

New community outreach centre offers all the right help under one roof

by Gloria Welton

Right in the middle of Charlottetown, a refuge is open throughout the day for Islanders struggling with homelessness, poverty, and many other issues that require compassion and support.

The centre offers a warm haven for people to have a snack, take a shower, do their laundry, access a phone and computer, and talk with community support representatives who are there to help.

Mike Redmond, Manager of Bedford MacDonald House, a homeless shelter for men, also manages the new centre. He says as a result of a rising need and with the help of tremendous community support, the centre opened the first week in January.

"We have a social responsibility to make sure nobody is left behind," says Mike. "We need to do the best we can with the resources we have to help these folks get on the right path. Most of them have nobody, and that is the problem."

"Since we opened, we have been very busy. There are about 30 or 40 people who come through our door on a daily basis," says Mike. "Our visitors include men, women, teenagers, and families. Every case is different and complex."

Staff and service providers available at the centre

"Between Bedford MacDonald House and the Community Outreach Centre, we have four full-time and 10 part-time staff," says Mike.

About 10 to 15 service representatives from organizations such as the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI, John Howard Society, Social Services and Housing, and Canadian Mental Health are on site at scheduled times. Also, UPEI nursing students will do their clinical rotation at the centre.

"At our mens' shelter, the first thing needed is usually medical and dental care. We have relationships with local dentists and other professionals who will do things quickly."

"Also, the need for identification is an issue for many people. We probably have the best relationships with police services in Canada in terms of identifying risk in a timely fashion and addressing needs."

"Staff and volunteers need to be compassionate and understanding. Unfortunately, in this country people using shelters have a certain stigma. It is assumed people have done something wrong."

"But 90 percent of the men coming to our shelter have experienced some type of trauma. Once you understand that, you realize many factors contribute to where they are now."

Personal stories need to be told

"We had a war veteran at the house with PTSD and various stages of dementia, and nobody was looking after him. We had to get assessments done and get him into long-term care. There was heavy pressure to get him out of the house, but what were we going to do? Those cases are hard."

"One guy we are working with is only in his twenties and has been an alcoholic for about 15 years. Now he has been five months without a drink and is doing really well. He has no place to go. He has developed a love for small engine repair and we need to help him follow that interest."

"Another man in his early forties has spent 75 percent of his life in jail. He has had a hard life. In the last few months, I have seen a change in him. It is important to understand and appreciate that life has not been kind to some people."



Mike Redmond, Manager of the Community Outreach Centre, with Tami MacIntyre, Case Worker. Abby Wilson, far right, and Amber Laybolt, far left, are third-year UPEI student nurses doing their clinical rotation at the centre. "Probably 60 percent of the Island's population is two paycheques away from being homeless," says Mike. "When you know that, you can approach the issue of homelessness with more compassion and understanding."

Employment support and employer engagement

"A construction company has asked for some labourers, and another company called All Star Cresting Embroidery and Screen printing has already hired two of our guests."

"As a result, they have been able to exit the homeless shelter and go to transitional housing. When our clients are hired, we offer support by visiting the workplace to see how they are getting along."

"We are looking for employers who have compassion, understanding, and flexibility to understand the journey people are on."

"People here stay with us as long as they need to, until they are ready to take the next step."

For more information, contact **Mike Redmond**
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For the full interview, visit www.employmentjourney.com and search **Community Outreach Centre**.

Leadership program helps youth gain employability skills

by Stacy Dunn

St. John Ambulance now offers **SJA Connect**, a health, safety, and leadership development program for young people aged 14 to 19. It is designed to improve the health, safety, confidence and competencies of youth through training, volunteer service, and leadership opportunities.

"By delivering a variety of topics, youth learn useful skills essential for entering the workforce," says **Annette Deagle**, Director of Operations & Community Service, St. John Ambulance-NS/ PEI Council.

"Along with First Aid, the program covers WHMIS, team leadership, personal risk and stress management, public speaking, team dynamics, and volunteer opportunities."

Youth receive a SJA Connect Youth Leadership Certificate, a First Aid Certificate, and gain diverse leadership skills such as team building, conflict resolution, and citizenship. This national program was launched in 2018 and came to PEI in March 2019.

"To date, we have offered Level I of the program to 22 participants," says Annette. "We plan to offer Level I again this year over two days during March break."

Besides First Aid, Level I covers five topics: SJA in Canada, Why Volunteer, Team Dynamics, Conflict Resolution and Citizenship. It takes 10 hours to complete.

Topic options are relevant to real world skills and career paths. "Youth are encouraged to seek out volunteer opportunities within their communities at various non-profits, charitable organizations, or their high school or post-secondary institution."

Community support

SJA Connect also looks for partnerships in the community with organizations that serve youth.



"These organizations can help increase the awareness of the value of community engagement, help develop life-long health and safety habits, and improve job readiness as they participate in diverse volunteer opportunities."

Videos with testimonials

Life Skills Development:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rgHWZMMBD8>
Building Confident Community Leaders:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glQmnhtcGSU>

For more information on **SJA Connect**, contact **St. John Ambulance-PEI** at **902-370-3670** or email infopei@sja.ca

Visit www.connect.sja.ca