

Transforming lives here: Grand opening of new urban village for people living with addiction and mental illness

By Margaret Goulding

During a month of unpredictable weather in Toronto, the sun shone on The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's (CAMH) street festival in celebration of its 10th anniversary and the grand opening of the first phase of the redevelopment of its historic Queen Street site at the end of June. Hundreds of people gathered for the event marking a decade since the merger of four institutions – the Queen Street Mental Health Centre, Addiction Research Foundation, Clarke Institute of Psychiatry and Donwood Institute – leading to the creation of CAMH. The day was historic for another reason—it marked the completion of the first phase of an award-winning redevelopment project that is transforming a stigmatized psychiatric facility into a mixed-use 'urban village.'

Held outside four specially-designed new buildings for client care, on a newly created street and public park, the street festival featured musical entertainment, guided tours of the new facilities, a ribbon cutting ceremony, remarks from federal, provincial and city politicians, and a blessing by Elder Vern Harper of CAMH's Aboriginal Services. CAMH's historic 27-acre site housed the first Provincial 'Lunatic Asylum' in 1850 – and had remained largely sequestered from the community ever since. With this grand opening, CAMH begins transforming a significant section of Queen Street West into a welcoming mixed-use community where patient care and services for people with mental illness and addictions will exist side by side with businesses, restaurants and homes. Newly-created city blocks and thorough streets will connect the new urban village to one of Toronto's most vibrant neighbourhoods.

For many of those gathered, it was also an occasion to mark how far the needle has moved on fighting the stigma of mental illness and addictions, a major component of CAMH's work and one of the great hopes at the time of its creation. "This unique redevelopment speaks volumes about CAMH's bold approach to mental health and addictions, but says even more about the way we as a society are moving away from the stigma of the past," says Dr. Paul Garfinkel, CAMH President and CEO. "It should be a source of pride for everyone in our city."

The new buildings house



Minister of Health Promotion Margaret Best (centre) officially opened the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's new client care buildings. Others in attendance included (L-R): Rosario Marchese, MPP Trinity Spadina, Olivia Chow, MP Trinity-Spadina, Dr. Paul Garfinkel, CAMH President and CEO, and Paul Beeston, CAMH Chair of the Board of Trustees.

inpatient, outpatient and administrative activities for the Mood and Anxiety and Addictions Programs. The 'Alternate Milieu' (AM) units provide a new home-like environment for

treatment of people with mental illness and addictions to create a natural transition toward community reintegration. These units are designed to empower clients to regain their indepen-

dence and assert control over their recovery plan.

The four-storey AM buildings have six single-bedroom units per floor, each with its own private three-piece bath-

room and individual key card. Every floor has common areas – a living room, dining room, kitchen, and a private lounge that clients can use for visits with loved ones. Appropriately, clients will attend clinical and support programs and activities at other locations on the site and in the community.

Chair of the CAMH Board of Trustees Paul Beeston told the crowd: "You know, it's easy to get caught up in the excitement of these types of celebrations. The dignitaries that join us, the entertainment and stage show, but the real reason we are all here today and every day is for our clients. These new buildings are a symbol of the way forward. Every single day, people from all walks of life walk in and out of these buildings seeking good clinical care, supports to help them get on with their lives, a friend to lean on. They are the heart of the CAMH family."

Margaret Goulding is the External Communications Coordinator at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

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