

Youth Roundtable Reveals Gaps in Mental Health Services Across Atlantic Canada

Mental health services are a "closed door" for those in crisis in Atlantic Canada, young people say

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The struggle for mental health care runs deep"

Jillian Stringer

ATLANTIC CANADA YOUTH CITE GAPS IN ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Youth Services "A Closed Door" for Many

An Atlantic Canada Youth Roundtable on Mental Health has concluded that mental health services for youth in that region are "inexact, incomplete, often out of reach and for those in crisis, a closed door."

A Report on the Youth Roundtable - organized and led by the Co-Chair of the National Youth Advisory Council for the Mood Disorders Society of Canada, Jillian Stringer - has been circulated among communities and government leaders in the Atlantic provinces.

Even young people who described "okay experiences" with mental healthcare in Eastern Canada attributed this to their own family and income advantages, while, for others, the struggle for care runs deep.

The Roundtable was the centrepiece of fact-finding by young people. Community feedback was collected prior to the event "bringing to light steep price tags for prescription drugs, medical insurance, far distances to travel for care, and seemingly endless wait times."

Meanwhile, the Newfoundland Premier's Youth Council, calls for "affordable psychotherapies -one of the most effective treatments" and "Canada-wide financial support for mental health care among Canadians on social assistance, working only part-time, and who find \$200 per therapy session out of reach."

Saint John, New Brunswick, is in "desperate need for proper and appropriately-accessible mental health care and education. This shortage is compounded by a provincial suicide rate in that has

exceeded the national average for 16 of the past 20 years (Centre for Suicide Prevention) and staff shortages in hospital emergency rooms - factors that will discourage youth from seeking help.”

The Roundtable also heard that students pursuing health education are discouraged from mentioning their own experience with mental illness because they will be looked upon by professional schools as “weak.”

Roundtable chair Jillian Stringer said “the group reached a clear-cut consensus, that continued advocacy by young people for an accessible, empathic, and affordable mental healthcare system is essential. Youth are beginning to accept mental health and mental health problems - as a natural part of the human experience.” Refer: Jillian Stringer, Co-Chair, Youth Advisory Council, Mood Disorders Society of Canada (jillianstringer3@gmail.com) or Bill Wilkerson (bill.wilkerson@mentalhealthinternational.ca)

Bill Wilkerson
Mental Health International
+1 905-885-1751
bill.wilkerson@mentalhealthinternational.ca

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