

# Unity Health Toronto

## Background

In 2017, St. Michael's Hospital, St. Joseph's Health Centre, and Providence Healthcare joined together to form Unity Health Toronto, a health network in Toronto, Canada, consisting of more than 11,000 employees. People are the backbone to achieving Unity Health Toronto's vision of providing the best care experiences, created together.

This is why joy in work is one of the key priorities in the health system's first network-wide strategic plan, with the aim of creating an environment where all employees can realize meaning and purpose in the work they do every day, and where joy in work is reflected in the care provided to patients, clients, and residents in the community. In 2020, Unity Health Toronto joined the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) Joy in Work Results-Oriented Learning Network to support and accelerate their efforts.

### IHI Joy in Work Results-Oriented Learning Network

The IHI Joy in Work Results-Oriented Learning Network (July 2020–December 2022) was a collaborative of pioneer institutions committed to supporting workforce well-being and improving overall quality of care for staff and patients. IHI strives for a future free of health inequities. Our bold vision is that everyone has the best care and health possible. Realizing this vision requires a focus on attending to the joy of the health care workforce. The Joy in Work Results-Oriented Learning Network focused on combating burnout at pace and at scale; provided improvement methods and tools for testing our way to solutions; created a learning system across organizations; and disseminated results and lessons learned.

## Year One: Introduce Joy in Work

In 2018, the Unity Health Toronto Executive Committee established the first harmonized strategic plan, with "Joy in Work for Our People" identified as a key deliverable. The first step in this journey was forming the Joy in Work Steering Committee to plan how to engage employees, align the actions of departments and managers, and foster a common culture by using the [IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work](#). In September 2019, at the first annual Unity Health Toronto Leadership Summit, the organization kicked off its joy in work efforts with a keynote address by IHI Vice President Jennifer Lenoci-Edwards.

The Joy in Work Steering Committee created a toolkit for Unity Health Toronto leaders to help them better understand their teams’ barriers to joy in work and co-create meaningful solutions using improvement science principles. The toolkit serves as a guide for holding “What matters to you?” conversations, an approach from the IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work, with the goal of helping leaders engage staff and co-create action plans to address what really matters to staff. The action plans addressed drivers derived from department-level “What matters to you?” conversations, and teams customized change ideas to match what really mattered to them. For instance, to address workload stress and wellness, one clinical team committed to supporting team members to always take their breaks.

The Joy in Work Steering Committee also launched corporate action plans to address some of the opportunities and barriers encountered across the organization and health system, as identified in the annual engagement survey. The committee purposely aligned survey drivers to the pillars in the IHI framework.

## Year Two: Invest in Joy

To truly demonstrate the importance of joy in work as a priority, Unity Health Toronto made a significant financial investment. In 2020, the Joy in Work Steering Committee introduced the Unity Health Toronto Joy Fund. All teams are eligible to submit an application to obtain up to \$10,000 per initiative to implement ideas from their action plans to increase joy in work.

Although the first annual Joy Fund process launched in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, this initiative demonstrated the importance of joy in work. Even during a substantial second wave of the pandemic, 33 applications were submitted for the fund. After teams presented their ideas in a virtual pitch-off, the steering committee selected eight projects that correspond to four components of the IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work: Camaraderie and Teamwork, Recognition and Rewards, Wellness and Resilience, and Daily Improvement.

### Unity Health Toronto Joy Fund: Selected Joy in Work Projects

IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work Component	Selected Unity Health Toronto Joy Fund Projects
Camaraderie and Teamwork	Behind the Mask: Unity Health’s Got Talent Unity Health Virtual Choir The Ministry of Mundane Mysteries
Recognition and Rewards	Recognition Trees
Wellness and Resilience	Mindful Opportunities in the Ordinary Code Lavender
Daily Improvement	Kangaroo Care Bring in the Clowns

Joy in work projects included local-level initiatives such as kangaroo care in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), as well as organization-wide projects such as Unity’s Got Talent, a

virtual talent show featuring staff from across the organization, which had more than 6,000 views after one week.

