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## Meeting “GAPPS” in Service

The GAPPS (Getting Appropriate Personal and Professional Supports) program is not your traditional Mental Health and Addictions service, with people coming to and fro for appointments.

Team members hit the road daily on foot – and by bicycle when the weather permits – to look for clients in some pretty grim locations: under bridges, on the street, along the riverbank. They also go to shelters, food banks, soup kitchens and the local detox centre.

“Our clients can’t make and keep appointments,” explains Gene Kolisnyk, Program Coordinator for GAPPS.

“They can be homeless, they don’t have phones. Sometimes we just chat and offer a coffee and slowly get to know the person. Reaching out can be as simple as a warm handshake.”

GAPPS is a pilot project managed in partnership between St. Joseph’s Care Group, the Canadian Mental Health Association Thunder Bay Branch and the NorWest Community Health Centres. The North West LHIN provides operational funding.

GAPPS began in March 2009 with the vision of offering a unique, integrated approach to service supporting very vulnerable persons with serious, unstable and complex mental illness and addictions issues.

It’s a true community solution, to a very complex issue.

“For a lot of these people, this is the first time someone has shown that they care for them,” says Dr. Mary Ann Mountain, a neuropsychologist and manager of mental health outpatient programs at St. Joseph’s Health Centre. “They can have a very poor sense of self-esteem and self-preservation. They have forgotten how to take care of themselves.”

GAPPS staff members use electronic health records, which are continuously updated. All individuals followed by GAPPS are registered and have a plan of care that addresses their current needs.

Kolisnyk says being creative and innovative has produced some impressive results. “Our work aims to intervene, get help for them now, and avoid emergency situations and deaths. We go to them.”