

## **Housing first for the mentally ill**

### **Former MP wants changes to assist those in need**

By Wendy Elliott

Former federal cabinet minister Claudette Bradshaw brought her message of housing first for the mentally ill to Kings County last week.

Bradshaw was hosted by the Kings County Schizophrenia Society at a well-attended meeting in New Minas. The former labour minister and former minister responsible for homelessness initiatives also spoke to students at Acadia University.

Widely recognized as an expert on policy issues related to mental health and homelessness, Bradshaw is currently the Moncton site co-ordinator for the national At Home/Chez Soi Project.

It involves 2,285 homeless people living with a mental illness. Through the program more than 1,000 people are given a place to live and offered services to assist them during the initiative. The remaining participants receive regular services available in their cities.

At Home/Chez Soi is a research demonstration project investigating mental health and homelessness in five cities: Moncton, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver.

The study, funded by the [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#), began in 2008 to get the mentally ill off the streets, offer them a furnished apartment and all the professional help needed for the next three years.

Bradshaw explained she was lured out of political retirement to spearhead the new initiative because she made a promise to Ashley Smith.

The 19-year-old Moncton woman, who struggled with mental illness, killed herself in prison two years ago while guards watched in an Ontario prison. A federal investigator said Canada's corrections and health systems failed her.

After Smith died, Bradshaw said she stood in front of her coffin and told herself that the teenager would not be forgotten.

"I did it for Ashley," she stated. "There are all kinds of Ashleys in this country. We have to try and make a difference."

According to Bradshaw, there are 42 different landlords in Moncton keen to rent to individuals in the project. The study is also working with rural families struggling with mental illness.

Bradshaw is now trying to set up a small school in New Brunswick to train employers, teachers, police officers and judges to recognize and work with people who suffer from mental illnesses, fetal alcohol syndrome, illiteracy and dyslexia.

She indicated it is important institutions, such as the courts, learn how to deal with people who may have forms of mental illness or other issues affecting their behaviour.

If it is successful, she'd like to see similar schools across the country. Bradshaw said she has high hopes for the training centre to help people and communities.

Bradshaw also sketched out her four decades working with not-for-profit groups and her experience as a federal politician.

She began at age 19 working for the Boys' Club in Moncton. Her years learning about isolation, abuse and hunger taught her children can be damaged by the age of six.

"You had to learn to love the parents because many of them did not know how to be parents," Bradshaw said.

She believes youth, who have been abused, develop an instinct about who to trust. "They're like a cat, they know right away who they can trust or not."

Looking back to 1968 when she went into the field, Bradshaw noted, "we've got the same problems, only worse."

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