

\$1 million donation to rehab centre gives youth a chance

By Marni Walsh

“Every young person deserves the chance to build a healthy and productive life,” says Gary Slaight. Mr. Slaight and his wife Donna donated one million dollars to the Pine River Foundation for adolescent addiction and mental health rehabilitation earlier this month. Jennifer Blunt, CEO of the Pine River Foundation says the landmark donation was not the first time the couple has supported the Foundation's efforts. In 2014, their “support was instrumental in enabling Pine River Foundation to purchase our property in Shelburne that is now Pine River Institute's forever home,” says the CEO. The Slaight's most recent donation is unprecedented for Canada's leading long-term residential treatment centre for youth.

Jennifer Blunt says, “Addictive behaviours and mental health issues create tremendous stress for youth and the entire family. Youth in care, and their parents, must put enormous effort into regaining their health, relationships and their futures. The last thing they need is the added worry of treatment costs that aren't covered by government or private insurance. This gift will mean that our families will have access to the full range of support they need and allow them to move forward with focus on their health and healing.”

A decade ago, Toronto based Gary Slaight sold the radio empire his father started in 1971, Standard Radio, and established the Slaight Family Foundation. Since then, the Foundation has given away millions in donations to multiple institutions nationally and globally, including hospitals, universities, arts organizations and youth treatment centres.

Jennifer Blunt believes the Pine River Institute represents a natural fit and extension of the significant investment Gary and Donna Slaight have already made in transforming access to health care, especially for people struggling with mental health and addictions. In a statement released by the Pine River Foundation, Gary Slaight said, “When a child is ill, the whole family struggles. Waiting months to start treatment is a torture no family should have to endure. And, to go without is unthinkable. Donna and I are privileged to be able to help and we are excited that our gift toward bursaries will make it possible for more youth and their families to access Pine River's exceptional care.”

The Institute received the first of five \$200,000 annual instalments this month. “We expect to disburse 100% of this investment to support treatment costs for families facing financial barriers to care over the next 12 months,” says CEO Blunt.

The benefits from the Slaight donation go beyond monetary value - the unprecedented gesture helps forge a new frontier in public perception when it comes to mental health. “When community leaders choose to make transformational investments to help our most vulnerable populations, it sends a clear message as to the importance of providing excellent and compassionate care for all people regardless of what ails them,” says Ms. Blunt. (cont'd)

“By demonstrating equal compassion for those with mental health and addiction as for those dealing with cancer, diabetes or heart disease, we will hopefully end the stigma and encourage more people to openly seek the help they need without shame, blame or guilt.”

Jennifer Blunt says, “The goal is to nearly double the number of youth and families we can help at Pine River Institute each year. Gary and Donna Slaight's generous gift to Pine River takes us a giant step closer to achieving this goal.”