

E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic helps cut Renfrew County wait times for mental health and addiction care

Across the sprawling geography of Renfrew County there are a limited number of free counselling clinics, and those that exist have long wait times and they can be difficult to access in the absence of public transit. It is why a regional team launched the Renfrew County Collaborative E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic in March 2021 that has created another option for free, same-day, single-session virtual mental health and addiction support.

“Because the E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic is delivered by phone or video, people in more remote parts of Renfrew County can more easily access mental health and addiction counselling that provides them with meaningful conversation and a connection to the right resources,” explained Monika Remisiewicz, Counsellor with the Renfrew County Collaborative E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic and RN at Pembroke Regional Hospital (PRH) focused on mental health care.

The E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic came to be through the expansion of a service model started in Ottawa under the leadership of Jewish Family Services (JFS) and funded by the Ontario government and United Way East Ontario through the JFS. The Renfrew County expansion is a regional collaboration bringing together multiple Renfrew County healthcare providers and agencies to share mental health and addiction resources to better support the immediate needs of children, youth, adults, and families.

How it works

Every Thursday, residents can access free, single-session counselling focused on acute mental health and addiction concerns. Registered and licensed counsellors provide clients with narrative therapy sessions (up to 90 minutes) via phone or video. There is no referral required, and clients can pre-book via www.counsellingconnect.org or call the E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic directly on Thursdays at 1-844-441-0981 to book a same-day appointment.

“It allows clients to tell the story of their life and sometimes it ends up with the realization that they need long-term therapy, or it may result in a referral to other resources,” explained Jackie Rousseau, Program Coordinator, Renfrew County Collaborative E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic.

At the start of each clinic day, Colin Ellis, Registered Psychotherapist and Clinical Supervisor, meets with the counsellors to match them with clients, discuss each client’s profile, the types of questions that would be helpful and possible solutions and/or resources that may help them longer-term.

“One client called in because they were feeling anxious about becoming homeless,” shared Monika. “Through the one session, we explored this and with their permission I was able to call PRH’s Central Intake to refer them to the Crisis Team for ongoing support.”

Monika added: “At the end of every session we do a check in to see what the client wants to remember. Often clients will say: ‘this has been really helpful, I feel so much better now, and I just feel like my head is clearer and I can move forward in my journey.’ It’s really about having somebody there to support them.”

Being part of the solution

The expansion of the E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic to Renfrew County has been part of a collaborative effort to reduce the pressure on the limited mental health and addictions services and to minimize the burden of the long wait lists on individuals.

“When there is a really long wait list, it means that some people with acute mental health needs such as grief, for example, will have to wait months for support,” shared Colin, who is also a psychotherapist at Arnprior & District Family Health Team. “Sometimes within that period, their acute mental health issue is exacerbated and becomes a chronic one. One thing that the E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic does is it meets people where they’re at when they are in that acute place. Often, we can pop that bubble by getting people free, same-day support or at least within the week.”

Colin added: “I’m really proud that the E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic has removed traditional barriers to mental health and addiction care and offered a way to cut down the wait lists in Renfrew County.”

The Renfrew County Collaborative E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic partners include: Arnprior & District Family Health Team, Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation, Deep River and District Hospital, Madawaska Valley Family Health Team, Mental Health Services of Renfrew County (Pembroke Regional Hospital), Pathways Alcohol and Drug Treatment Services, Petawawa Centennial Family Health Centre, The Phoenix Centre for Children and Families, West Champlain Family Health Team, White Water Bromley Community Health Centre, and the Renfrew Victoria Hospital.

“With the limited resources we have, being able to let someone know you can call the E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic on Thursdays and there will be somebody there to talk to and support you through to your next steps has definitely helped out the community,” reflected Monika.

To book a counselling session with the Renfrew County Collaborative E-Walk-In Counselling Clinic go to www.counsellingconnect.org or call 1-844-441-0981 every Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. for a same-day appointment.