



DMHS Report - January 2014

New Leaf Registered Drop-In Program (Ajax)

New Leaf is a social recreational program designed to provide opportunities for individuals who are socially isolated and/or living with mental illness in West Durham.

Running twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays from 10:00am to 2:00pm, New Leaf offers its members discussion and educational groups, arts and crafts, exercise programming, games, a book club, outings, movies and a \$2.00 lunch.

Wendy Gareau, Peer Support Worker with Rouge Valley Health System, explains how New Leaf came to be. "We saw a huge gap in services for individuals experiencing mental illness in West Durham. There are no other drop-in centres between Oshawa and Scarborough," she explains. "We put a call out to organizations to partner with us on a day program. COPE Mental Health and Durham Mental Health Services (DMHS) responded to the call."

DMHS Coordinator Mark Bouwmeester is proud of how the partner organizations filled the service gap. "Through partnering and utilizing resources within our agencies, we've been able to offer programming to over 30 people a day, two days a week," he says. "This includes psychosocial rehabilitation programming as well as educational groups like WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan). Our hope is that we can expand to meet this need 5 days a week."

The three partner organizations each provide staff or volunteers along with financial and supervisory support. But many of the tasks involved in maintaining the program are carried out by the members themselves. New Leaf is now operating out of its third location and seems to have found a permanent spot for its members.

“Our current location is air conditioned and accessible,” Wendy says, “so it is a great fit for our needs.”



Christy Brown has been coming to New Leaf ever since it opened. When asked what keeps her coming to the program, Christie says, “Many things –the chance to socialize, being around people who have the same experiences as me, picking up information on coping skills, being around people who care about me.” Her favorite part is when members talk and share as a group, lending each other support. “I feel hope and compassion,” she says, “and I feel less alone.”

Debbie Pender has been a member for a little over a year. She appreciates how everyone contributes in whatever way they can. “We all do things, whether it’s empty the recycling, cooking, doing the dishes, wiping the tables, vacuuming.”



When asked what she gets out of the group, Debbie says, “I suffer from depression and I’m trying to manage it naturally. At New Leaf, I learn about my illness and its treatment, overcome isolation, and find a group who can relate to my problems, so we lean on each other. The people that run it, Lisa and Wendy, are very understanding and nice. I’ve made a lot of friends and learned a lot about mental health. I enjoy it a lot. I was sick last week and I missed it. It’s become such a part of my life that I miss it when I can’t come.”

For more information about the New Leaf Registered Drop-In Program or to register, please contact Lisa Scuse at lscuse@dmhs.ca or 905-666-0831, ext. 3227.