

MEDIA RELEASE

Supporting Vulnerable Patients

North East LHIN Recognizes Donna Stewart as Healthy Change Champion

March 20, 2018 -- Donna Stewart has worked in the social services sector for over 20 years. For as long as she can remember, she's wanted to help address challenges in order to foster healthy communities.

Donna is Director of Integrated Social Services at the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (DSB), where she oversees a number of programs and initiatives including social housing.

Two years ago, Donna spearheaded a unique initiative that would make available mental health supports to residents within the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB's social housing units.

For her work in developing an innovative model to better serve vulnerable patients, Donna Stewart has been named a North East LHIN Healthy Change Champion.

"Donna has helped to connect the right services to those in need. She has helped to establish a way to assist with ongoing issues related to mental health, for residents living in social housing in the Espanola and Manitoulin areas. Her commitment to promoting healthy communities is to be applauded," said Jeremy Stevenson, CEO, North East Local Health Integration Network (NE LHIN).

In December 2015, The Canadian Mental Health Association – Sudbury/Manitoulin (CMHA-SM) and Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board met to discuss a pilot project between the organizations. DSB identified a need for mental health supports for residents within its social housing units – and was looking to partner with CMHA to provide the service.



Donna Stewart, Director of Integrated Social Services, Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB, recognized as North East LHIN Healthy Change Champion.

Donna approached the North East LHIN, interested in partnering to hire a transitional Community Support worker to offer support services to these individuals. The concept was supported by the NE LHIN.

“Without the support of the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB board, my CAO, and my staff this work would not have been possible,” Donna said. “Partnerships with CMHA and the North East LHIN played a big part in the success of this project as well.”

A Transitional Community Support Worker began working with individuals in April 2016. In one year, 171 tenants were supported through brief services, and 45 tenants were supported through caseload management. They spoke about how, through the program, they were able to regain independence – and recognize medical symptoms. The project also led to a reduction in paramedic services, police calls, tenant complaints, and tenant evictions.

“The Transitional Community Support Worker project is important to ensure social housing tenants remain housed. The project also helps ensure that our tenants receive the best care possible through a proactive and supportive approach,” Donna said.

Those who worked with Donna on the project said they’re grateful for her ingenuity and passion in developing the creative partnership.

“Donna identified that people living in social housing don’t always access services to help them stay housed or well,” said Patty MacDonald, Director of Operations, CMHA-SM. “Together the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board and CMHA were able to work with the North East LHIN to develop a program within people’s home building to bring services to them. Through leveraging community expertise and an innovative partnership, we were able to achieve improved access to services and coordination of care for individuals in the Espanola District.”

The North East LHIN based a region-wide initiative with District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSAB) on the success of this project. There are now similar projects underway in Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, Parry Sound, and Temiskaming.

Donna says she will continue to work on the collaboration between social services and the health care system, recognizing that determinants of health are a key to the well-being of Northerners. Aside from her work at the DSB, which also includes her participation in different committees and tables, Donna recently became a CMHA Board member. As well, she’s one of the key players involved in spearheading a situation table for Espanola and area. The group of front-line professionals work together to support those in the community who are experiencing challenges and may be at high risk of harm.

“I am flattered at the opportunity to be recognized as a North East LHIN Healthy Change Champion. My work is very important to me and I take great pride in it. I feel very fortunate to have found my niche and to love what I do.”

Outside of work, Donna enjoys the outdoors, practicing mindfulness, and spending time with her family.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Healthy Change Champion Award:

- **Who is Eligible?** North East LHIN health service providers, employees and volunteers of providers, as well as, health care leaders, community leaders, and other Northerners who are contributing to building a stronger health care system in the North East.
- **What kind of work does the NE LHIN Healthy Change Champion recognize?** Those who are transforming the health care system so that it becomes more patient/client-focused, integrated, and easier to access. These are people or organizations who are reaching out to others in the course of their work to improve the system. Their work may be small or large in scope, but it's significant in that it is making a difference in people's lives.
- **Who can nominate?** Any Northerner can suggest a Healthy Change Champion. We just ask that you tell us in one or two paragraphs why you believe the person or organization deserves this recognition. Send your nomination to engagingwithyou@lhins.on.ca or 555 Oak Street East, Third Floor, North Bay, ON, P1B 8E3.
- **How are they picked?** Nominees are reviewed by our senior team. Consideration is also given to individuals and organizations advancing the care for special population groups within the North East LHIN including seniors, Aboriginal/First Nations/Métis, and Francophones.

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