

## Envision starts up walk-in counselling, holds AGM

Greg Nikkel / Weyburn Review -- June 28, 2019 12:21 AM



*The staff and board members for Envision Counselling and Support Centre gathered at the end of their annual meeting on June 18, held at the Microtel Hotel in Weyburn. The annual meeting saw a new chair and vice-chair elected, with Tana Cugnet as vice-chair (front left), and Brian Pilloud as the new chair (front far right). Photo by Greg Nikkel of the Weyburn Review*

Envision Counselling and Support Centre has continued to grow with the services they are offering to southeast area residents, including with the addition of a walk-in counselling service in Estevan and Weyburn.

Staff, board members and supporters of Envision heard details of the new walk-in service from staff member Larissa Smeltzer, who spoke during the Envision annual general meeting June 18 in Weyburn. She discussed how the new service has gone in its first full month of operation.

The service is offered at the Salvation Army in both Weyburn and Estevan, going on Wednesdays and Thursdays in Estevan.

The service is still building with the word getting out that it's available, said Smeltzer, but from the feedback she's already had, "it's very needed in our communities."

The one statistic that she passed on that shows how much the service is needed was in answer to the question what the clients would have done if the walk-in counselling was not available. According to the feedback, 39 per cent of the respondents said they wouldn't have gone anywhere.

"They would've stayed at home and maybe left to their own devices," said Smeltzer, noting this sometimes doesn't go very well when that happens.

The main issues that have brought her clients to the walk-in service are mental health related (61 per cent), stress-related (50 per cent), anger issues (44 per cent) and domestic violence and addictions issues (29 per cent).

She noted many communities across the province are also offering walk-in counselling. Of those who have come to her sessions, she's had a lot of comments from people surprised that the service is available as they didn't really know that it was offered.

Asked why it's being offered at the Salvation Army church location, Smeltzer said, "They were the first ones to approach us for a partnership. It's a high-traffic area in both communities too."

Envision's executive director Christa Daku added the opportunity to offer walk-in counselling came up very suddenly without much notice, and this was the best solution to begin this service.

Smeltzer said there are pros and cons to using these locations, as it may keep some people away who otherwise might make use of the drop-in counselling, but on the other hand, she estimates about 40 per cent of her clients have come from Salvation Army workers, "so it's a very welcoming environment."

Asked how many walk-in clients are coming for counselling for the first time, she said it was probably a majority.

Earlier in the meeting, an overview of statistics was provided to give a picture of how many people and families are being helped through Envision.

The counselling service has four offices, in Weyburn, Estevan, Carlyle and Oxbow, and an area of 28,700 square kilometres with a population of over 54,000 people.

Envision staff drove a total of 79,681 kilometres in the 2018-19 fiscal year, which is up by 4,316 kilometres from the previous year.

For the interpersonal violence and abuse program, 83 per cent of these clients are female, and a third are between the ages of 26 and 35 years. In a 10-year span, there were 220 referrals in the 2008-09 year, 399 in 2017-18, and 398 in 2018-19.

While both men and women experience violence, women do experience higher rates. Their risk of violent victimization is 20 per cent higher than for men.

In the family intervention program, 36 per cent of their clients seek support for couple relationship or family relationship breakdowns, and 19 per cent seek support for child or adolescent behaviour.

Referrals in this program numbered 33 in 2011-12, which rose to 285 in 2017-18, and dipped slightly to 274 in 2018-19, with 1,096 family members involved in this past year.

For the children exposed to violence program, 72 per cent of clients seek support for family violence-related issues. Broken by age, the largest group of children in this program are aged four to six (38 per cent); seven to nine-year-olds are 22 per cent; 10-12 year-olds are 28 per cent of the clients; those aged 13-15 are three per cent, and those aged over 16 comprise nine per cent of the clients.

There were 39 clients referred in 2018-19, with 67 referred in 2017-18.

Family support program staff drove a total of 159,627 kilometres in the 2018-19 fiscal year, with 157 contracts in place. Of these, 55 are family support contracts, 49 are child aide contracts, 53 are diversion contracts and two are ABI contracts.