

Addiction Services opens treatment beds in partnership with community groups]

By Brock Weir

GTA residents looking to overcome addiction have an expanded path to recovery thanks to the Aurora-based Addiction Services Central Ontario and community partners.

Addiction Services Central Ontario (ASCO), in partnership with the Krasman Centre and Caritas School of Life, have launched a new pilot program ? a newly-opened withdrawal management centre in York Region.

Located in Vaughan, the centre offers six beds and will work with various community leaders to expand service for community members living with substance use concerns, including drop-in programs, peer support, counselling, case management, harm reduction, psychoeducation, and more.

The Centre is funded by Ontario's Addiction Recovery Fund and organizers say its opening ?marks an important step in expanding the continuum of equitable, accessible, publicly-funded services? in the communities they serve.

?We're one of the largest providers of addiction services in Ontario and we have been providing a suite of services [such as] counselling, treatment, addictions, medicine, case management, peer support, information, referral, education awareness, and we also provide court support and a very specific program for women who are pregnant and who are at risk of using substances, who might be parenting and are at risk of using substances,? says Penny Marrett, Executive Director of Addiction Services Central Ontario. ?As part of this, we're saying there's a continuum of services and some people may decide they wish to withdraw or reduce their consumption of substances. They may be able to stay at home, but for others they need that additional support, to have that opportunity to have a stay in withdrawal management centre, also known as ?detox', gives them that [chance].?

The closest detox centres for anyone who lives in York Region or South Simcoe are in Barrie or Toronto, and being able to offer this kind of care closer to home has long been a goal for ASCO ? and has long been an ask to funders.

That funding came following the Provincial Government's 2021 announcement of the Addictions Recovery Fund, a fund that is in place for three years. It enabled ASCO to partner with both the Krasman and Caritas to make these six beds a reality.

They can't do it alone, adds Marrett, and The Krasman Centre's peer support organization and Caritas' clinical supports have all come to the table to make this happen.

It's what she describes as a ?24/5? service in that it operates Monday through Friday, giving those who avail themselves of the program a chance to figure out their next steps.

?What happens is during those five days they're there is clinicians are all working to help them determine what their next steps will be,? she says. ?We're not discharging them into oblivion?some people will have decided they want to go to longer-term live-in treatment but they need to be in a detox centre before they can go and be stabilized. Individuals may decide they have supports at home and it's safe for them to go back, or individuals may decide they want to do addictions counselling. They will be at home with a referral to an addictions counsellor like our own staff.

?We have other community agencies we have relationships where we can actually do a warm referral to them so they can then come and pick them up and provide the supports for that next phase in their life. For us, the real important piece is during the five days they have a chance to decide their next step in their recovery and where do they want to go. There's no judgement about where it is, we don't tell anybody where they should be going. What do you want to achieve? What's your goal? How do we support you in reaching that goal??

The 24/5 structure is the model simply due to current resources, notes Marrett, but they will work to connect people with the

supports they need.

?We're really trying to build a program that will be able to offer a number of different things, but right now we don't have the funding to do all of what we want to do, but we're talking and we're hoping to have more funding to be able to do more comprehensive withdrawal management centre. Some people may require more immediate addictions 24/7. We know who has space?because we don't want you to call 10 different places. We keep in touch to know who has space and then you can decide if that is where you want to take your referral or not.?

ASCO and its partners have this funding in place until March 31, 2024 and, during this window, will monitor the number of people served and the services used in order to keep building.

?We suspect six beds aren't going to be enough in the end for our region, but it is a start and that's the important thing for us. We believe that between the number of individuals served and the outputs and the outcomes more generally speaking will demonstrate the real importance. This has been a service that even individuals who are clients of ours have been asking for years and years. Some people can afford a private detox but the majority of people can't. For us, part of the continuum is we need to have a publicly-funded withdrawal management centre for individuals who are looking for that service, so we're really pleased to be able to offer it ? very excited.?

For more information on the program, call 905-758-2270. Services can also be accessed through ConnexOntario at connexontario.ca or toll-free though 1-866-531-2600.