

Wellness centre set to open In Beaconsfield. Will help those diagnosed with cancer and their families

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The doors aren't yet officially open but the West Island Cancer Wellness Centre is already welcoming phone calls about the services the non-profit centre will be offering in less than two months.

The first of its kind in the West Island, the centre will provide people who have been diagnosed with cancer, or who have friends or family who have cancer, with information, support, and services for the mind, body and spirit.

"This has been a dream in progress for many years, but we only launched the actual process nine months ago, planning to open in 2010," said psychologist Debbie Magwood, founder and president of the WICWC board of directors.

"But there was so much community support - and need - that we sped it up by a year and now plan to open within a couple of months."

Support indeed: on Monday, the city of Beaconsfield presented the centre with a \$20,000 cheque and a construction company has offered to do all renovations and construction needed on the 80-year-old three-storey farmhouse on Beaconsfield Blvd. that will house the centre.

"We are proud to support this fundraising campaign," Beaconsfield Mayor Bob Benedetti said in a prepared statement. "Our community will benefit from these programs and supportive services."

Donations and help have been so forthcoming, in fact, that even the landlord on the leased house has given them a break on part of the rent for a few months, Magwood said.

"The support has been tremendous," she said.

Contributions to the centre also include telephone equipment, an alarm system, paint, environmentally-safe cleaning products, a fireplace and four desktop computers. The centre still needs some furniture, more computers and would like to set up a gourmet kitchen.

Magwood said the need for such a centre in the West Island was evident to her.

"I was diagnosed with cancer in my 20s, when I was a student in psychology," she said. "I experienced what was missing first-hand."

Later on, while working with cancer patients, Magwood was again struck by what was needed and started doing some research into what could be done in the West Island.

And what she and co-founder Jill Boileau came up with was the cancer wellness centre,



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Jill Boileau (left), Debbie Magwood (centre) and Maria Lewis in front of the building in Beaconsfield that they will convert into the West Island Cancer Wellness Centre.

only the second such centre on the island of Montreal, although there are quite a few in the U.S.

"We will be the umbrella organization for all cancer-related issues," said Magwood, who worked for six years at the West Island Palliative Care Residence.

"We will be a home-like centre where people will find what they need; it will be place that will help cancer patients and their supporters maintain a quality of life conducive to maintaining active and productive lives, both personally and professionally."

The centre's supportive network will include psychologists, medical personnel, pharmacists, therapists, support groups and mentors, and offer one-on-one and group counselling, and referrals to spiritual advisers, Magwood said.

The programs at the centre are designed to meet a variety of needs and will include a drop-in coffee and chat centre, nutritional education with cooking classes designed to minimize side effects of some cancer treatments, Internet education, yoga, tai chi classes, meditation training and sessions, and medical and holistic treatment options.

The centre will be open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and some evenings.

For more information, visit the website www.wicwc.org or call Magwood at 514-909-2780.

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