

Eating disorder centre enters 10th year with new name, purpose



By Brock Weir

Janice Morgante wants people to understand eating disorders are never just about 'food and vanity'.

As Eating Disorders of York Region (EDOYR) enters their 10th year next month, Ms. Morgante, the organization's executive director, says this is one of the common myths surrounding eating disorders that have come close to being shattered over the last decade.

People are coming to understand that people suffering from eating disorders often suffer from low self-esteem, trauma, and trying to live up to unrealistic body issues they're subjected to every day, she says. As the needs of their clients and the community at large have evolved, so too have the services they provide.

Now, as they enter their milestone year, they are re-branding to better reflect their reality.

Next week, at a special fundraising and awareness-building walk, the Aurora-based EDOYR will officially rebrand as Riverwalk Eating Disorders and Wellness Centre.

'EDOYR was chosen by the founders to provide for the community resources that were not available for their loved ones,' explains Ms. Morgante. 'That fact is the name is now limiting. People sense that this is a government agency because it has 'York Region' in the name which couldn't be further from the truth because we need support from the community.'

'We're also expanding beyond eating disorders. As an unhealthy coping strategy, individuals can move between addictions, substance use, disordered eating and other behaviours if that underlying issue isn't resolved.'

Ms. Morgante found inspiration for the name while on a stroll along Tannery Creek. Fittingly, the name will be unveiled Saturday, August 24 alongside the Holland River at Fairy Lake as supporters of EDOYR stage the 'Remembering Renata' walk, an offshoot of the Newfoundland relay to battle eating disorders.

Statistics have shown eating disorders continue to rise across the country, says Ms. Morgante, and those affected keep getting younger. She believes there is a 'dearth' of treatment options available to individuals and their families for affordable and accessible care and, as such, they have seen an increasing number of people come through their door.

Men, however, are increasingly coming forward to seek assistance with their eating disorders. Ms. Morgante says she believes men are being targeted more nowadays, as women have been in the past, bombarded with images of the 'photoshopped' 'buff' males as the unattainable standard.

'That image is a lie and not a reality,' she says. 'Young men might feel they will do whatever it takes to try and reach that physique and it is very, very dangerous and soon spins out of control.'

Teens too are reaching out through various means to the support they provide. While they often make presentations within schools to reach as many teens who might be affected by an eating disorder as possible and those who might know others struggling, she says she wished the uptick could be attributed to teens becoming more self-empowered to seek help. It's a struggle, however, for teens to come forward.

In some cases, their eating disorder might stem from stress within the family such as a divorce, as a way of finding something to control amidst the uncontrollable personal family situation.

'If this person takes on the family's burdens, they are not going to share that they themselves are burdened,' she says. 'A teen will struggle with if they want to go to a support group, how are they going to tell their family, how they are going to get there, how they are going to pay for it, and be faced with the question of if they are really ready to acknowledge [the issue] themselves or hope that it is just going to go away. Those are all complicating factors.'

'We have made the program available where a person can access it by public transit, it is provided in a way that is confidential. It can be for no cost or a low cost of \$10 a week. We can provide support over the phone so that young person can sense it is not a stage or a phase that is going to go away on its own.'

EDOYR believes it is important to see each individual as a whole person from their creativity, for their innermost qualities and it is equally important to provide a means to provide reinforcement of who they are as a struggling, creating, and developing human being.

The next step in this evolution will be the creation of a new therapeutic and expressive arts centre which will build upon past programs, such as Songs for Recovery. The Arts Centre will encompass music, writing, visual art, performance, art, and poetry to showcase who individuals really are and will ultimately be shared and exhibited throughout York Region.

'As people come into the art program, they might want to share their art, or their poetry, or their songs so they are also showing recovery is possible. If I can do it, you can do it, and not only that, you can be a person who is giving back to the community with great pride and self-knowledge and having walked a really hard journey, sharing with others you are not alone and you do not have to struggle in isolation.'

'You are able to get the support, you are able to do this in a way that is creative and meets your needs, who you really think you are. You are not a sick person who is able to cope, rather you can work with your strengths.' For more information on next weekend's walk and for the organization as a whole, visit www.edoyr.com.