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Addictions program recognized for providing treatment to women

by Paula LEVY

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COUNTY - Addiction services at South Shore Health has received another award for its programming from the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health.

The Leadership Award for Women's Health was presented to the shared service between South Shore Health, South West Health and Annapolis Valley Health last month.

The service reported that the number of female clients increased by 53 per cent, and the number of female "nicotine-only" clients jumped by 5,500 per cent and achieved a more equitable treatment ratio.

"What we ended up demonstrating by looking at our numbers over the last number of years is that we've caused a significant increase in the number of women," says manager of community-based services Todd Leader.

He says over the past decade, there has been a growing recognition that women have particular needs in addictions treatment. In order to meet the needs of women, the services have been developing programs specifically for women.

"It was one size fits all before. But, in fact, this gender issue does appear to create different kinds of substance use, different kinds of lifestyles around the substance use and certainly different kinds of recovery needs," says Mr. Leader.

Women's treatment specialist Nancy Ross says public education activities over the past number of years have helped to de-stigmatize addictions and resulted in more

women coming forward for help. One such specific program is a women's recovery group which Ms Ross says helps women feel more comfortable.

"They [the women] would say that their experience of addiction is different from men's and they really value the experience in having this women's recovery group on a weekly basis," says Ms Ross about the group that has existed for three years. "They really appreciate that it's a women's only group and they find there is freedom in that and safety in terms of being able to express themselves," says Ms Ross.

Mr. Leader adds that women also have different issues when accessing treatment for their addiction. One such issue is that of child care.

"Generally, the woman is still the primary caregiver for children," says Mr. Leader. "That again creates another barrier to entering treatment."

Mr. Leader says decentralizing the services has enabled more women to seek treatment in their own communities. Now there are community-based programs available in Chester, Lunenburg, Bridgewater, Liverpool and North Queens. Plus, there are addiction services now available in every junior high and high school.

"Our whole approach is very decentralized and it's very much about trying to make our services available in as many locations as possible so that we're as close to people as we can be," says Mr. Leader.

Another change is the way services are delivered to all clients includes being able to seek treatment as an out-patient.

"The kinds of services that we provide are intended to be flexible and diverse in nature. The old days included checking into detox or a 28-day type of program. But that's just not the case now," says Mr. Leader.

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