

Inaugural gala will support Salvation Army Northridge's mental health programs



Mental health organizations around the country have experienced an uptick in demand across the board coming out of the global pandemic, and the Salvation Army's Northridge Community Church in Aurora is no exception.

To support their mental health programs, Northridge will turn their expansive Leslie Street space, just north of Wellington, over to an inaugural gala that aims to entertain and inspire.

The Salvation Army of Central York Region offers myriad mental health services through two psychotherapists who regularly help an average of 60 clients per week through group sessions and, in 2022 alone, more than 1,000 of individual counselling hours.

But the services they provided last year are significantly higher than they were prior to 2020.

"We have had these programs for close to 10 years when [we identified] a gap, particularly in our Region, for accessible, barrier-free mental health services," says Northridge's Angela Covert. "Our counselling is available in person and over Zoom and people are asked at the outset if they have a health plan, such as through work, that would assist towards the therapy. If they do, then they are asked to see if they can access that to some degree. If not, they can pay a nominal fee - there's a good portion of people who might pay \$20 or \$25 - otherwise the majority would not be paying for this therapy and that is why we have these services available to them."

Two factors, says Covert, have contributed towards increased demand within the programs. One such factor was the pandemic.

"They're seeing a lot more anxiety and depression, especially with youth and young adults" come through their doors. A related factor is the increased demand for mental health services at local hospitals and other mental health organizations, which sometimes sees referrals directed to Northridge to help close the gap.

"Surrounding the pandemic, the loss of work, the schooling concerns for the young adults - there are many factors and we're seeing the demand grow," she says. "One of the issues for us is how are we going to grow with that, in order to have more groups or one-on-one, which is where the needs are higher. If we want to increase the number of groups, there is an increased cost [for practitioners], for the materials, etc. and we're just seeing the need to grow the program either through putting in more interns or the hiring of another part-time or full-time staff down the road."

Cost is always a factor.

In her role at Northridge, Covert oversees the Salvation Army's local kettle campaign.

Last year's campaign, she admits, 'wasn't the best year' and, as years go by, she says the Kettle Campaign, which is one of the largest funding sources for their community programs, including these mental health services, aren't what they once were.

'I have some concerns about that,' she says. 'About a year-and-a-half ago, I was charged with raising funds for our mental health services to really start building on it. I really needed to look at something that was going to ensure the strength of the program and offset any losses over time for the Kettle Campaign. The goal is to bring people into the gala to raise support for mental health, but also to bring people in to see our building, see what we do there overall, not just from a church perspective, but from a services and program perspective. Mental health is not a campaign that is going to end any time soon, but it is a campaign that is a challenge. It's a challenge from a staffing and volunteer point of view.'

The September 21 Mental Health Gala will take place from 7 ? 10.30 p.m., at their facility at 15338 Leslie Street.

Tickets are on sale now for \$100 and will include dancing and live music courtesy of George St. Kitts and his band, inspiring speeches from mental health advocates, food and non-alcoholic drinks donated by local vendors, including Magna International, a live and online auction, the live auction of a painting made that evening by artist Dube Akinola, and more.

For more information, including tickets, visit northridgesa.com.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter