

FTP has program to help pregnant women with substance issues

Being pregnant is hard enough for some, but being pregnant while on methadone adds a whole other dimension.

Family Transition Place (FTP) is one of six agencies to receive annual funding from the Central-West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) for new programming to support pregnant and parenting women struggling with opiate use.

FTP was chosen to receive such funding because of its compliment to present services offered to women in the Caledon and Dufferin Area.

"I felt sad, guilty, and regretful," commented Patricia, a pregnant methadone program patient. "I was constantly worrying if my baby was going to be all right. My mind never stopped. I wanted to enjoy what should have been a happy time in my life, but struggling with these issues made it impossible. I am so thankful that while pregnant I had someone to talk to and ask questions."

The program, now called Mothers Changing Paths (MCP), is designed to compassionately and nonjudgmentally help women whose lives have been affected by ongoing use of opiates (codeine, percocet, morphine, demerol, oxycontin, heroin, methadone, etc.) and other substances. It's a comprehensive, client-centred counselling program that educates and incorporates harm reduction strategies. Many mothers become dependent on drugs that were initially prescribed as pain relief, and once addiction takes hold, it proves difficult to shake. There is a grave concern that pregnant women or mothers may not seek help because they feel they might be scrutinized and labelled as a "bad parent."

According to the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse report, *First Do No Harm: Responding to Canada's Prescription Drug Crisis* (2013), it is estimated that 22 per cent of Canadian women of child-bearing age (15 to 44) reported in 2011 that within the past year they had used prescription drugs, among this population 16.8 per cent admitted to the use of pain relievers. This is a growing concern. Ontario currently ranks extremely high in terms of opiate use in Canada.

Substance use, like mental health concerns, does not discriminate. It can affect anybody at any time in their life. There is stigma attached to opiate use, especially with pregnancy and parenting.

FTP thrives on being an open and welcoming agency for all women, no matter the current circumstance.

Anyone who is struggling with opiate use and would like to know more, can contact FTP's 24-hour crisis/info line at 519-941-4357 or 905-584-4357.