



## MEDIA COVERAGE

### LOCAL

#### **Academy for at-risk youth to open soon near Boiestown**

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Ambulance NB responds to a call  
Photo: James West/The Daily Gleaner

Bridges of Canada Inc. and its U.S. counterpart are meeting with the province about the opening of a centre for at-risk youth.

Lori Costantino-Brown, president of Bridges of Canada Inc. and Bridges of America Inc., said plans are underway to open a year-round youth academy in Boiestown on the Taxis River.

She said the youth facility will open in March at the same time as its drug and rehabilitation centre for women in Tracy.

“We’ll be taking 24 children between the ages of eight and 14 in the first phase of that program,” Costantino-Brown said.

“It will be a year-round place where at-risk youth will be able to get assisted.”

She said the facility will have a professional staff to address substance abuse, mental health, education, and crisis intervention.

The staff will be able to deal with children who have had sexual abuse and trauma, children who’ve been abused and thrown into foster care or who’ve been removed from their home unit.

“It will be a longer-term facility,” said Costantino-Brown.

She said Bridges of Canada is in talks with the provincial government about funding to support the operation of the youth academy and the women’s drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility.

She said it’s hoped corporate and private funding will follow to keep the facilities running.

Work to prepare the Taxis River site – the home of the Bar None youth summer camp – is underway. Buildings are being renovated and modular buildings are being installed.

Construction of a crisis stabilization unit for youth is planned. Youth who are in crisis or can’t remain in foster care are now being housed in hotels, she said.

“What’s happening with substance abuse and mental health services (in N.B.) is really quite a shame ... this community is long overdue for these services,” she said.

Costantino-Brown said before Bridges of Canada formed its action plan, it met with government and community organizations to discuss where the gaps in the province’s services exist and how the non-profit agency could help fill those holes.

“They were the ones that dictated to us where the needs were.”

She said Bridges of Canada has met with Premier David Alward and the Department of Social Development several times.

The premier and the Department of Social Development told her the government needs help to deal with at-risk youth on issues including mental health and addiction, she said.

She said she’s been told the province’s foster-care system is in crisis and has a severe shortage of foster homes. When a child has severe mental-health issues or has been removed from a home because of severe sexual abuse, he or she can’t be placed in a regular foster home, she said.

She said a youth-crisis unit at the future youth academy would take those kids into its care. She said the youth academy will be a ranch-like setting where at-risk youth and kids in crisis can recover from trauma.

“So we can get (children) to the point where they can assimilate back into the community, into outpatient services, into other types of services that do exist in the community now. The

problem is the long-term stabilization piece doesn't exist now."

Costantino-Brown said she will meet again with the departments of Social Development, Education, Health and Public Safety this week to talk about a private-public partnership to open the youth facility.

"We have the support of the premier ... He is strongly encouraging his team, his staff as well, because he is aware of these needs and is concerned," she said.

"There's no signed agreements yet, but we are working toward that ... I hope within a couple of months that we will be formalizing our partnership."

However, she said, if no agreement can be reached with the province, the non-profit organization will go forward anyway.

Bridges of Canada Inc. will run the youth academy and youth crisis unit, but youth will remain in the care of the province, she said.

"They would be partnering with us to provide certain services. Those services would be under the control of Bridges of Canada, monitored by the government ... We would have control of the facility and the services, but the custody of the child and the determination of whether that child would participate, and to what extent, would be on their side of it," she said.

Bridges of Canada Inc. is getting help to start both the youth and the women's facilities from Bridges of America. Based in Florida, it has more than 30 years experience in working with substance abuse and mental health both in the criminal justice system and the community.

"Our model has had quite a bit of success."

Costantino-Brown said she expects it will take a couple of years before Bridges of Canada is ready to run its programs without help from its U.S. counterparts.