

HEALTH

Centretown Health Centres

By Glenn Ramsay, Centretown/
Somerset West Community
Health Centres

Harm reduction, an "ounce of prevention"

I am a retired 60-something baby-boomer, living in Somerset Heights for the last 23 years and a volunteer at Somerset West Community Health Centre (CHC) for the last six years. Somerset West CHC is an organization that provides primary health care and social services to our community. I live in this area because of its proximity to downtown Ottawa and the broad diversity of people who live here. Here we have a real sense of sharing community life with our neighbours.

Lately, I've had a hard time understanding the very negative emotional reaction and misunderstanding that grips the media, some politicians, and members of the public when they hear the term harm reduction. It is often applied to a policy or program in the health field. This negative reaction occurs because people most often hear the term used in referring to programs aimed at assisting people who are struggling with addictions. But it has a much wider application. It applies just as well to diabetics who watch their blood sugar levels or people who get a flu shot. They too are practicing harm reduction.

This idea is not new, it goes back through civilization. When I was a kid, my grandmother was a great one for old proverbs. She has been dead for 20 years, but I can still hear her say, "a stitch in time saves nine," or "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." I hated those sayings but I was usually doing something without thinking of the consequences. She was trying to keep me from hurting myself or others, from pulling some prank that would cost her or my parents more to fix than was acceptable. She wanted each of us grandkids to learn to think ahead – to ensure that we acted wisely for ourselves and others around us. "Look before you leap!"

With that basic idea, each of us takes steps to minimize the cost to ourselves and our community. It's the reason the city shovels the sidewalks in winter to prevent costly injuries and lost time due to injury at home and work.

That is why harm reduction is included as a basic premise in our centre's approach to providing primary health care and social services. It is better to teach a diabetic how to eat wisely and monitor blood sugar levels, than to pay the high costs for medication,

hospitalization to amputate legs, or to assist a blind person to live in the community as a result of diabetic complications.

Trying to solve a problem after the fact is always more expensive than getting at the causes of a problem before it begins. It is more cost-effective to set up parenting and early learning programs than to deal with the social consequences of families who do not receive adequate parenting support or people who come into conflict with the law down the road. This idea of prevention is definitely used when we work with people who are dealing with drug addiction.

Let us be clear: Somerset West Community Health Centre does not condone or encourage drug use. We recognize its widespread negative effect on individuals and our community. However, this is the centre of a large urban area and drug abuse exists. We can't afford to see it as a moral issue but one of health. So, our staff are there to help, support and encourage people suffering from addictions to get rehabilitation as soon as they are ready.

Meanwhile, we do our best to ensure that clients with addiction issues remain as healthy as possible. So the next time you hear the term harm reduction used in any context, try to see it in a positive way. Prevention in any context is cost-effective whether it's applied to health issues or home maintenance. Harm reduction is just my grandmother's ounce of prevention. It's saving all of us the cost of a pound of cure.

Centretown/Somerset West Community Health Centres' teams of physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, counsellors, dieticians, community developers, and health promoters deliver more than 60 programs. Community health centres are community-based organizations tailored to community needs and resources and committed to building healthier communities. The community health centre model of care is unique: the services go beyond primary health care to address the underlying conditions that affect one's health. For more information about your community health centre, please visit: centretownchc.org or www.swchc.on.ca.

KidSport Ottawa given \$10,000

By KIDSPORT OTTAWA

During the holiday season, KidSport Ottawa received \$10,000 from GoodLife Fitness to assist with grants and equipment purchases for kids in need. The donation will help many children in Centretown.

"KidSport provides an important resource to children who are experiencing financial barriers to participation," explains Natalie Brett, program coordinator, KidSport Ottawa. "Essentially, we provide the financial resources to the family to register their children in a sport program. The support from GoodLife Fitness will enable us to support up to 50 additional kids in 2011."

"On behalf of our loyal GoodLife Fitness members in the Ottawa region, we wanted to make a special donation to kids in need during the holiday season," said Tracy Glennon, director of operations Ottawa and area, GoodLife Fitness. "We are very proud to support an organization that removes barriers and enables children to get active and lead healthy lives in the Ottawa community."

KidSport helps low-income children throughout Ontario access sport with KidSport Ottawa focusing on the city. Grant applications are received by KidSport Ottawa three times a year to correspond with the sports seasons: fall, winter and spring/summer. Families are asked to submit an application now.

For more information, visit kidsportottawa.ca

Building a Healthy Community

Nanny Goat Hill Nursery School and Queensway Preschool

- Spaces available, morning and afternoon
- Free subsidy, transportation provided
- Accepting children 18 months-5 years
- Before or after kindergarten care also available

Call 613-235-7561 for more information



ANNOUNCEMENT

O'Connor Health Group

267 O'Connor Street Suite 404, Ottawa ON
Email: occonnorhealth@live.com

Dr. Claude Gauthier and the O'Connor Health Group are pleased to announce that **Dr. Diane Forbes D.C.** has joined its chiropractic treatment team in central Ottawa.

Dr. Forbes is an experienced doctor of chiropractic, providing acute and ongoing care in relation to the treatment of musculoskeletal pain and spinal health.

Patients of all ages are welcome, with services covered by most extended health insurance plans.

For an appointment, call 613-288-0055