

New program aims to keep youth suffering from mental health crisis out of hospitals

BY ROBIN LEVINSON, OTTAWA CITIZEN DECEMBER 10, 2012



Councillor Allan Hubley speaks at the launch of a new youth mental health treatment team that will close a crucial gap in services for Ottawa's young people in crisis.

Photograph by: Chris Mikula, The Ottawa Citizen

A new program launched Monday is aimed at helping youth aged 12-18 who have been hospitalized for mental-health issues get the help they need at home.

As part of the Bridges Project, teens will be placed immediately into the program, where they will have direct access to the services they need. Traditionally, they had to wait for a referral from the hospital to a psychiatrist.

In giving children access to a range of experts—from psychiatrists to educators—the program will offer a comprehensive approach to managing youth with mental challenges, .said Joanne Low, executive director of the Youth Services Bureau.

Ottawa city councillor Allan Hubley knows how important—and how difficult—it can be to get the right care for a child in the midst of a mental-health crisis.

Before his son Jamie's suicide last year, the 15-year-old had been hospitalized for severe depression.

The Hubley's found it difficult to navigate the complicated referral system that connects youth who have just been in hospital with outpatient services.

“We didn’t know where to go when we came out of the hospital,” Hubley said.

Alex Munter, president and CEO of Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario, estimates that the program will help more than 150 kids in Ottawa recover and stay out of hospital.

“What we’re doing today is we’re flipping it upside down,” Munter said. “This is a case where one plus one plus one plus one is going to equal a lot more than four.”

The program is a joint partnership between CHEO, Ottawa Public Health, The Royal Mental Health-Care and Research facility and the Youth Services Bureau.

For the past two years, Munter said hospitalizations for mental-health issues among youth have increased 50 per cent. And referrals from hospitals to mental-health specialists have doubled.

“This community has been shocked into action by the terrible tragedy of suicide among our teens,” said Joanne Low, executive director of the Youth Services Bureau.

With funding from both the province and the Champlain Local Health Integration Network, the program is now ready to go. The regional health authority has pledged \$500,000 a year to the program as part of its \$11-million initiative to fund community health services.

The ultimate goal of the Bridges Project is to help youth who have been hospitalized for a mental-health issue get care at home and not have to be readmitted.

Hubley said the program will help many more people.

“I can tell you in our own case how many lives have been touched because of what happened to our son,” he said. “There’s a ripple effect.”

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