

New respite service 'plugging the gap' in Haliburton County

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While many families have been struggling since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic more than a year ago, those who relied on community supports and services to care for vulnerable individuals have been particularly impacted and, in some cases, completely left behind.

Tanya Yakeley has spent the past 13 months working hard to plug that gap.

Last March, on the back of an extensive 21-year career working for Community Living to care for individuals with a wide-range of cognitive and developmental disabilities, Yakeley took on the role of coordinator with Respite Now – an organization that matches families in need with “caring and compassionate” local workers.

“Respite care is, essentially, relief for a caregiver, but it really has come to mean so many other things here in our area, especially with COVID-19 [happening],” Yakeley said in explaining the services her organization provides. “With the [provincial government] shutting down a lot of community resources, respite workers have kind of become the ‘everything’ to the people, and the families that need a certain level of support.”

If that sounds like an exaggeration, it isn't, Yakeley stated. As well as providing in-home care – helping individuals with simple tasks such as laundry and cooking meals – Yakeley says many of the workers have taken it upon themselves to provide supports in other areas too.

“We have quite a few workers that are starting to do some support around vir-



Since its launch in 2019, Respite Now has been connecting local families with workers who offer a wide-array of services, from providing at-home care to offering a wealth of community supports. / SUBMITTED PHOTO

tual learning... We have individuals that are needing suicide watch types of support, and lots of other mental health supports,” Yakeley said. “Along with that, we’ve been picking up all of the community supports too – taking people out for a hike, or teaching them how the bus system works in their community, or helping with grocery shopping. Basically, a lot of the things that other agencies would help with, the respite workers are kind of filling in the gaps.”

She added, “We’ve actually been really fortunate that there are workers out there that are able to meet these needs, because there’s a lot of families right now who are in crisis.”

While Respite Now officially launched in 2019, Yakeley said things didn't really

start kicking into gear until spring 2020. Since that time, she has taken on more than 250 families from Haliburton County, Kawartha Lakes, Peterborough and Northumberland County. There has been substantial growth on the worker side too, with 75 active workers across the region and another 120 awaiting accreditation.

The organization is in the midst of yet another hiring campaign, as they try to bring more individuals on board to meet the demands of the community.

The community reach is spreading too, Yakeley said, with the initiative quickly outgrowing the Haliburton, Peterborough and Kawartha Lakes areas.

“Our service radius is growing quite dramatically,” Yakeley noted. “We pro-

vide services as far away as Belleville now, and then in the opposite direction we have clients in Durham north and Mississauga. We’re growing in terms of communities, but we’re also growing in terms of service. We have the capacity now to support anyone and everyone of all ages. Seniors services are taking notice of us, and we’re helping to provide supports for families in their home so that seniors can stay living in their home. We’ve really evolved from just being a support for people with developmental disabilities to encompassing all ages and abilities.”

The Respite Now app, available on all Apple and Android devices, is free. All of the services and supports Yakeley herself provides are also free. The only cost to families is whatever agreement they strike up with the workers they are matched up with. Operating as independent contractors, workers will negotiate with families on a cost for service.

That flexibility has been a major plus point for many clients thus far, Yakeley said. Because of the number of workers available locally, families have been able to mix and match to find the best fit for the service they need.

“Families, for years, have been seeking a service like this. Traditionally, for these types of supports, they’re having to do endless amounts of paperwork to get onto a three to five year waitlist,” Yakeley said. “That’s one of the first things families will ask me – what is the waitlist time, and how much will this cost? In most situations I can usually find families a match for the supports they need within 24 hours, and the cost is discussed rather than being dictated.”

For more information, visit www.respite-now.com.

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