

Anglican Church Women at St. Thomas hear about Centre 454

John Curry
john.curry@metroland.com

Centre 454 was front and centre, as it were, at the April meeting of the Anglican Church Women (ACW) at St. Thomas Anglican Church in Stittsville.

Centre 454 is a community ministry of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa, offering a day program serving those who are precariously housed or homeless in the Ottawa area. Centre 454 provides support services, social recreation and essential needs such as laundry and shower opportunities.

Jennifer Crawford, the executive director of Centre 454, was the guest speaker at the ACW meeting on Monday, April 4, explaining about the operation and services provided by Centre 454.

“Our goal is to create a welcoming space for folks to be,” she said, noting that Centre 454 welcomes an average of 175 people a day. She explained that about 80 percent of clients are in housing but much of it is housing that is not well taken care of. She explained that while clients may not technically be homeless, they are constantly faced with decisions between paying a bill and providing a meal.

Ms. Crawford said that Centre 454 tries to be what she called a “living room” for these clients where they can feel comfortable and can access the services offered. The whole idea behind Centre 454 is to offer a safe space for men, women and children where they can experience community, friendship and peace and where they can develop new skills that will help them transform their lives. Centre 454 offers social supports such as daily activities and special events, practical sup-



JOHN CURRY/METROLAND

Pat Dalphy, left, of the Anglican Church Women (ACW) at St. Thomas Anglican Church in Stittsville presents a box filled with shampoo and shower gel to Jennifer Crawford, right, who is the executive director of Centre 454 in Ottawa.

ports such as laundry and shower facilities, telephone and mailbox services and essential clothing, counselling support, help in navigating the application process for the Ontario Disability Support Program and spiritual support including weekly prayer services.

She explained that providing help in navigating the Ontario Disability Support Program is a major focus, with three staff currently dedicated to the role. She explained that the Ontario Disability Support Program entails an extensive application process involving support documents. Before Centre 454 provided help in this, applicants were usually denied on their initial application. But now, with Centre 454 help, applicants are usually getting an approval within three months. She explained that receiving financial help from the Ontario Disability Support Program helps clients financially, often allowing them to get a better place to live.

Centre 454 serves an average of 1,200 cups of coffee each day along with tea, juice and nutritious snacks. Providing everyday needs such as razors, deodorant, toothbrushes, can openers and socks is another of Centre 454's roles.

“The greatest needs are the practical things we can't keep up on,” Ms. Crawford said in reference to providing these everyday items and the demand for them from clients.

At the April 4th meeting, the St. Thomas ACW provided Ms. Crawford not only with a financial donation for Centre 454 but also provided a quantity of shampoo and shower

gel collected from ACW members as well as from members of the St. Thomas congregation.

Centre 454 employs 12 full time staff as well as 14 relief staff on weekends. Centre 454 also has about 250 active volunteers who help out in various roles including helping out in the kitchen or at the reception area and playing cards with clients.

“We'd be lost without our volunteers as well,” Ms. Crawford said.

Funding for Centre 454 comes from the city of Ottawa (about half) as well as from the Anglican Diocese and from donations both from Anglican parishes and from individuals in the community. It also has received grants from the federal government. Centre 454 began in 1954 on the initiative of the Council for Social Services of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa, at that time providing support to Anglican men who were preparing for their release from jail and re-entry into society. This initial ministry has evolved over time as Centre 454 moved to support emerging needs in the community. As the services changed and expanded, new space requirements were accommodated at various downtown Anglican churches including St. Alban the Martyr at 454 King Edward Avenue. This is where the name “Centre 454” was born. In 2000, Centre 454 moved to 216 Murray Street near King Edward Avenue but in so doing, it retained its familiar name. In 2012, Centre 454 moved back to the St. Alban's church basement at 454 King Edward Avenue.