

Children's mental health services in North Hastings

The following letter has been sent to Susan Sweetman, executive director of Children's Mental Health Services for Hastings and Prince Edward by Bill Kilpatrick, Bancroft councillor and youth liaison:

I am writing you at this time with great hope and optimism concerning the recent announcement by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services that \$6 million will be provided to support mental health services to children and youth where it will be most effective, in the communities where they live. As a member of the community safety and wellbeing committee, and being the youth liaison for the town, I have a keen interest in how this new allotment of money will impact the delivery of services to the families of Bancroft and the surrounding areas of North Hastings.

As a former and current social service provider, I am familiar with the unique needs and challenges faced by many of the families in and around Bancroft as a result of geographical isolation. As you may already know, Bancroft has the highest child poverty rate in all of Hastings County at 37.5 per cent. Close to 60 per cent of our residents live at or below the poverty level, making them more vulnerable to many of the negative health outcomes associated with poverty including negative mental health experiences.

Given our unique challenges, the Ontario Government's announcement that the new funds will go to hiring more staff, who in turn will help more than 4,000 children in Ontario, is welcomed news indeed. One of our strategies for success on the community safety and well being committee involves interagency support and intervention strategies, with the goal of reducing the demand for emergency response and acute care. CMHS is a vital partner in achieving positive outcomes in this area.

I have been informed by members of the media, with whom I shared this good news some weeks ago, that you have either been unavailable or not answered their consistent inquires as to the impact the new funding will have on the services offered by CMHS in North Hastings. I do not find this news encouraging and am left wondering if the children, youth, and families of North Hastings, despite a funding boost from the province, will have to prepare to deal with yet another reduction in services similar to the loss of the in-home worker in 2013. The residents of Bancroft and North Hastings deserve to know how this funding will impact services available to them.