

## New substance abuse and mental health supports available in Caledon

Written By JULIA LLOYD

A new working group has been formed by the Peel Integrated Drug Strategy (PIDS) to strengthen substance abuse use and mental health supports in Caledon.

But, why does Caledon need a working group dedicated to them?

The Town of Caledon has limited resources to support residents around these issues.

Simran Kaur is the drug strategy coordinator at PIDS and said, out of the three regions in Peel, Caledon has the least amount of information regarding substance use.

"We did an environmental scan of Peel and identified specific populations to reach out to so as to better understand the needs, gaps and challenges they face around substance use," Kaur explained. "One of the groups identified were youth in Caledon."

From the data collected from the environmental scan of Peel, Caledon has the largest proportion of youth out of the three municipalities.

"There doesn't seem to be much conversation happening around substance use and we do face certain challenges when engaging the community and more importantly, youth," said Kaur.

Out of the drug strategy, PIDS created a working group to look at what they can do to further improve service delivery of substance abuse and mental health services in Caledon. Currently, agencies have satellite sites and programs that run out of Caledon, but more needs to be done to provide consistent support to the community.

"There are folks and providers doing things, but what happened is we are not based in Caledon which makes it challenging to fully support the community. Working together to overcome these barriers will enable us to better support and engage Caledon," said Kaur.

Kaur said she and other partner organizations who have formed the working group are still trying to work out what to do and how to do it, but their general goal for this working group is to do a better job of coming together collaboratively to provide important services for the Caledon residents.

The second part of this working group is figuring out how PIDS can better engage the community around substance use conversations.

"We want to make sure what we're very specific and intentional when targeting Caledon and ensure their views are incorporated into the drug strategy we are developing for all of Peel," said Kaur.

The working group is a subset of PIDS' main drug strategy, with the organization expecting to roll out a focused strategy by the end of 2020.

Kaur said, the strategy is in stage two right now, focusing predominantly on consultations, meaning the organization hopes to engage with area residents on the drug strategy.

"So while we develop the larger strategy, we can create working groups to address things that have immediate needs," explained Kaur.

PIDS has recently compiled a panel of ten people, made up of individuals who have lived with, or are currently dealing with issues surrounding drug abuse. A recent goal for the panel was to conduct secret shopping assessments on all the fixed needle exchanges in Caledon. And so the peers went in and looked at the fiscal environment and evaluated the staff and also looked at whether staffs were knowledgeable on the supplies they hand out. And these exchange sites provide naloxone and are trained on how to use it, explained Kaur.

Just this Tuesday, Public Health hosted a council meeting where Kaur presented the findings from the needle exchange sites.

?We had discussions about recommendations regarding what can be done to address the challenges pointed out,? Kaur said. ?At the end of the meeting the report and all recommendations were given to the sites, while it was made clear a six month a check-in would be required to see how the services are doing.?