

Work begins on transformative year for mental health care in York Region

The zoning is in place, the funds are coming in, and now it's nose to the grindstone for the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe (CMHA-YRSS) in bringing York Region's first Mental Health Community Hub to fruition.

Set to be located on Yonge Street, directly across the street from York Regional Headquarters in Newmarket, the CMHA-YRSS has begun doing site work on what promises to be a facility that will change the face of local mental healthcare.

“Our goal is to ensure somebody's first mental health crisis is their last,” says Rebecca Shields, CEO of CMHA-YRSS, of the Hub, which will serve residents ages 12 and up. “This is all about us rolling up our sleeves and thinking of, how do we support people who need to be de-escalated and how do we connect them to the right level of care? That involves two things. It involves designing the space so that it is welcoming to everyone in the Region and we want them to feel safe if they are coming in with their 13-year-old daughter, or they are bringing in their spouse or parents. This is a space for everyone who may be needing some immediate mental health or substance use support, and that space design is on now.”

This work will continue as the organization works with capital planners at Ontario's Ministry of Health to ensure everything they are working to deliver “meets rigorous standards” of the capital planning process.

“Every dollar counts when it is our taxpayer dollars, so we go through a rigorous process with them around the planning, the costing, and everything we need to do, so that our hope is this spring, when we go to tender and get bids with contractors that it is a competitive bid process, and we can then start the work this spring and summer and do the renovations.”

Support for the Mental Health Community Hub is not only coming from the Provincial government; Shields says she is grateful for support from the Region, local Police and Paramedic forces, and even area school boards for their input on how this hub can best serve the community.

“When we have engagements from people with diverse ethno-cultural communities, when we have conversations with Police, what does that all look like when we walk through the door? What is the experience? We want to use language like, “What brought you here?” not triage. We want to understand the nature of the crisis and how do we help, ensuring that we're providing the most evidence-based mental health and substance use support that is truly a client-led experience “what do you need to help resolve the underlying issue of your crisis?” says Shields

“This is about profound change. The space itself and the deep consultations and the work that we are doing today, and will continue to do, is to understand, even from different age ranges, from people that are coming in with our teenagers and adolescents, to people who are older and understand how the space is welcoming to you, because this is a mental health healing space. Recovery happens at the door. This is a space where we will have the highest standards of safety and care, but it is also patient-led and a space where people feel integrated and part of the community.”

And community will be integral to the Hub's success.

As plans have progressed, the team has done neighbourhood walks in the community closest to the property, their Good Neighbour Collective, to make sure they are involved and engaged in the building and construction processes, and also address concerns when they arise.

The community will also be key in making sure programs that truly make a difference are developed.

Shields invites the community to visit their website at cmha-yr.on.ca/about-us/centre-project to learn more about their Leading the Way campaign as well as how to get involved with their Operational Planning Committees.

?It is for people who are interested in providing their advice, guidance and experience,? says Shields. ?We can do so much more when we do it together.?

By Brock Weir