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LHIN-wide Early Intervention, First Episode Psychosis Program

There are a fortunate few Ontarians whose only ever connection to mental health issues will be through watching movies. But for the vast majority, mental health issues are a reality and for 1 in 5 people, it's a daily challenge.

For Tomas, issues related to his own mental health have changed his life in ways that he could never have imagined. Tomas' difficulties started in his early teens when he began to exhibit confrontational and rebellious behaviour. While a teenager's desire for independence is not unusual, his behaviour and emotions quickly escalated to a point where he could no longer live at home, and by the time most of his peers were learning how to drive, he was living on his own. Within a short period of time, Tomas began to have acute symptoms related to schizophrenia which made it more and more difficult to attend school, or even go outside of his home.

It was during a CMHA presentation at his school that Tomas realized he needed help. A phone call later and he was connected with the CMHA Early Interventions program and was on his way to receiving assistance. Things were progressing well until a turning point came one evening when Tomas called his mother in a panic, emotions and mind out of control. He pleaded for help and to be taken to a hospital. It was the lowest point in his life. Thanks to hospital staff, Tomas was stabilized and the next steps in a care plan could begin.



*Left – Tomas, patient of CMHA's Enhanced Early Intervention Program
Right – Tim Heath, Early Detection and Intervention Services, Early Intervention Specialist, CMHA Lambton-Kent, Lambton County Branch*

Tomas was then reintroduced to the CMHA Enhanced Early Intervention program supported by additional funding through the Erie St. Clair LHIN. When asked, Tomas indicated that, "Without this program, I would have seriously considered suicide." Through the CMHA program, Tomas has been able to safely return home from the hospital and access a range of invaluable services which are helping him live a full and happy life – a life that includes telling his story to other teenagers in local high schools, with the hopes that he can help make a positive difference in their lives.

About the Enhanced Early Intervention Program

The Erie St. Clair LHIN has provided new LHIN-wide funding to assist CMHA, and its partners, with enhancing the Early Intervention Program. These additional resources have allowed people, like Tomas, to access the necessary tools they need in order to work towards living a healthy, happy, safe, and independent life. The four core enhancements that have been made to the program include:

Assessment and Help: It is anticipated that, each year, 250-300 people between the ages of 14 and 34 will be provided early identification, assessment, and treatment through the program. Clients have access to a case manager and psychiatrist who provide intensive supports for three years.

Group Sessions: One challenge with mental health issues is the tendency for clients to become isolated. Group sessions are designed to help clients regain their ability to interact in a social setting while providing them important educational opportunities.

Onsite Nurse: Access to medication is vitally important to successfully control and manage a client's mental health issues. The onsite nurse provides timely access to medication that would otherwise be a significant barrier for treatment.

Family Support: Education and awareness of mental health is not limited to just the clients. It is also very important to provide family, friends, and other caregivers information on how to help the client manage their condition. This helps to ensure a sustainable care plan across the client's entire life.

When speaking with Tim Heath, Early Detection and Intervention Services, Early Intervention Specialist, CMHA Lambton-Kent, Lambton County Branch, he indicated that since the ESC LHIN provided the enhanced funding, they've been able to do an even better job helping people within their group programs, make additions to their staff, and improve their service offerings. This has meant greater individual treatment and a significantly greater chance for keeping people on track.

ABOUT THE ESC LHIN

The Erie St. Clair LHIN is a Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care agency that plans and pays for health care services totaling a billion dollars a year in our region alone – everything from hospitals to Meals on Wheels.

The Erie St. Clair LHIN strives to make the health care system better by understanding and responding to local needs and by getting services to work together more efficiently. That's how we'll all get better health care while saving money and making the system sustainable for our children and grandchildren.