



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Crisis Response Program

October 1, 1998

Crisis response program celebrates first year of operation

Toronto, ON – As little as ten years ago, individuals experiencing an acute psychiatric crisis were faced with limited resources. A psychotic episode likely resulted in a visit to a hospital emergency ward, or the police being dispatched to deal with the situation as best they could.

With greater awareness of issues surrounding mental illness, the number of programs and resources available to individuals suffering from mental illness, and their families, increased substantially. While there are still gaps in the system, more support systems are in place today than ever before.

The Toronto Integrated Community Mental Health Crisis Response Program is one resource which can make a significant difference to those confronted with the difficulties of serious mental illness.

Funded by the Ministry of Health's Community Investment Fund (CIF), the Crisis Response Program is the result of collaborative relationships with other service providers including hospitals, police and other community agencies. Launched in October, 1997, the program has since received an average 165 calls a month. Eighty-five percent of calls resulted in a visit from crisis response workers.

How does the program work?

The crisis response program is designed to assist adults 16 and over with serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia or manic depression, who are experiencing an acute psychiatric crisis. Its purpose is to provide a timely response to residents within the areas of Scarborough, East York, North York, and Etobicoke.

Clients may be living in private homes, women's shelters, group homes, boarding homes, or with their families. In some instances, clients are homeless. Often they lack the support network of family and friends, and are coping with mental illness in relative isolation.

They may be experiencing their first psychotic episode or it may be part of a chronic mental health problem. Frequently, the crisis is triggered by a traumatic event, such as losing their housing, their job, a member of their family, or simply by neglecting to take medication.

If they are aware of the program, a family member, an employer, a friend or an associate calls the crisis line. Crisis response workers, generally with backgrounds in social work, psychology, occupational therapy, nursing, addictions, and counselling, are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Assessing the problem over the phone, the crisis worker decides on the most appropriate course of action, which may include linking the individual with other resources within the community; calling 9-1-1 directly; or visiting the client at their current location to provide a more in-depth assessment.

"It used to be a real challenge for the consumer, family or members of the person's support network to access mental health resources in the past," says Freida Chavez, Director of Saint Elizabeth Health Care's Mental Health Program. "Through the crisis response program we can assist the person in a less intrusive, less intimidating way. It is designed to enhance, not duplicate the services that exist."

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Often, crisis workers will help minimize the crisis situation during a mobile visit. In some instances, crisis workers will accompany the client to the emergency department to advocate for and assist them. They may provide links to housing, and case management services. They also may visit the client on a daily basis, monitor their medication use, and continue working with the individual and family for up to six weeks.

The crisis program also has a respite bed, supervised by a professional health care worker, and available to the client for five to seven days.

Crisis response program – Other information

The program was developed in partnership with Saint Elizabeth Health Care, New Dimensions in Community Living, Sunnybrook Health Science Centre, Reconnect, the Canadian Mental Health Association - West Toronto, the Community Mental Health Centre - North York East, and the Griffin Centre.

A trained mental health crisis worker responds to the program's 24-hour crisis line and determines the need for a mobile crisis visit, which is attended by two crisis workers. The Saint Elizabeth Health Care team responds to calls west of Yonge, and the New Dimensions team responds to calls east of Yonge St.

Sunnybrook Health Science Centre provides mobile psychiatric residents to visit with the crisis team.

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