

1980 – The Riverside Villa Association moved its addiction treatment program to 4515 Centre Street North, to be known as “*The Villa North*” with a 14 bed live-in program for women with addictions. The Sunalta location became a halfway house for women, the first of its kind in Canada. Room and board fees at the halfway house cost \$50 a week and residents were eligible for social assistance during the first month of their stay.



**Official opening of The Villa North by MLA Eric Musgreave Calgary – McKnight on June 16, 1980.
Loveday Boyle, Executive Director of The Villa North (right)**

This decision to push forward with this initiative, was due to the fact that 9 out of 10 women reported being abandoned by family or spouses while attending The Villa, while trying to overcome their addiction. This left them on their own, vulnerable, without resources, and often without employment or a means of taking care of their basic needs. A long-term, transitional setting was needed to ensure these women could continue their recovery process in the best way to support their continued sobriety.

The halfway house also helped to prepare women for independence and life outside of the centre. A number of programs were implemented to help women who were entering the job force, including interview skills, self-assertiveness training and learning how to socialize and have fun without using drugs or alcohol.

Many women in recovery were experiencing fear of relapse and other challenges in the weeks following the completion of their treatment program. Clients often experience a wide range of emotions when they graduate. Determination, a sense of accomplishment, happiness and overall well-being can be mixed with trepidation of leaving the security of the structured program, and being out on their own and experiencing a new addiction-free lifestyle. Returning home can mean a return to family and relationship stresses which newly sober women may find challenging, which puts their recovery at risk for relapse. Under the umbrella of a halfway house, if a Client were to relapse, trained Villa Staff could provide them with the care and support to help them through this critical time.

The first few weeks and months following treatment is one of the most crucial times for Clients. Prior to graduation from the program they learn relapse prevention and coping skills, including preparing for high risk situations, identifying triggers, dealing with cravings, self-reflection and working on a discharge plan to help them transition back into the community.

Continuing with innovative and progressive ideas, the Villa leadership recognized the need to help women re-build relationships with loved ones, and began hosting Family Evenings. During these information sessions, a Client's family members could learn about addiction, with emphasis on the fact that it is a disease.

"Once they are convinced it is a disease, the relief is tremendous. Children who thought mother was a 'bad lady' are relieved to learn that she was sick," Villa Director Evelyn Penny said.



Meridee Storey, Supervisor, The Villa North, counsels a Client about job opportunities

When family and friends understand Clients' feelings of shame and living with the stigma of a addiction, they can learn how to best support their loved one. They can learn to regain trust and the impact that healthy boundaries has on relationships. Above all, improved communication and positive relationships with family can improve Client outcomes and build a supportive foundation for their ongoing recovery.

In 1980, a third of The Villa's Clients had an addiction to both drugs and alcohol and Counsellors were noticing a dangerous trend – some women would seem to conquer their addiction to alcohol only to begin taking pills instead, or discover that taking both drugs and alcohol had an increased effect on the level of intoxication. In addition, drugs would often increase the craving for alcohol in those with addictive behaviors. *"This would often lead to women jumping from prescription to prescription trying to make themselves feel okay,"* said Meridee Story, Villa Supervisor. It was common during this time for many people to be overprescribed as a result, which in turn led to a rise in the number of people with an addiction to drugs and alcohol.

