

intro



SPECIAL AVENTA

"Women drink and gamble for different reasons than men do. They compromise themselves much more in addiction. A tremendous stigma is attached to addicted women. What allows women to heal here and makes them feel safe is being with other women." Cathy Wood, Executive Director of Aventa Addiction Treatment for Women, explains the myriad reasons why the only women-specific agency in Western Canada exists. Aventa's 31 year history began with residential services for alcohol dependency but now encompasses comprehensive programs treating substance and gambling addictions.

Wood says what distinguishes Aventa from other agencies "is that we offer a continuum of services – outpatient and residential for all areas of addictions, and ongoing support in aftercare groups. When a women enters our system on a pre-treatment status, she can stay with us for a year or longer and access a range of supportive services that maintain recovery skills."

That extends to programs for family, partners, and clients' children and teens. A new smoking cessation program builds women's confidence and coping skills and helps them avoid relapse in a group therapy process.

Pregnant women are a priority; those who seek treatment are admitted immediately to reduce harm to themselves and their unborn children.

The waiting list for residential admission is three to four months. A couple of years ago the organization committed to seeking out a new facility to lessen the wait. Wood says, "Residential beds are in highest demand. People think women can get better as outpatients, but they need to be out of their home environment and in a place where there's structure and no negative relationships that feed addictive behaviour."

Aventa has made progress towards their goal, securing the Scottish Extendercare Building in Cliff Bungalow. They will renovate the building, put in 36 residential beds and amalgamate outpatient services from other locations. Six beds are earmarked as crisis stabilization beds, the first women-specific withdrawal beds in Alberta. With the exception of their 12 bed post-treatment transitional facility, leased for next-to-nothing from Public Works, Aventa will be under one roof. The target date for completion of the renovations is September 2003.

"We need \$5 million for the project. We've raised about half that. We're looking for major gifts, writing grant proposals, and building relationships in the corporate community and with foundations and individuals," Wood continues. "For 31 years we haven't needed a handout – we've been 90-95 percent funded by government on the operational side, so nobody's heard of us. Now we're asking."

"Addictions are a hard sell. We emphasize we're impacting the lives of children and families significantly by treating women."

Call 245-9050 or visit www.aventa.org.

Christa O'Keefe - Calgary Magazine, Dec. 2002