

Family Transition Place launches Lotus Centre program

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Family Transition Place is expanding their sexual violence services with the launch of a new program.

The new program, known as the Lotus Centre, aims to provide a larger continuum of support for victims and survivors of sexual violence with increased counselling opportunities.

"The biggest piece for us is we really want a message that people can access us and get the support they need, when they need it? we don't want waitlists," said Lynette Pole-Langdon, director of counselling, education and community mental health initiatives. "With the new expanded services, we're able to provide services whenever a client needs it, whether it's grief counselling support, support in the evening, or on site at a high school with our mobile crisis counselor."

With new annualized provincial funding, Family Transition Place has been able to hire a number of employees to facilitate the expansion of services including more clinical counsellors to avoid waitlists, a community engagement facilitator to build awareness, and a mobile crisis counselor.

Supports that the Lotus Centre offers includes; 24/7 crisis counselling; sexual violence counselling services; support for partners, family and friends of survivors; therapeutic group counselling; sexual violence peer support groups; and sexual violence education and community engagement.

The name of the new program "Lotus Centre" holds significant meaning for Family Transition Place and the goals of the expanded services.

"A lotus flower represents new beginnings and symbolizes strength, resilience and rebirth," explained Kelly Lee, manager of fund development and communication strategies. "Those are all things that a lot of our clients will be going through, through the experiences that they've gone through."

As part of expanding their sexual violence support services, Family Transition Place is also bringing awareness to the language used surrounding sexual violence, specifically to incorporate the spectrum of sexual violence that exists against all genders.

"Instead of talking about sexual assault, we're talking about sexual violence because what we're seeing and recognizing now is that often when people think of sexual assault they think of the physical assault, but we know people are impacted through sexual violence on a continuum," said Pole-Langdon. "People's experiences around sexual violence has changed, look at social media nowadays when you look at non consensual sharing of pictures."

Sexual violence can include, but is not limited to: sexual assault, trafficking, stalking, rape, sharing nude photos without consent, catcalling, harassment, sexist media and advertising, and online harassment.

Statistically, one in three women and one in six men will experience sexual violence in their lives and in many cases, they will know the person who attacked them and not report the crime to police.

The month of May is recognized as Sexual Violence Prevention Month.

"The messaging that we've been putting out throughout the month is that we're here for the community. A lot of people are hesitant and reluctant to make that call and it is very stigmatizing to be in that situation, but our counselors and our partner counselors are

here to listen, support and to take that next step. There really is no wrong number to call, they're going to get the support that they need,? said Lee.

Family Transition Place partners with Dufferin Children and Family Services (DCAFs) and Headwaters Hospital and has sexual violence counselling services available in Orangeville, Shelburne and Bolton.

To connect to the Lotus Centre or any of the services at Family Transition Place call 1-800-265-9178 or visit their website at familytransitionplace.ca.