

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata - Ellice Avenue Neighbourhood Care Centre
743 Ellice Avenue / 925-0348

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Interview with Marilyn McGillivray
Manager of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Ellice Avenue Community Site
(Ellice at Beverly)

What is this Ma Mawi site all about?

We're called a Neighbourhood Care Centre. It's an approach based on strengths - if you can build capacity in the community, then the community can take care of itself. But we also recognize that at the same time, we still need to do some healing and ensure that basic needs are met - so we provide some emergency services. We no longer identify programs for the community - they tell us what they want.

Has there been a conscious change in approach in the last six months or so?

Yes. One of our goals now is to establish relationships in the community. So we're having more informal events to celebrate the community. We are also getting involved in different neighbourhood committees, recognizing that we are only one agency and as we develop relationships with other agencies, we are developing a wider resource base. Also, there's strength in numbers and we are all working toward the same goal. So we are developing those relationships so that we are part of the larger team in the neighbourhood.

We are also looking at developing a Neighbourhood Council. Their role would be to help us establish those relationships in the community, and as an advisory group to help us develop programming. We are also looking at developing a Community Kitchen to meet some emergency needs, as well as help people build relationships. Also, we are looking at developing a clothing depot, hopefully quality clothing for job interviews. And we will set up a mini Food Bank. Those things are very different from what we were doing a year ago.

At the same time, we continue to provide the group programs with the same number of staff. The capacity building will come with involving people in the community programs, with the end goal that the community people will take them over and run them themselves. Capacity building also comes into play in the groups where community volunteers have opportunity to help facilitate and plan different events. So we are really trying to get them very involved, help them identify their strengths, and nurture those strengths so they can start becoming independent. Then they can act as role models and mentors for others.

How did the Beverley Street Party that you organized last summer go?

Considering that it was really cold and raining, I was surprised at the number of people that came - about 50 or 60. The theme was "Celebrating Our Community". We tried to have entertainment which reflected the different cultural groups in the community. We had stuff

inside for the kids to do, but most people still wanted to be outside despite the rain.

What's your response to the prostitution in the community?

We wanted to 'take back' that stretch of Ellice for our community celebration, partly as a response to that issue, but the City wouldn't allow us to close it. Also, a couple of our staff members are involved in the Safety Patrol. We recognize that we're not going to eliminate prostitution but as the community takes ownership and we provide alternatives, the prostitutes will also recognize that there are alternatives. But we don't see that moving the prostitution out of the neighbourhood can be called a success. But recognizing some of the things that cause prostitution may slowly reduce the activity.

How is your work in the community going so far?

It's been overwhelming. We changed the interior of the building to make it less 'office like' and more physically comfortable for community people. We've had a lot of traffic, especially on drop-in days. It's been really good. People have commented positively about the changes we've made. They're recommending it to their friends. I hope that we keep building on that in the next year and have the impact we desire.