

First free mental health walk-in clinic coming to N.B.

SARAH SEELEY Times & Transcript

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Moncton counsellor Kerri Gaskin is opening a free mental health walk-in clinic in Moncton this month. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association it is the first of its kind in New Brunswick.

Photo: Sarah Seeley/Times & Transcript

A Moncton counsellor is opening the first free mental health walk-in clinic in New Brunswick.

Kerri Gaskin wants to make mental health services available to those in need.

When she was finishing her master's degree, she did a nine-month internship with the Canadian Mental Health Association of New Brunswick.

During her internship, she saw first-hand the social and financial barriers deterring people from seeking mental health services. After opening her practice - Coverdale Counseling and Consulting - six months

ago, she wanted to do something to fill the gaps in Moncton's mental health-care system.

She talked to counsellors operating similar walk-in clinics in Ontario and took the idea to the New Brunswick branch of the CMHA.

"If we are in a position to offer something to the community that will help it and help its members ... then why shouldn't we?" she said.

Kristen Barnes, director of the CMHA New Brunswick, said the clinic will provide a much-needed service in Moncton.

"It's important for individuals who aren't being served on a regular basis, who don't need ongoing counselling to be able to walk in and have even a one-time appointment with somebody," she said.

Gaskin partnered with CMHA New Brunswick to start the clinic, which will be open every Wednesday from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Clients will be seen on a first-come, first-served basis and have a 45-minute session with Gaskin.

During the meeting, Gaskin will give them referrals to other services and help them devise a plan for their next steps in getting support.

For now, she is the only clinician volunteering her time at the clinic, but she hopes other counsellors will jump on board.

"It would be wonderful to see this grow in a way that is manageable, but that is able to support the people who most need the service," she said.

She said her interest in the clinic is fuelled by her love of volunteering.

"Giving back to the community is really important to me," she said.

Barnes said if the initiative is successful in Moncton, she would like to see it spread to other cities.

"The more counsellors we have that want to be involved, the bigger or more broader we can make this," she said.

Last year, 60,000 New Brunswickers accessed services through the Canadian Mental Health Association, which is 10,000 more than the previous year, said Barnes.

She said although the stigma around mental health is still present, people are more willing to seek help. The walk-in clinic in Moncton will provide a response to people coming forward for assistance.

"We know it's going to have a big impact," she said.

The clinic, located at the Peace Centre on Church Street, officially opens its doors on March 21 and will be open until 3:30 p.m for the grand opening.

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Another FIRST for Moncton

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Great idea and perhaps people who are disadvantaged will seek help if it's in a less threatening,overwhelming environment. It costs taxpayer's \$48,000 to treat a homeless person with mental illness.

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