



Mental Health- Interim Report

Mental Health in a Healthy Community

Mental health is beginning to surface along side of the traditional importance of physical health. The World Health Organization has included this in their definition of health as being more than an absence of disease but rather “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being”⁽¹⁾.

The health of the community is directly affected by the degree to which individuals in the community can directly influence their own determinants of health, such as income, education, housing, and access to health care. The ability to take care of one’s mental health needs often involves the health care system. Minor mental health or illness as well as acute mental illness, when dealt with in a comprehensive and timely fashion, will avoid the burden of chronic illness and resultant damage to family life and negative impact on personal socioeconomic factors. During their months of work, the Community Health and Wellness teams identified a number of issues related to barriers to healthy living that were directly linked to access to mental health services.

Fort Erie and Mental Health

On December 13, 2002, 28 people gathered at the Centennial Library at the invitation of Community Health and Wellness Fort Erie. The purpose of the gathering was to create an opportunity for discussion and assessment of the scope and qualities of mental health services and supports for the residents of Fort Erie. Community and regional providers of mental health services were present.

The participants in the meeting identified that Fort Erie has the unique quality of being a border town where people arrive and settle from all over the world. Some of the newcomers have experienced war trauma resulting in significant mental health challenges. This situation highlights the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services.

“Health care organizations should develop participatory, collaborative partnerships with communities and utilize a variety of formal and informal mechanisms to facilitate community and patient/consumer involvement in designing and implementing culturally and linguistically appropriate service-related activities.”⁽⁵⁾

The results of the meeting indicate that there is a need to develop a localized system of access for the Fort Erie residents. The services appear to be available in the Region but the access, primarily because of lack of diagnosis and/or advocacy, seems to be the barrier to mental health services, especially for young people.

The Canadian Mental Health Association has invested significant research into community based mental health services, which reflects a broader understanding of the importance of engaging the community in providing mental health services- something that Fort Erie might consider.



health services in the region for people who live in Fort Erie. This organization would work interdependently and interface with the Niagara Health System, Niagara Regional Public Health, and the Canadian Mental Health Association.

- 4) Niagara District Health Council (2002). Niagara Mental Health System Design 2002.
- 5) US Department of Health and Human Services (Office of Minority Health). National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services.

2) Mental Health Services for Youth

It is recommended that we focus on and work towards identifying and facilitating access to mental health services for youth particularly in providing reliable diagnostic services and urgent acute interventions.

3) Culturally Competent Mental Health Services

Fort Erie is a community that values cultural diversity and has a strong multicultural citizenship. It is recommended that we establish a participatory, collaborative partnership with the NHS Department of Mental Health, Niagara Regional Community Mental Health Program and the Canadian Mental Health Association with the intent of facilitating community and patient/consumer involvement in designing and implementing culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

References

- 1) World Health Organization (2001). World Health Report 2001.
- 2) Canadian Mental Health Association (1995). *Community Reinvestment.* http://www.cmha.ca/english/advocacy/policies/print_pol_13.htm
- 3) Pape, B. *Canadian Mental Health Association Social Action Series: Building A Framework For Support For People With Long-Term Mental Disabilities.* http://www.cmha.ca/english/info_centre/sas/sas_1.htm