

Youth mental health clinic expanding hours

BY LARISSA CAHUTE , OTTAWA SUN

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Emily had high hopes for college.

The straight-A high school student and student council member was set to start her post-secondary education at Algonquin College in September 2010.

"I felt like I was on top of the world — and then I graduated," said Emily, who didn't want her last name used.

The transition was too much to handle

"I didn't adjust well and I began to fall," she said. "I started withdrawing from my friends and my family and my school and I turned into someone that I barely recognized — and I didn't like her. And that's when I knew I had to get help."

Emily is just one of 225 youth and teenagers who have benefited from the Youth Services Bureau's youth mental health walk-in clinic.

The free service opened in January offering a walk-in on Thursdays for youth aged 12 to 20.

Emily and YSB staff announced Friday the clinic will be expanding its services.

With \$80,000 in funding from Ottawa Public Health, along with \$40,000 from Bell Canada's Let's Talk initiative service will open twice a week: Tuesdays and Thursdays from noon to 8 p.m.

Ottawa's medical officer of health Dr. Isra Levy said it's a step in the right direction.

"Many mental health issues have their onset in childhood and adolescence — almost half of mental health problem disorders that occur, occur before the age of 13, and three quarters before the age of 25," he said.

According to Levy, 10% of school aged children say their mental health is poor and less than a third have access to mental health services.

"We see in Ottawa the tragedy of two to four suicides in youth every year," he said. "That is just a number that is a tragedy for me."

Emily believes adding one day to the walk-in will benefit young and struggling students like herself — considering the long number of therapists before finally finding comfort at YSB.

"I needed to talk to someone who knew youth, someone who wouldn't think my problems were juvenile or silly," she said. "I walked into the waiting room (at YSB) and felt something that I never felt at (other doctor's offices) and that was: I finally felt like I was being judged or looked down on."

Twitter@larissacahute

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