

New mobile mental health clinic will help CMHA reach more students in York, South Simcoe



Since its launch in 2015, the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe's Mobile Youth Walk-In Clinic (MOBYSS) has welcomed more than 2,000 students and youth each year to its safe and welcoming space to receive free medical and mental health care.

But MOBYSS has begun a new chapter in its service within the community.

More than 400 members of the community came together this month for the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe's (CMHA-YRSS) biggest annual fundraiser, Mental Health in Motion.

The annual cycling event, which aimed to raise \$130,000 to support MOBYSS this year, more than met the target and, on June 11, culminated in the debut of a brand-new MOBYSS vehicle for the community, increasing both capacity and accessibility.

?We launched our first MOBYSS vehicle back in 2015 and those needs are ever-increasing as we try to reach more youth,? says CMHA-YRSS CEO Rebecca Shields, noting their mission to bring the MOBYSS vehicle to places where youth are often gathered, such as schools and rec centres. ?We always need to ensure that youth have accessible services. They need services where they can feel comfortable and that is why they can attend MOBYSS anonymously. They can have any of their questions met, they have a nurse practitioner, a youth mental health worker, and a peer who understands them so we can connect with them right away and with whatever their needs are. 66 per cent of the youth who attend MOBYSS [do so for] mental health-related supports, but we still have 40 per cent that come in for other primary care reasons so we can help kids when they need it the most.

?Our lovely MOBYSS bus served us well from 2015 all the way through to 2023 [but] it was time to decommission it and get something that will keep MOBYSS on the road.?

In developing the new vehicle, the CMHA-YRSS consulted both with their team and the youth they aim to reach. The goal was to replace it not with a carbon copy of what they had, but in a way that improves accessibility.

The new space is now fully accessible with a wheelchair lift, equipped with more efficient heating and cooling systems to make sure it's comfortable and functional in the heights of winter and summer, and, from a driving perspective, it's a bit more ?wieldy? for the team, says Shields.

?It's not about a brand-new service; it's about building on and ensuring what we're doing and that we continue to reach more kids ? and we're reaching more than ever. We still reach between 2,000 and 2,500 kids a year, but we're seeing the service rise now with new models that include virtual support and we're going to reach more kids that need a team.?

The value of the MOBYSS service was underscored at Mental Health in Motion where clients, their families, and community members at large came tother to support the cause.

It was a chance for the CMHA-YRSS to get together after the height of the global pandemic and to highlight the ongoing needs of the organization.

?Without the event and our donors we would not be able to keep MOBYSS on the road because it is not a fully-funded program by Ontario Health and it is just so necessary,? says Shields. ?The program really goes into saving lives. We do a lot of high-risk suicide interventions every year. We help kids get care confidentially and privately that they wouldn't otherwise get, so we're able to do that early intervention. When we unveiled the new bus, the people who have been supporting the program and people whose families have used them ? I just saw tears. I saw the emotion of our donors and staff [who] were just so excited to see not only that the program is continuing but it is continuing with something that is brand-new, that meets even more needs for more community members, more youth, more accessible, and that the commitment from the CMHA and our donors is just to grow and expand the service.

?You see a mix of pride, determination and commitment and just gratitude. The thing about CMHA and mental health is everybody is touched; everybody is touched by mental health and mental illness and, for some, substance use, and we get it. The idea that we can reach somebody early and get the help that they need before it becomes a crisis, before it becomes a life-long illness, before it becomes a death by suicide, that's why we're all doing this: we can help someone today and then save a life. That emotion, that pride, that resilience, that determination? and also just that community where we're all here doing the right thing together is just amazing.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter