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Mental health supports grow for Simcoe County’s rural and remote youth with new outreach van funded by province’s Ontario Trillium Foundation

Barrie, ON (May 31, 2024): At an Open House on Friday, MPP Doug Downey and MPP Khanjin met with representatives from the CFS Counselling + Wellbeing (CFS) and heard how the group’s \$74,900 Capital grant from the provincial government’s Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) is making a local difference. Awarded last fall, the grant has enabled CFS to launch its new Youth Mental Health Outreach Van to extend its inclusive and accessible YouthCALL program to rural communities across Simcoe County via pop-up hubs.

“This van is a great example of how grassroots organizations, like CFS, are best equipped to meet the needs of our community,” said Doug Downey, MPP for Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte. “This innovative model allows for CFS staff to meet at-risk youth in their home communities to receive the essentials they require, not only to survive, but to have the chance to thrive and make a difference.”

Funds from the grant have been used to purchase, wrap and install custom shelving to outfit the vehicle in preparation for YouthCALL’s expanded summer program. Staffed by youth workers, who are also registered social workers, the outreach van will have a regular weekly route to support youth aged 12-25 in their home communities across Simcoe County.

“Pop-up accessible programs like YouthCALL are essential in supporting our youth experiencing mental health crises, while allowing them to stay in the comfort of their own home communities,” said Andrea Khanjin, MPP for Barrie-Innisfil. “This \$74,900 Capital grant from our provincial government’s Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) will make a direct positive impact to our youth living in Barrie and Innisfil, by providing 12-25-year-olds with experienced social workers and essentials like snacks, hygiene products and clothing.”

The new outreach van will carry supplies such as snacks, hygiene products and clothing items that can be provided to youth, who don’t have the ability or opportunity to purchase or shop for the essentials they require.

“It’s easier to have vital conversations with youth about their mental health when they’re not distracted by hunger or cold, and if they don’t have to worry about feeling clean or drumming up a ride to service,” said Amanda Fellows, CFS’s Community Program Manager. “We are thankful to the Ontario Trillium Fund for supporting the expansion and accessibility of this life-changing – and sometimes life-saving program.”

YouthCALL offers a variety of low-barrier support services for young people 12-25. For teens, Drop-ins and Discord server are available to those aged 13-20 and 14-19 respectively. Counselling services, and the program’s live-answer helpline, staffed by trained youth workers Monday-Friday, are available to the full age range. The Outreach Van will also serve all youth.

YouthCALL is a program of CFS, which is currently celebrating 45 years as a registered charity and professional counselling and wellbeing centre. YouthCALL operates in association with City of Barrie, Township of Innisfil and many other community-based organizations, including the locations hosting pre-scheduled Youth Drop-ins: Bradford Library, Collingwood Library, Innisfil YMCA, and the Orillia Youth Centre. Program funding is also provided by City of Barrie, Catholic Charities, and the Township of Innisfil. For more information, visit cfssc.ca/YouthCALL or email YouthCALL@cfssc.ca.

“Non-profit organizations across Ontario deliver programming that makes a difference,” said Neil Lumsden, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. “That’s why funding that my ministry is providing through the OTF is so important. Our government wants to ensure that these programs and spaces remain the heart of communities across our province.”

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) is an agency of the Ontario government with a mission to build healthy and vibrant communities across the province. Last year, OTF invested more than \$110M into 1,044 community projects and multi-sector partnerships. Projects aim to enhance economic well-being, foster more active lifestyles, support child and youth development, provide spaces for people to come together and connect, and create a more sustainable environment. Visit otf.ca to learn more.

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