

Two Headwaters MCRT nurses awarded for exemplary service

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The impact of community Mobile Crisis Response Teams (MCRTs) in only a few years of operation has already left a lasting effect on community response.

Responding to 911 calls involving mental health or emotional crises can be unpredictable and possibly dangerous, and special care is needed to make sure the right response is provided for the individuals who need it. MCRTs take those calls.

Two nurses from the Headwaters Health Care Center have been at the vanguard of that response, and have been recognized for their dedication with the Healthcare Rockstar Award presented by Bayshore Broadcasting. Michelle Marr and Angela Armbrister were both surprised and deeply moved by the award nominations.

"I had no idea I'd been nominated, so this recognition is incredibly meaningful," Armbrister said. "Mental health nursing is about compassion, patience, and showing up for people when they are most vulnerable. Our work isn't always seen or celebrated, so this acknowledgment means a great deal to us."

Marr was likewise moved and said she's glad the program is gaining more community recognition.

"I was very humbled to receive the Healthcare Rockstar Award," she said. "It's meaningful to see the Mobile Crisis Response Team becoming more recognized in the community as a valued resource. We often meet people on the worst days of their lives, so knowing we can make a difference and be acknowledged for that is truly heartwarming."

The MCRT pairs a Headwaters mental health nurse with an Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) officer to respond together to 911 mental health crisis calls.

Their primary role is to de-escalate situations on scene, conduct a clinical mental health assessment, and connect people to appropriate community resources such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, Dufferin Child and Family Services, Victim Services, Family Transition Place, and a developing centralized hub at the Edelbrock Centre.

If a situation can't be safely resolved in the community, they will apprehend the person and bring them to the emergency department for psychiatric assessment.

Tania Alexander, manager of ambulatory care at Headwaters and the MCRT nurses' supervisor, said she is exceptionally proud of the nurses and the positive impact they have made.

"I'm so proud of them, and they should be so proud of themselves," she said. "They are extraordinary people... they're just incredible supports to the community, and I'm so glad that they're out there supporting Dufferin County."

Alexander continued by highlighting the impact they have had in the community, helping reduce the hospital backlog by addressing cases in the field.

"They've already diverted over 1,000 calls last year from our emergency room," she said. "That has enabled the emergency room to treat people for their injuries, for their illnesses, at a much quicker and more efficient kind of pace, and it's allowed the mental health patients in the community to receive their care right on scene and resources right on scene, which is safer for them. It's safer for their family, and it avoids unnecessary hospital time."

The nurses' counterparts at the OPP were likewise extremely proud and thankful for their experience in working with them.

Sergeant Terri-Ann Pencarinha of the Dufferin OPP praised their dedication and tireless commitment.

"I couldn't be prouder of the nurses in our Dufferin OPP MCRT program for winning the Healthcare Rockstar Award," she said. "Michelle and Angela pour their hearts into this work every single day, and it shows in everything they do. Their compassion, dedication, and genuine care for people have truly taken this program to the next level."

"They are always willing to go above and beyond, staying flexible and stepping in wherever they're needed, no matter the situation. They also take such pride in training and mentoring new nurses, helping them grow while ensuring MCRT continues to thrive. We are so incredibly lucky to have Michelle and Angela in Dufferin," Pencarinha added.

Currently, the pair of nurses are the only MCRT nurses in the community, but there is hope from both Headwaters and the OPP that the program can expand in the coming years with more funding.

For now, however, Dufferin is in the extremely capable hands of Marr and Armbrister.