sommes

3 *L-express.ca* (2023). Accueil centralisé au Centre francophone du Grand Toronto. https://l-express.ca/accueil-centralise-au-centre-francophone-du-grand-toronto/ Accessed on January 12, 2025.

4 *Ibid.*

5 The services pertain to welcoming and integration, housing, employment, legal aid, early childhood and family, health and mental health care, social services and welcoming at Pearson airport for Francophone newcomers.

nor did it indicate which point of service was where the initial request took place. Finally, the seven services provided by the Centre were supported by over 20 funders, each with its own specific data requirements and its own different information management system. It was in this context that the CFGT management decided it was essential to have a common client registration and data collection tool. This tool would have to make it possible to see where clients were coming from, record the number of services they called on and centralize the request for services for the benefit of the clientele. The project, which was developed over the course of a year with the help of a specialized firm, launched in September 2021, but it was in 2022–2023 that the intake system really started to work well.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were to create a user registration system for the Centre to facilitate access to all services with a single request through an online form, to standardize intake practices and the information requested of clients, to centralize sociodemographic information to better coordinate data collection, and to refer clients to the appropriate services.

In other words, the Centre had a database and a dashboard. These tools gave CFGT officials the ability to better understand their clientele and its needs, to do proper tracking and monitoring, to call clients back as needed, and to meet funders' specific needs.

Features of the practice

Accueil centralisé is a Centre-wide, bilingual, digital platform for managing service requests. The platform allows new clients to be registered, ensuring quick and efficient access to the services they need. They complete an online form available at https://ac.centrefranco.org/. Registration can also take place at one of the CFGT's points of service, where tablets and assistance are available.

As the resource explained in the interview, "intake is now the same for everyone. Employees are able to identify clients' different needs from the time of their initial intake and direct them instantly to the requested services." In other words, *Accueil centralisé* officers will know if the person needs a doctor, a lawyer, child care or all three. The internal referral system emails clients instantly to confirm that their request has been received. The intake agents aim for a quality standard of returning clients' calls within 48 business hours of receiving the online form. The *Accueil centralisé* team then automatically points clients to the appropriate programs. In summary, the officers receive requests, call clients back, follow up and arrange appointments.

The system keeps the requested services confidential. Therefore, an officer from the legal aid service will receive only requests for that service and will not see a request from the same client for medical clinic services.

Challenges

According to the resource person, the first major challenge was undertaking an unknown project, one that had not been experimented with anywhere else. Next, the staff at the Centre had to be told and persuaded about the advantages of using a shared platform to increase collaboration and coordination of all services. The staff was resistant to using new technologies; some members were not comfortable with them and there was a risk of adding to their workload. There were also reportedly some problems syncing the platform and other tools used by the Centre with those of the funders. The initial project included syncing the platform with those of the funders, but this turned out not to be possible.

The tools are functional and efficient, but they could be further improved to continue to address the changing needs of reception officers and the clientele. Adjustments could be made to the questionnaire; certain questions are not mandatory and fail to capture necessary information (e.g. whether the person is a new or existing client of the CFGT). The people in charge of the system have limited budget to make the necessary changes and are hoping for new funding that would allow them to use Version 3.0 of the platform, which would increase efficiency.

In 2025, after attending a training session on the tools, staff members reported they were satisfied with *Accueil centralisé* and recognized its benefits for them and their clientele. However, the issue of informing all staff at all points of service about the procedures involved in *Accueil centralisé* was raised during the interview. The CFGT has 180 employees, 25 of whom are assigned to *Accueil centralisé*, whereas the entire staff should be aware of the existence of the system.

Analysis

Why is this practice considered innovative?

The purpose of this initiative was to enhance a system that did not effectively meet the needs of the organization or its clientele. On this front, *Accueil centralisé* makes it easier to collect users' sociodemographic data, makes the referral process faster and easier, and better meets the demands of funders. The system centralizes information on needs that are diverse in terms of the services requested (legal, health, housing, etc.) and that come from multiple points of service. Centralized registration avoids the need for repeat registrations. Finally, the information collected will be used to design and implement new programs.

Emerging, promising or leading: A promising practice

Quality of evidence: *Accueil centralisé* was evaluated by a consulting firm. The evaluation was based on the perspective of clients, staff and partners. Focus groups and other techniques were used in it. For example, the results were used to develop the training for staff who needed guidance on using the system. The evaluation also helped identify certain challenges for which solutions were found. Clients who had trouble completing the online registration form were able to get help by phone or visit the Centre for personalized help. Other improvements were implemented following the evaluation. However, the more technical aspect of the tools used by *Accueil centralisé* were not covered by the evaluation.

Also, a weekly follow-up ensures that *Accueil centralisé* procedures are being followed, ensuring that all clients who complete a service request form are seen to promptly.

Impact: The results of the initiative are very positive for all involved. Clients no longer have to provide their personal information to each service; they provide it just once. *Accueil centralisé* enables managers and staff to better serve clients, to follow up effectively and to compile the information needed by the Centre and by funders. However, the project leaders would like to continue improving the system, for example by making it possible to provide referrals between the Centre and external partners.

Applicability: The system was implemented fairly recently, but its applicability has already been tested. The CFGT's *Accueil centralisé* and the associated tools developed can be adopted by any organization that coordinates multiple services and wants to improve its ability to centralize information and provide services more efficiently.

Transferability: The CFGT's experience was presented at the *Symposium de l'immigration francophone* in 2022. It garnered the interest of officials from other organizations, especially in the field of welcoming and integrating immigrants.

Other sources:

ONFR (2023). *Un accueil centralisé au Centre francophone du Grand Toronto*. https://onfr.tfo.org/un-accueil-centralise-au-centre-francophone-du-grand-toronto/ Accessed on January 12, 2025.