

# Envision has vision for vital services

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Envision Counselling and Support Centre has a new leadership team following the recent retirement of long-term executive director Patt Lenover-Adams.

Christa Daku is taking the lead position with Lynda Rideout moving into the assistant director's role as the board of directors takes the organization into a new era of service with even more services to offer in the near future.

Besides the mini-workshops being offered this month (see accompanying article) Daku said Envision is hoping to add grief and loss counselling services soon, once funding, time and space allows as this type of service has been identified as one that is currently underserved in southeast Saskatchewan.

Daku will be working from Envision's Estevan office while Rideout will primarily work from their Weyburn location. Daku had been in the Weyburn office prior to the appointment, working as a counselling supervisor while Rideout was an administration supervisor for the 70 member staff that consists of a mixture of employees and volunteers.

Daku said she expects to continue to offer some counselling expertise and Rideout will continue to provide administrative services including data collection as well as in-home and outreach services.

"The board has been very co-operative and supportive and remain as passionate about Envision as the original board was when it began as the violence intervention program," said Daku who has been with the organization for seven years. Rideout came aboard five years ago.

Envision, in its nearly 20 years of service, has expanded to three offices with the third unit located in Carlyle.

The grief and loss component to the Envision roster was suggested by Lenover-Adams before she left this spring. It can include a variety of factors, not just death and dying issues, the two women explained.

"Take newcomers to our communities. They experience huge changes in their lives and they often grieve for ones left behind or fear of their new lifestyle. We began to recognize these kind of things as early as 2008 so would like to work it into our counselling services and it could

evolve into a separate program," said Daku.

Funding for Envision has stabilized as the programs have matured. They now have a resource development position within their ranks to help them keep the funds they are already receiving from traditional sources, while seeking new funds for expansion. Daku added that when community needs are identified, they look for funding sources so they can continue to grow from the original concept of providing a place and a service where mostly women, facing crisis or abusive situations could go to seek help.

"Those primary needs remain the same," said Daku. "We are just seeing more of them."

In 2011, Envision helped 943 individuals or families in true crisis situations and that grew to 1,192 last year. A strategic plan that was developed in 2012 will be revisited in 2015 due to the growing and changing needs. It will also point them toward ways they can tighten up all their programming and re-evaluating community needs and wants, said the new director.

The 24-hour sexual assault and sexual abuse support phone line, staffed by volunteers remains a vital cog and connection to residents in need. The two women said that service was identified as a vital need, especially after the traditional service industries closed after 5 p.m. or on weekends. Support counselling came into being in 2006, first in Weyburn and then Estevan and from there, throughout the southeast. Children exposed to violence required some supportive programming too, they learned, so that service was introduced in 2008, first in Estevan as a pilot project and then as a full program. Funding restrictions have prevented it from further expansion at this juncture.

A family intervention program began in 2012. Daku and Rideout said it's interesting to note how companies are acknowledging how important it is to help families in crisis situations since it ultimately leads to happier, healthier and more stable labour forces.

Working with men who are often seen as the culprits, and sometimes victims, is part of the mini-workshops being formulated right now.

The core vision, they said, is to reduce violence against the individual. "Our roots are still helping those who are experiencing abuse," said Daku.

Rideout said the provincial Status of Women agency continues to support their work in a real way, and through them, Envision will be offering services to help prevent cyber bullying and cyber violence against young women in coming days. Once again, this was identified as one of those gaps that become evident over a certain period of time.

"A co-ordinator will do a needs assessment, find the gaps, develop a strategy and then we could be offering a program within 18 months," Rideout added.

The Saskatchewan Law Foundation is another source of funds for Envision since they do a lot of research in terms of the legal aspects of their service. That expands to offering law classes in high schools and integration programs for newcomers in the community who may not grasp the

roles within the justice systems from counselling to police to social workers to lawyers and courts. With that in mind, realizing that many newcomers arrive from countries where democracy is not always in full force, Envision partners with local police services to improve this perception and educate them on the fact that the police are in place to provide assistance, not harm.

"The outreach program is active in schools," said Rideout. A new package going out provides information for businesses, too.

Intake services and assessments continue to be a busy portfolio for the paid employees and volunteers alike. That leads subjects not only to Envision's services but perhaps to agencies such as mental health, addiction services or other specialized organizations. Envision is engaged in a lot of cross-referrals over the course of a year.

Daku, who had a background in women's shelters in northern Alberta, before arriving in Weyburn and Estevan, also dealt with children's therapy programs before taking some time out to raise a family. When she felt comfortable getting back into the social assistance game, the VIP program, which begat Envision, was natural as she stepped right into an in-home support program in Weyburn before moving into the senior counselling role a couple of years later.

Rideout came to southeast Saskatchewan from Surrey, B.C. in 1999. She had served with a non-profit counselling outfit, not unlike VIP in that province. Her forte was support programming and statistics, so once she relocated to Saskatchewan with her families, she took a job with Legal Aid, but felt her place was within the counselling community. So after she and her husband adopted a son and got settled in, she joined Envision as an office manager. That job blossomed into more administrative work and computer programming.

Both women are pleased to be able to retain roles they are familiar with and happy doing.

"Our offices are tight. There is no community jealousy or geographic pulls," said Daku.

"I wasn't going into this job expecting to make drastic changes. You're nervous heading in, but I'm seeing from the support we're getting, that I really had nothing to fear. It's working out very well, and we're continuing to grow."

- See more at: <http://www.estevanmercury.ca/envision-has-vision-for-vital-services-1.1448198#sthash.uHy2glbv.dpuf>