

Mental Health Services of Renfrew County Offers Support for Those with High Content Homes, Also Known As Hoarding

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 29, 2018

While a variety of reality-style television programs have helped raise awareness about hoarding, their depiction of this mental illness has also negatively portrayed many whose homes are packed with possessions and are now fearful of asking for help.

“In most cases, hoarding is not squalor, meaning the conditions may not be dirty or unsanitary, just unmanageable from a safety perspective,” said Lisa Schuler, Case Manager at the Arnprior office of Mental Health Services of Renfrew County, a program of the Pembroke Regional Hospital.

“High content homes or those packed with possessions can pose a safety risk for falls or entrapment, not only for the home’s occupants but also for those who may need to enter the home in an emergency situation,” Ms. Schuler said.

In Renfrew County, it is estimated that, at minimum, there could be several hundred individuals and/or families living in high content homes which pose safety risks.

Regionally over the past four years, work has been done to develop a coordinated multi-agency approach to hoarding that includes Mental Health Services, the fire department, the police, public health, OSPCA (Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), pest control, municipal by-law enforcement officer and others.

Additionally, Ms. Schuler said she has worked with many individuals over the years and helped just over 20 individuals who have attended the *Buried in Treasures* therapy group hosted in the municipalities of Renfrew, Pembroke and Arnprior in the past few years.

“*Buried in Treasures* is an American program developed to assist those who hoard or have high content homes. In the United States and Canada this program is best practice and consistently yields a 90% reduction in symptoms,” Ms. Schuler said.

Part of the program involves an evaluation of the relationship an individual has with his or her belongings and the different thought patterns that accompany that. Ms. Schuler said that there are many reasons why people may hoard or have high content homes. Sometimes trauma and loss can be contributing factors but that’s not always the case.

The program which runs for approximately 22 weeks requires a huge commitment on the part of the individual, with many joining due to safety issues that have arisen within their homes. Once completed, program participants are welcome to get additional one-on-one help.

Best practice in the field is now evolving to a more community-based model involving an assortment of agencies. A model like this is currently being used in Boston, Massachusetts with a lot of success, and is now being piloted in Lanark County.

Ms. Schuler said there are currently plans to expand local support services for those who find themselves in this situation on a more county-wide basis.

“The more involvement we can have with community partners, the more supported these individuals and families will be,” Ms. Schuler said. She added that when agencies who have a right to enter someone’s home from a safety standpoint become involved, and do this regularly, it helps to keep the individuals on track and keep things managed.

For more information, or for individuals or families seeking help for themselves or a loved one, please call the Mental Health Services Central Intake Line at (613) 732-8770, extension 8006.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Carolyn Levesque, Public Affairs and Communications Coordinator

Pembroke Regional Hospital

(613) 732-3675, ext. 6165 / carolyn.levesque@prh.email