

Lifehouse a beacon of hope

By Sherwood Hines

"Everyone needs a good place to go where the staff are helpful and really nice."

The Lifehouse Support Centre at 23 Bridge St. West in Bancroft has been supplying free laundry, an affordable lunch, hot beverages, a needle exchange program, and peer support services to marginalized people in need for seven years.

The Lifehouse is a small community space just off the edge of the York River where a variety of people come to have lunch, watch a bit of TV with friends, play some cards, share life stories, joke and laugh, or help plan next year's community garden.

"We only have space for 22 people at any given time," says team lead Sonya Sumerville, "We work on a very small budget, but we try to do a lot with that. We provide a \$1 lunch Monday to Friday. We also have a writers' therapy group, an anxiety and depression group, anger management and meditation, peer support groups, mental health talks, cooking classes, and the WRAP program to name a few. All with three staff and a \$125 a week budget."

The Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP), a major component of what the Lifehouse offers, is designed to help people keep track of difficult feelings or behaviours that trigger their addictions, mental health, or overall wellness issues. Based on the key concepts of hope, responsibility, education, self-advocacy and support, WRAP is a daily self-guided maintenance plan participants design to try to stay on track with their recovery. It can be used alongside other treatments for anxiety and depression, such as prescribed medication, [CBD oils](#) and talking with a psychiatrist. .

"This is a place for people who have nowhere to go to get help and be accepted," said Dominic, who uses the centre's computer while waiting for his laundry. "Almost everyone here has been abused or hurt by other people. No one here really fits in. This is a place to feel safe and grateful."

As peer support staff worker Karen Mulock points out, "people need a safe space to work through their mental health problems. Everyone is supportive here. That's really important to me."

The Lifehouse is one of eight peer support centres in southeast Ontario funded by Ontario's South East Local Health Integration Network, and the Mental Health Support Network. Other locations are in Trenton, Picton, Belleville, Napanee, Kingston and Modoc. The highlight of the holiday season at the Lifehouse was the \$1 turkey lunch on Dec. 22. For a loonie, participants got to sit down to a full traditional turkey dinner with all the fixings, cooked and prepared by staff, participants, and volunteers.

As one person said before the dinner, it's a great way for the group to join together and celebrate the season.

For more information on Lifehouse programs, or how you could support the Lifehouse, please contact Sonya Sumerville, at 613-332-4056.