

Mobile clinic helps Addiction Services for York Region get to the heart of the problem



By Brock Weir

Addiction Services for York Region is getting to the heart of the problem with the launch of a new travelling clinic that will hit many of our community's hotspots.

Addiction Services (ASYR) staff and representatives of the Central LHIN (Local Health Integration Network) launched M-RAAM, the new Mobile Rapid Access Addiction Medication clinic at their Aurora office on Monday morning with a mission to provide drop-in services for people looking for help with their substance abuse, gambling or tobacco use.

"We currently have rapid access addiction medicine clinics in five hospitals, and we're just opening up one now in a sixth hospital, and these are hospitals that are all within the Central LHIN boundaries)," explains Penny Marrett, Executive Director of ASYR.

"One of the things we've discovered is transportation is an issue for people, and particularly in really rural areas of York Region it is much more difficult. We also recognize for a number of people if they are not able to afford the transportation to get to the clinic or they are not available on the day that we're there, it is even harder for them. This is a way in which we can go out to them versus people always coming to us. It is really important for us to be able to go out to individuals who are looking for their support, the information and the need, versus expecting that they will come to us."

This view is also expressed by the Central LHIN, which serves as the primary funder for ASYR.

"This is all about meeting an important need in the community," says Kim Baker, CEO of the Central LHIN. "There are still some areas that are under-served and this is a very innovative way to go out and find patients and families, adults and teens, and provide them with the supports that they need. This is just an example of a service that is responsive to the needs of the population and it is one of several as an array to better respond to the needs of the population we serve."

ASYR is the largest addiction service provider within the Central LHIN. Based in Aurora, they offer a number of clinics and offices throughout York Region and are set to open up a new office next month in Alliston to serve the residents of South Simcoe.

The M-RAAM clinic looks like an ordinary coach bus from the outside, but it is another story all together as soon as you climb the steps inside. There, those seeking out its services will find a comfortable atmosphere in which to speak to on-board nurse practitioners, case managers and counsellors.

At the moment, M-RAAM is a pilot project and its future growth will be determined by both funding and demand.

Following Monday's launch, the bus was headed immediately to its first few stops in Sutton and Pefferlaw, followed by stops in Woodbridge and Newmarket later this week. A full itinerary will be posted each week on their website at asyr.ca.

First-timers will be asked to go online and fill out a brief form and ASYR will call the applicant back and set up a time to come and visit.

"Some community agencies have asked us not to make [our locations] public because it is very specific to their own clients, so it won't look as full, and that is partly because there are some places we'll be going that are closed off to the public and we won't be able to accommodate everyone," says Ms. Marrett. "We want to be sure that we're able to accommodate everybody in a timely way

and not have people wait.?