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Ottawa Mission makes mental health a priority

New partnerships add needed staff to serve clients

Michelle Nash/Metroland



Jordanna Marchand, the Ottawa Mission's coordinator of mental health services, says two new partnerships the Mission has entered into should help fill some gaps in mental health services at the men's shelter.

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By [Michelle Nash Baker](#)

A downtown men's shelter is on a mission to fill the gaps in their clients' health care needs.

The Ottawa Mission announced it is now working with the Canadian Mental Health Association to enhance the mental health services at the shelter. The partnership will add a full-time outreach worker who specializes in engaging and connecting with transient clients, such as those who frequent shelters.

Jordanna Marchand, the Ottawa Mission's coordinator of mental health services, said partnering with the Canadian Mental Health Association is an obvious thing to do. "They are the experts," Marchand said. "They have the skills and knowledge to help."

In addition to adding an outreach worker, the Mission has also partnered with the Royal Ottawa Hospital which will offer the services of a part-time psychiatric nurse to the Mission's mental health team.

“We strive to help shelter residents navigate through whatever crisis they are in and to help them feel valued, respected and understood throughout the process,” Marchand said.

Marchand explained the need is great, with an existing wait list to see a psychiatrist who visits twice a month. Adding the nurse being made available by the Royal will help more clients navigate to the services they need, she said.

“Shelter life is very difficult,” Marchand said. “They don’t necessarily have access to the same mental health services you or I have and access is really important to getting the help you need.”

Marchand said she believes that these two partnerships – and in turn the services they provide – will enable the Mission to connect with more individuals and help them.

“Different people respond to different approaches,” she said, adding that both the outreach worker and the nurse expands the Mission’s ability to make more clients feel comfortable and reach out for the help they need.

STRIVING FOR BETTER

The Mission has been making mental health a priority, with Marchand and a fellow co-worker being certified to teach mental health first aid to the Mission’s frontline staff. The certification, offered through the Mental Health Commission of Canada, helps individuals recognize if someone is struggling with a mental health crisis. According to Marchand, the program provides people the skills and knowledge to help those with a potential or developing mental health problem.

Marchand said the certification process was very informative and is an asset for herself and staff at the Mission.

“It’s all about providing better services for our clients,” she said. “You learn that there are a lot of signs that maybe you wouldn’t know were a sign related to mental health. We want to make sure they are not falling through the cracks.”

The Ottawa Mission first opened more than 100 years ago, offering food, clothing and shelter to homeless men or men facing difficult times. Since it first opened its doors in 1906, the shelter has expanded to currently having 235 beds, including 21 beds for palliative care and 36 beds for addiction treatment programs.

In addition to the mental health programs, the Mission has a learning centre, runs a job training program and houses a medical and dental clinic.