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Jessica Cunha | May 28, 2013 - 3:59 PM | Report a Typo or Correction

Mental health program bridges services for youth in crisis

A new mental health program is building bridges between the services offered by various health institutions.

The Bridges Project, a collaboration between the Youth Services Bureau, the Royal and the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, offers services to families and youth in crisis outside of a hospital setting.

Five months after the program was announced and one month after coming into service, Bridges already has 12 clients.

"As a caring community we want to see young people get the care they need when they need it," said Joanne Lowe, executive director of the Youth Services Bureau on May 6, during a community meeting of the Ottawa Board of Health.



Mental health program bridges services for youth in crisis. West Carleton Secondary School student Heather Bisailion, 16, donates her photo on youth mental health to the Bridges Project. Jessica Cunha/Metroland

MINIMIZE RISK

Before the Bridges Project, it was up to those in crisis to find and access the services needed after being discharged from hospital.

"Up until a few weeks ago, we would discharge those patients with a bit of a safety plan ... and point them in the right direction," said Alex Munter, CEO and president of CHEO.

The first 14 days after discharge is when the risk of suicide is the greatest, he added.

Bridges helps minimize that risk by making it easier for at-risk youth to access the help they need once they leave the hospital.

"We go to meet those youth where they are ... when they are at the highest risk," said Munter. "By working together on this we will literally change the future."

The program is offered to youth between the ages of 12 and 18.

In the past three years, CHEO has seen a 67 per cent rise in youth crisis visits, said Munter.

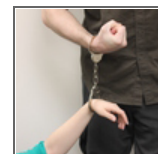
Providing services outside the hospital frees up beds, and youth in crisis can maintain some normalcy by staying at home and accessing services where they live.

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"These interventions are provided in the community ... and help relieve pressures on hospitals," said Dr. Alison Freeland, associate chief of psychiatry at the Royal.

"We work with the client and their families," said Lowe. "It gives us a fantastic opportunity to really see a client holistically."

Photographs taken by youth, for a contest spearheaded by Ottawa Public Health, depicting mental health issues, were donated to the Bridges Project.

With files from Laura Mueller

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