Projects were conducted over a six-month period. Team leaders were assigned advisors for quality improvement support, communications, and wellness, as well as a dedicated Joy Fund Coach to help guide them through the process of rolling out initiatives (change management).



At the end of the process, teams reported back to the steering committee to share their experiences and lessons learned. This feedback enabled the committee to determine improvements for the next round of Joy Fund applications.

## Lessons Learned and Improvements

The first Joy Fund process in 2020 was a great success. Before launching the second round in Spring 2021, a PDSA cycle on the process identified opportunities for improvement:

- **Financial management assistance:** Teams provided feedback that they required more support to better follow the budgets, and to ensure that funds are being utilized in adherence with the organization’s policies and in time for the financial year-end.
- **Timeline for project roll-out:** Several projects in the first round ran beyond the December 2020 completion timeframe. Improvements for 2021 thus included better communication about project timelines and scheduling regular meetings between project leaders and their Joy Fund Coaches to ensure that projects are wrapped up in a timely fashion, allowing them to come to fruition.

## Year Three: Build on Momentum

The second round of the Joy Fund launched in 2021 amidst the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, another 33 joy in work project submissions were received and nine new projects were funded. Some projects, including Unity's Got Talent, a talent show showcasing staff, and Code Lavender, a crisis intervention approach for staff, were so popular and had such great impact on the organization that these projects have been sustained through alternative funding to elevate joy in work at an organizational level.

To further the organization's commitment to joy in work, the inaugural People Strategy was developed using a three-step process:

- Data utilization and stakeholder engagement to identify the emerging themes and areas of focus for all staff and physicians;
- Organic conversations with direct care providers from teams and programs across all three sites to identify what truly matters to them; and
- Refinement and validation of the three pillars of the People Strategy (Empower Excellence, Protect Each Other, and Lead by Example) to achieve the co-created vision of a diverse, healthy, productive workforce powered by purpose and person-centered care.

Throughout the process, the team ensured alignment with the organization's strategic plan, mission, vision, and values, and the IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work.

Over this three-year journey, the organization demonstrated how embedding joy in one's work is not a single-sourced approach. It requires integration at the senior executive level as well as the utilization of tools and resources to foster joy at the direct care provider level. What matters to people is both personal and specific, and therefore organizations need to be nimble and responsive to the needs of their people to ensure that they can navigate their ever-changing needs. Unity Health Toronto is creating a culture where joy is valued across all aspects of health care, and where every individual is recognized and appreciated for their contributions.

## Kangaroo Care: A QI Success Story

With support from the Joy Fund, staff in the NICU at St. Michael's Hospital are improving education and carrying out quality improvement initiatives on the unit, while helping parents enjoy more skin-to-skin time with their newborn infants.

Kangaroo care is a method in which a parent or guardian holds their newborn infant on their bare chest, in an upright position, with the infant wearing nothing but a diaper. This skin-to-skin method for holding infants has numerous benefits, including temperature and glucose regulation, stabilization of heart and breathing rates, more rapid weight gain, and infant attachment.

When the NICU team reported barriers to education and joy in work in their 2019 engagement survey, Michelle O'Connor, Clinical Leader Manager for Obstetrics, Gynecology and the NICU, applied to the Joy Fund for support. The NICU team's idea: dedicate time and resources to

engage the interprofessional NICU team in a quality improvement initiative that would strengthen and sustain kangaroo care.

The NICU team received Joy Fund support to finance a huddle board to track their progress, a recliner chair to support individuals providing kangaroo care, and an educational poster for staff, physicians, and parents.

Since introducing kangaroo care last year, the team has increased staff engagement on the unit, as well as parent satisfaction and kangaroo care time. Staff have reported more time spent on education and continuous quality improvement.