

Eating disorder group expands and moves to new central location

BY KIM ZARZOUR

Eating Disorders of York Region is on the move - in more ways than one.

Nearly one-third of all Ontario teenaged girls are affected by severely problematic food and weight behaviour experts say, but few seek help because of the stigma surrounding eating disorders.

For five years, the York Region agency has tried reaching out to this vulnerable, hard-to-reach group, but it has been a challenge, says executive director, Janice Morgante.

Most people try to keep the problem secret, she says, and few are aware of what services are available to help. Even when they are prepared to seek help and know what's available, few young people can access the agency, located in Thornhill, without a car or means of transportation.

Now new funding may make it easier.

The non-profit organization has just received grants from Ontario Trillium Foundation and York Region's New Agency Development Fund to move to a more central location, to expand to several satellite offices throughout the region and to print a resource directory called Emotion in Motion to be distributed to all schools.

The new location, on Yonge St. in Richmond Hill, comes thanks to \$355,300 from the Ontario Trillium Foundation earmarked to create a new Community Support Centre. It will house Eating Disorders of York Region along with Hospice Richmond Hill, Helpmate Community Information and Volunteer Bureau, Community Living York South Foundations Program and the Aids Committee of York Region.

They're calling it the "common roof initiative". The new centre will provide a broad range of services to those with life-threatening illnesses while delivering cost-effective services to marginalized communities, including those who struggle with eating disorders.

Located at 10155 Yonge St., hidden behind the modern facade of a jewelry store, the new location is a "cozy, charming century home - but

no one would know that," Ms Morgante says. "It's an authentic, homelike setting with wooden floors, beveled French doors and the original brick hearth and fireplace. It's a very warm, healing location."

The big plus, Morgante says, is the centre is on a bus route, "and it's generic. No one has to identify why they're going in. And young teens can go back and forth on their own after school."

Helpmate, which provides free information on a wide range of local and government services, will provide the reception services for all the agencies, she says.

The new Community Support Centre is across the street from the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts where the eating disorders clinic will hold its fifth annual Wings of Hope Gala Nov. 29.

The following day the agency will move to its new location. "I'm not going to sleep at all that night," she laughs. "It's all very exciting."

The agency also received \$43,460 from the region's New Agency Development Fund to print a directory of resources for eating disorders for presentations to teachers and students. "Emotion in Motion" will be the first directory of its kind for the area, Ms Morgante says.

"This was a gap we'd discovered. There are programs no one knows about and because they don't know, there's never enough registered for them."

Ms Morgante says the agency will deliver the resource information to every school in the region. She hopes schools will follow up by inviting their experts to speak with students.

A new satellite office has been opened in Newmarket, a second is set to open in Vaughan and the agency is searching for a third location in Georgina.

All four locations will offer free support groups with qualified psychotherapists who specialize in eating disorders. The confidential service is geared to all ages and no doctor's reference is required.

The agency also offers two open house presentations per month, a variety of programs like skill-building to deal with stress and life balance and hopes to help schools start clubs that deal with the issue.

Ms Morgante estimates more than half the population of York Region is affected by eating disorders. "Everyone knows people who are struggling, but don't know how to deal with it.

"We're all dealing with stress and often it's not something that we can face head on - like job or marriage or parents. Some cope with addictive behaviour like gambling or drugs or alcohol, some with food. It's a way to gain control - or feel like we've gained control - but it quickly turns around and controls the individual."

GOOD TO KNOW

WHAT: "Wings of Hope" Eating Disorders of York Region Fifth Annual Fundraising Gala with Silent Auction and Dessert Reception, presented by Steppin' Out Theatrical Productions

Honouring Dr. Randolph Staab for his contribution to the field of eating disorders.

WHEN: Sunday, Nov. 29, 8 p.m. Doors open for silent auction at 7 p.m.

WHERE: Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts, 10268 Yonge St. Richmond Hill

To make a donation or to purchase tickets (\$75 per person) call 905-886-6632 during business hours, Monday to Friday 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or mail to 300 John St., Ste 271, Thornhill

The new Community Support Centre can be reached at 905-884-6683. Eating Disorders of York Region will retain its current phone number, 905-886-6632.

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