

## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Oxford Peer Support

We are honoured to be spotlighting our Peer Support team in Oxford County!

The Oxford Peer Support program was born out of the Oxford Self-Help organization, during its integration with legacy agency CMHA Oxford in April 2017. The original programming prior to and at the time of the integration included drop-in support, groups and individual peer support. Since then, it has grown to include Peer Support Community & Street Outreach and Transitional Discharge Model (TDM), which helps individuals dealing with their mental health adjust to daily life as they leave the hospital.

The program supports individuals aged 16+ and reside in Oxford County, including Woodstock, Ingersoll, Tillsonburg, Norwich, and Tavistock. It complements other treatments or clinical services, and can help peers advocate for their needs and interests, practice wellness strategies, and continue on their wellness journey.

Specifically, the Oxford Peer Support team supports in-patients at Woodstock General Hospital through its TDM program, provides outreach services to individuals experiencing homelessness and related challenges, and is available at our Woodstock site for anyone in need of social connection and support for daily living activities. The team also collaborates with various community agencies including Operation Sharing, Indwell, the YMCA, Brightside Youth Hub, community libraries, and others, in order to expand its reach.

### ***How does peer support work?***

In 2010, the Mental Health Commission of Canada identified peer support as an opportunity to transform the mental health system. Peer support staff intentionally and meaningfully use their lived experience of mental health and/or addictions challenges to:

- Encourage self-determination and inspire hope by supporting individuals where they are at by providing tools to help with each person's unique journey,
- Connect individuals to community resources and educate them about available options,
- Create safe and inclusive spaces for those who access services.

The team practices the core competencies endorsed by Peer Support Canada, and uses these best practices and values to guide their work. They continue to find unique and innovative ways to integrate the expertise of lived experience into our agency's programs and services!

Among the team's proudest accomplishments to date are the emphasis Woodstock General Hospital places on peer support, which includes the TDM program as an integral part of its in-patient care, as well as the community's positive response to their work.

*"Having a [Peer Support Worker] that is able to come out into the community and/or shelter really helps a lot of us. Just to have someone who we, even myself, be able to open up and talk to honestly helps mentally. It's a great feeling to be able to look forward knowing that a [Peer Support Worker] will be out in the streets and shelter to speak with."*

This team is excited about several upcoming opportunities to strengthen peer support services in our community. This includes new training for staff, creating additional peer support groups for the community, and fostering strong community partnerships. The team continues to work hard at



combatting stigma associated with mental health, addiction, and homelessness, and remains committed to modelling wellness and inspiring hope in our community.

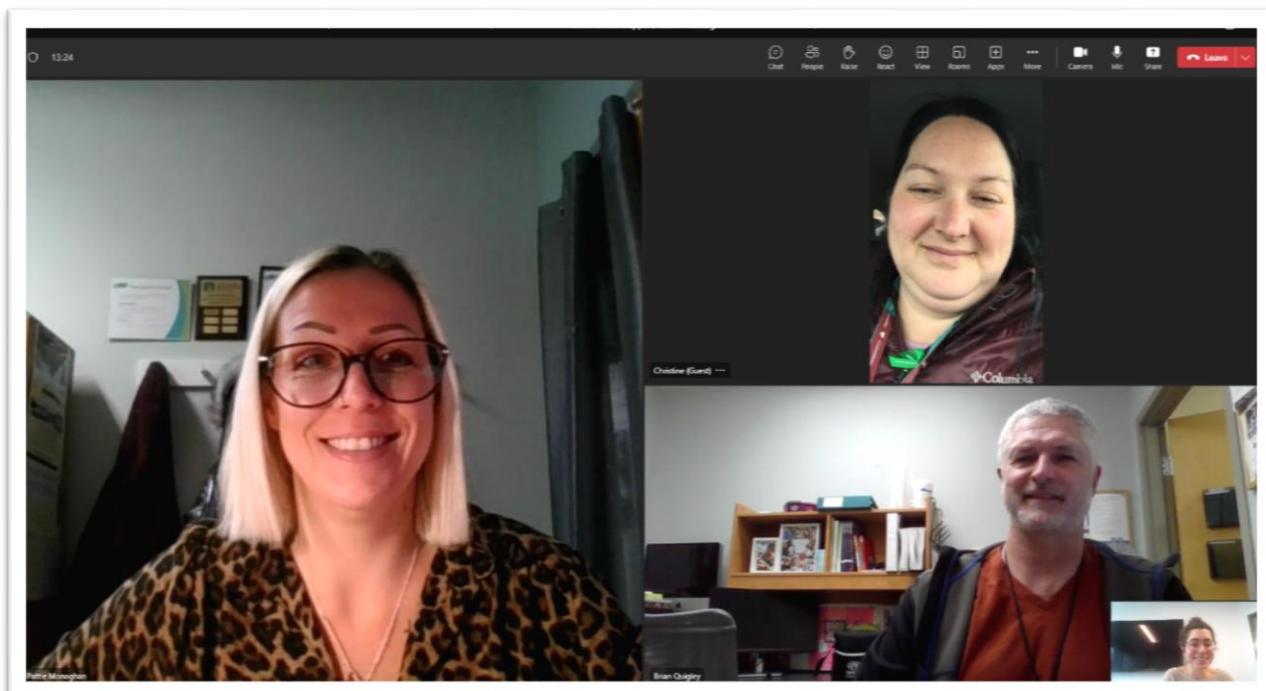
**Connect with the Peer Support team!**

To connect with a member of the Peer Support team, individuals can contact the CMHA TVAMHS Woodstock site by calling 519-539-8055 or email the team at [oxford.peers@cmhatv.ca](mailto:oxford.peers@cmhatv.ca). They also offer drop-in at the Woodstock site, located at 522 Peel Street, on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, from 10:00 am to 3:30 pm.

The community can continue and expand on their support by sharing information about the Oxford Peer Support program and its benefits, which helps ensure the community is aware of this service at CMHA TVAMHS.

Community members are encouraged to deepen their knowledge and understanding about the practice of peer support, and share their experiences with others. This helps reduce stigma and honors the wisdom and expertise that comes with lived experience of a mental health and/or addiction challenge.

Learn more about professional practice of peer support by visiting the Peer Support Canada website ([www.peersupportcanada.ca](http://www.peersupportcanada.ca)).



*Photo in order of appearance: Pattie Monaghan (left), Christine Smith (top), Brian Quigley (middle), and Jessica Carswell (bottom right). Manager of Oxford Sue Forbes is missing, and the Drop-In Coordinators are also not in the photo.*