

Town police, CMHA to work together on meeting local mental health needs

The Orangeville Police Service and Canadian Mental Health Association signed an official Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Wednesday that will serve as the foundation for how the two agencies will be able to work together to best meet the mental health needs of the community.

“Collectively we realize that strong partnerships, clear protocols and specialized training are effective strategies to best help and support those who have conditions related to mental health,” Police Chief Wayne Kalinski told reporters present for the signing. “The formal signing that we are here for today represents a partnership we share with the Canadian Mental Health Association to share information and to work together so that we can best respond to the needs of those who need us most.”

He continued, adding that this is just one step that Orangeville Police are taking in order to better meet the needs of the community they are serving, and those who need them most.

“I’m very humbled that we are here today and can actually formalize a process and conducting it formally,” he said. “This is an opportunity that we welcome in our community, and I know those needs of the community will be addressed through our partnership.”

He said police services across Canada have been making a move towards a more community-focused style of policing, adding more emphasis on problem-solving issues that arise on a day-to-day basis.

In the context of mental illness, this has led to expanded responsibilities for officers dealing with those with mental illness. Problem-solving could entail an officer being able to recognize when mental illness is at play in a situation, how to de-escalate the situation, referring a person to the appropriate services, or diverting an offender into treatment as opposed to making an apprehension.

“Policing has become more complex every single year, and this is just a great example of some of that complexity,” said Mayor Jeremy Williams. “I really hope that this will give some of our officers the tools to see some of these situations and deal with them in an effective way; where the outcome is a positive one.”

He thanked Chief Kalinsky for his continued effort to bring programs such as this to the local force, and help change the impact and way in which the town sees our local department.

“I just want to say, as Mayor and as Chair of the Police Services Board, I fully support this,” said Mayor Williams. “I think it’s a wonderful thing and I’m really hopeful that on some dark evening, in some back alley, when there’s somebody who is in mental duress that it is perceived correctly and there can be a positive outcome. I’m really hoping that is what happens when all is said and done.”

The partnership and the signing of the MOU is just one of many steps that the Orangeville Police Service will be taking to better address the needs of its community members facing mental health concerns.

Recently, the OPS developed protocols with its partners at the Headwaters Health Care Centre emergency department. They are also working on a strategy for community partners to have situation tables where the needs of individuals or families at risk can be addressed by a multi-disciplinary team of front-line professionals that meet on a weekly basis.

“It is one of the most common occurrences for police to engage individuals who have mental health difficulties, but often it’s not a policing matter,” said Tim Smith, CMHA Team Lead for Dufferin and Wellington. “It is a mental health matter where a person needs treatment or support.”

He added that they are looking forward to a very effective and positive working relationship that can help them to change lives in

Dufferin County.

?We want to thank the Orangeville Police and Chief Kalinski for the progressive and innovative approach to addressing mental health issues,? said Mr. Smith. ?They've been very receptive to us and very responsive to the training, and also to developing this partnership.?