

Mental health resources hub coming to municipal website

The Town of Aurora's website will soon become a hub for mental health resources in the community.

The addition to the website comes following a motion from Councillor Rachel Gilliland last week requesting a specific page on the Town's website to provide information on local organizations and local not-for-profit resources that support and promote mental and emotional health in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Much of the information that will be featured on the site will stem from the work of the Aurora Cares Community Action Community which was established near the outset of the global pandemic to look at local needs stemming from COVID-19 and how the community could give neighbours a helping hand.

Speaking in support of her motion, Councillor Gilliland recognized the work of the team and said these mental health resources need to be in the spotlight.

"I have spent the better part of Stage Three reconnecting with the community, reaching out and asking how they are doing, trying to get a sense of where people's priorities are shifting and what I have discovered is it is really evident how crucial mental health and emotional health needs attention and I really want to help make it easy for me to be able to help and others.

"One of the most difficult steps, at least that I find, is admitting to yourself that you need help and once you attempt to start to look for help that step can become rather overwhelming very quickly and can lead to giving up. It's just another day, you go back to bed, whatever it is. I know that I have had conversations with friends and family and just colleagues in general and this pandemic has seen days where people wake up and they really don't know what they are supposed to do that day and it is difficult. My goal is to make mental health help up front and centre and people do reach out to community leaders for help, especially in confidence. Let's make it easy to access, easy to market, easy to share. In addition, I would really like to see mental health subsections for youth, post-secondary youth, the LGBT community and seniors.

Feedback she has received from the community, she added, has indicated that people want a quick and easy resource whether they are teens dealing with anxiety or seniors dealing with loneliness or a lack of stimulation both mentally and emotionally.

"I recognize there are great supports out there, including this flier (compiled by the Committee), but let's help elevate mental health and its presence on its own and put it front and centre," said Councillor Gilliland. "Make it easy to access to market it, share it as a family, as a leader, as a Councillor. As the old saying goes, many hands make light work and I hope my colleagues will help me elevate this important topic separately.

While Council approved the motion, other lawmakers sought assurances that the motion would not mean municipal staff would have to retrace the work already compiled by the Aurora Cares group.

"There is so much and it is not easy for people to manoeuvre through," said Councillor Sandra Humfries of the expansive Aurora Cares document. "Not only did we [compile the document] we also implemented a help line at the front desk that we have through our customer care front and centre so regardless of who they are, anyone can call here and they will respond and provide the help that they need; not necessarily a conversation, but point to the right resources to give back to the residents.

"I support the motion in terms of what it is about, absolutely, but I think it is done.

This was a view shared by Mayor Tom Mrakas who said the document was "already created" and that work should continue through Aurora Cares, but other Council members saw the value in the motion.

"My belief is the more we can do to highlight what is available for mental health help, to just make it as easy as possible," said

Councillor Wendy Gaertner. ?Having it on our website, front and centre, when you have mental health issues? You don't know where to turn, you feel awful, and everything just seems really, really hard. Anything we can do to make the information more easily available, let's do it.?

Councillor John Gallo expressed a similar view, suggesting that the material that lands on the webpage might enhance the work of Aurora Cares.

?I believe we're all on the same page, that we want this front and centre, as many resources as possible in front of people,? he said. ?I think the motion speaks to putting it out and [as] accessible as possible. If we're doing it, great. If we can do it a little better? Fantastic. The work that is already done, let's take it and promote the heck out of it. I think it is super-important to have that front and centre.?

Added Councillor Michael Thompson: ?These challenges might not always be derived from COVID. Anything we can do to get people the help they need, I think they should. While I recognize a lot of the work has been done already?anything we can do to make it quick and easier for residents to access, I support.

?We want to make sure [that for] anyone who needs that help it is readily available.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter