

Kerry's Place grapples with services for aging population



By Brock Weir

The Autism Spectrum is very broad, and so too are the range of people living on it ? but this range is growing all the time and it is a challenge Kerry's Place Autism Services will be tackling in the years ahead.

Since coming on board as the Aurora-based organization's new Executive Director this spring, Sue Coke has been meeting with Regional leaders and stakeholders to develop their new Strategic Plan, which will carry them through the next three to five years and chief among the challenges in their path is grappling with the needs of Canada's aging population.

We all know the immediate burdens the aging population could place on the health system, but Kerry's Place is looking not only on these commonplace challenges, but also the very unique ones facing the thousands of individuals they support through residential care.

?Obviously, we always want to look at the full person, but as these individuals with autism age they are going to have more medical problems and we are already seeing that,? says Ms. Coke. ?How can we make sure we are meeting their needs? Some of our individuals are non-verbal, so how can we make sure we know that they may have other issues aside from their behaviors?

?What I am helping to do is not only encourage people to make sure we're doing evidence-based practices on the behavioural side, but I also want to see evidence-based practices for people who have any physical issues that might need treatment. As people age, we have to make sure we're addressing all of their needs.

Ms. Coke comes to Kerry's Place after years of work in acute care, including serving as the Executive Vice President of Sunnybrook Hospital, with an additional focus on working with organizations ?that are in transition and having a lot of challenging events happen.?

To that end, Kerry's Place is a particularly good fit, she says, because Kerry's Place itself is in transition.

It is not only the aging population that is putting Kerry's Place in this transitory state, but the new autism program handed down by Ontario's Ministry of Child and Youth Services. Set to change the way support is offered to children and families who are on the Autism Spectrum, the plan will see increased funding for Autism supports and innovative ways of addressing waiting lists for Autism services, which Ms. Coke describes as ?huge.?

?There is a third category, and I think this is where Kerry's Place can really be innovative, and that is the children are funded for ASD support until they are 18 and after that there is no financial support from the Ministry,? she says. ?We have individuals who are coming out of high school and they no longer have any support. A lot of people who have ASD in schools, many of them have support from either a support worker, they get teaching support, they get coaching, but it ends at 18.

?I see an opportunity for Kerry's place to work with other stakeholders and to fundraise and develop programs that will help young adults who are going to be either entering university to go to university, seek a trade, seek employment. They need help, they need coaching on how to apply for a job, how to interview, how to do their resume. Social interaction is challenging, so I believe that we can really help this group of people because there is nobody out there doing it. Looking at employment, looking at their future in education, and helping them just with social skills.?