

## Kingston area organizations launch new Community Risk Watch program

*Mandy Marciniak*

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News – Building a safer and healthier community is a main priority for many organizations in Kingston and while they all work hard individually, a new program wants to bring them together to help even more community members in need.

On Feb. 9, representatives from 12 organizations in Kingston launched the Community Risk Watch initiative, a collaborative, multi-agency program that will work to meet the needs of individuals and families experiencing acutely elevated levels of risk.

“These are individuals that may be on the brink of doing harm to themselves or harm to the community and it is really about trying to help people before they hit crisis level,” explained Lisa Holmes, regional director of specialized care at Ongwanada Resource Centre and chair of the working group that helped launch the Community Risk Watch program.

Participants in the Kingston Community Risk Watch program include both the Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic and Limestone District School Boards; Addiction and Mental Health Services of KFL&A; Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services; Family and Children’s Services of Frontenac, Lennox and Addington; Ontario Provincial Police; Kingston Police; City of Kingston; Pathways for Children and Youth; Victim Services of Kingston and Frontenac and Youth Diversion.

Representative from these organizations will meet on a weekly basis for a ‘situation table’ discussion where individual cases will be presented, discussed and evaluated.

“They all gather and they can bring forward situations that they have encountered in their own work area or that other groups have brought to them,” said Holmes. “It might be someone who has been identified in the school system, but there are factors involved including the family and that is beyond the school’s control. By reaching out to other community partners to get involved it is bringing the services to the individual before they or the family hit a breaking point.”

After assessing situations and needs, rapid intervention will take place and representatives from certain organizations involved can help will deliver their intervention within 48 hours.

“They will do a ‘door knock’ where they will go visit the family and offer the services,” said Holmes. “It is not about going and enforcing or apprehending, it is about going and offering assistance through services.”

Global Community Safety developed the Community Risk Watch initiative and similar programs are already running successfully in other communities across Canada. In Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, the violent crime severity index dropped by 39 per cent since the launch of their program in 2011, almost three times the average drop recorded across the rest of the province.

“With this program, there is the opportunity for the OPP to bring cases to the table where we don’t have the resources that these individuals need in order to make their lives better,” said Sgt. Sharron Brown with the Frontenac detachment of the OPP. “It allows us to get assistance with things like housing and mental health issues or whatever the case may be.”

Sgt. Brown also hopes that the Community Risk Watch program will work from a preventative standpoint.

“That is certainly a positive spin off to all of this,” she said. “Sometimes we are the only service available at two in the morning and we will come if we are needed, but when we are able to hook individuals or families up with the proper services afterwards we may not receive that second or third call.”

While meetings are still in initial stages, members of the situation table were already excited to get things started and help more people in the community.

“There is a lot of training behind this and it is very in-depth,” said Holmes. “I think everyone is excited to be given this opportunity to come together and work together. We all want this to succeed and that is very important.”

As the program continues, data collected will also help develop community programs and fill gaps in current programs that may help with prevention of recurring risks and issues.

“I think it will be really beneficial to the community as a whole and could benefit any community,” said Holmes. “We are really looking forward to seeing where it takes us.”



Members of the Community Risk Watch Program in Kingston in action on Feb. 9 at Kingston Police Headquarters.

For more information about the Community Risk Watch Program visit <http://www.globalcommunitysafety.com/>

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