



## MEDIA COVERAGE

### PROVINCIAL

#### **'We work with all addicts'**

MICHAEL WOLOSCHUK

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On Sept. 6, Patricia Joy Honeywell visited her local addiction treatment centre, took a swig of methadone, smoked a joint of marijuana and turned herself in to police.

She confessed to a crime that was almost seven years old – robbing the Garden Street Irving in the early morning hours of Boxing Day 2006.

The young Saint John resident threatened to stab staff with what she described as an HIV-infected syringe but what was really a pencil hidden up her sleeve. She made off with \$480, all of which was spent on drugs and friends.

Honeywell, who has struggled with addiction for years, told police she confessed so she could go to a federal penitentiary, where she hoped to get help with her drug problem and re-establish a relationship with her three children and their father.

On Oct. 21, Honeywell's wish was granted when she was sentenced to three years in a federal prison.

Although she is paying the price for breaking the law, Honeywell's case is a sad reminder of how tattered our social safety net can become.

When addicts turn to prisons for help, something desperately broken inside the system is crying out for fixing.

Several addiction treatment centres exist for men in New Brunswick, but there are none that are exclusively for women.

None, that is, until Bridges of Canada came along with plans for a new women's addiction

recovery centre in Tracy that is scheduled to open early in 2014. The non-profit organization has a long and successful history providing recovery services to prisoners, ex-prisoners and those with addiction issues,

“We work with all addicts, whether they’ve been incarcerated or not, from all spectrums of society, to help them to deal with that issue that so oftentimes lies beneath the surface in people’s lives – that secret struggle with addictions and substance abuse,” said Richard Bragdon, a Fredericton-area pastor and vice-president of Bridges of Canada.

“Oftentimes we judge the symptom and don’t see the underlying causes that are there – wounds, hurts, struggles, unresolved issues, pain on the inside, that they don’t know how else to deal with it. So they start to medicate – and sometimes, as a result of that, it takes over their life and they start making poor choices. And they end up in penal institutions.”

The planned women’s treatment centre will be located in the village of Tracy at the site now occupied by Canaan in the Woodlands, a walk-through prayer garden just off the highway.

Canaan in the Woodlands is owned by the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary, an ecumenical religious order based in Germany. Bridges of Canada is purchasing the property, which includes a building, with the deal expected to close in mid-November.

Once the sale is complete, renovations will begin in late November. Bragdon said he hopes to have the centre up and running in February.

The centre, which will accommodate up to 22 women, will provide therapeutic counselling, vocational training and spiritual guidance in a comprehensive addiction recovery program that will last six months to a year. The centre will be staffed by 15 professionals.

Bragdon estimated it will cost \$1 million a year to run the centre.

“It’s a substantial investment,” he said. “It’s a huge thing, and the demand is going to be huge. I don’t think there is going to be any shortage of demand for beds.”

Tracy is a village of 611 people in Sunbury County about 40 kilometres south of Fredericton. The highway to Tracy passes through New Maryland, which bills itself as the site of New Brunswick’s last fatal duel.

Travellers entering Tracy are greeted by a sign directing them to the Sunbury Shooting Association firing range.

At the village crossroads, you can turn one way and head to Fredericton Junction. Turn the other way, and the road will take you to Harvey Station.

However you look at it, Tracy is as far from the hustle and bustle of city life as you can get in New Brunswick, which makes it a good setting for a recovery centre.

Women who come for treatment will be entering a healing process, and a big part of that is getting a chance to decompress in a peaceful place with solitude and serenity.

“People will have the chance to get away from the stress, away from the various struggles, and focus for a time on their own health,” Bragdon said. “They will be in a safe atmosphere, a quiet atmosphere, a place for reflection, a place where they can connect with who they were really meant to be as a person.”

Treatment also includes an educational component, such as computer, culinary or other vocational training, along with 12-step programming and therapeutic counselling.

“It’s pretty intensive for those six months to a year, when they’re really going to be focusing on getting well,” Bragdon said. “We’re helping people get a fresh start in their lives. These are people transitioning from heartache, devastation, hurts, regrets, pains, all of those things, back into a functioning, holistic, healthy lifestyle. People find hope again, and as a result of that, they can move on with their lives and become contributing members of society.”

That’s the humanitarian argument, but Bragdon is only too happy to provide the economic perspective on why the treatment centre makes sense.

“If we can help stop the revolving door, of people going in and out of the system, at a tremendous cost to the taxpayer, as well as to families and communities, we’ll be doing a great service,” he explained. “Not only do we save on the cost of law enforcement, we save on the cost of litigation, of health care, incarceration – and at the end of it, they become a taxpaying contributor to society.”

It all sounds good – except that some in the village of Tracy, including the mayor, Dale Mowry, are not pleased that Bridges of Canada will be opening an addiction treatment centre there.

“I really don’t think it’s the place for something like that. Right in the community,” Mowry told The Daily Gleaner.

Bragdon, however, is confident that Bridges of Canada will win over the community, and he plans to invite village residents to an open house, where they can ask questions about the centre.

“I certainly understand that people have concerns,” Bragdon said. “People sometimes fear what they don’t understand.”

A small community of small modest homes and a half-dozen or so churches, Tracy, it can be argued, is the perfect place for a women’s addiction treatment centre.

Indeed, the Village of Hope, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre for men, is set on 200 acres just outside of town.

“Tracy already has Village of Hope, and people have already proven that this works in the community,” Bragdon said. “I think it speaks well of any community who will take in people who have gone through some difficult times and faced adverse circumstances.”

Bridges of Canada certainly boasts a history of success across the province.

Formerly known as Cons for Christ, the organization was founded in 1980 by Monty Lewis, himself an ex-convict who experienced a Saul of Tarsus moment while at Kingston Penitentiary and subsequently dedicated his life to helping convicts and their families and others who live at the margins of society.

Lewis, who served as the chaplain adviser for the province's Department of Public Safety, received the first National Public Safety Award from the solicitor general of Canada.

In 1995, he established the BarNone Christian Camp, near Boiestown, where children, especially those of incarcerated men and women, can attend for free. He also created the Christmas for Kids campaign to provide gifts for children with parents serving time.

In recognition of his work, Lewis received the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal.

In 2000, Lewis changed the name of his organization to Bridges of Canada after deciding to partner with Bridges of America, a group dedicated to providing help and hope to prisoners, ex-convicts and people in need of addiction recovery services.

"Monty, as he got older, thought that he wanted to make sure that his legacy continued," said Bragdon. "When something is built around a personality and a life story, when that person passes on, the dream often goes with them. Monty had the foresight to reach out to an existing, much larger organization with a successful track record."

Lewis died earlier this year but passed the torch to Bragdon so that his vision could continue. Before he died, Lewis was committed to establishing the women's recovery centre in Tracy and often visited the grounds, walking through the Canaan in Woodlands prayer garden.

"Monty always dreamed of having a treatment centre on that property," said Bragdon. "And we felt as an organization that it was the right time for this to happen."

The Bridges of Canada centre in Tracy comes too late for Patricia Joy Honeywell. For many women like her around the region, it can't come soon enough.

Michael Woloschuk is a contributing editor at Brunswick News and writes columns that bring the people and issues of New Brunswick to life. He can be reached at [woloschuk.michael@brunswicknews.com](mailto:woloschuk.michael@brunswicknews.com).