

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Providing Employment and a Friendly Ear in the North East *North East LHIN recognizes its support for regional Warm Line during Mental Health Week***

**Wednesday, May 9, 2012** -- After having her son, Kaarina Ranta was plunged into a post-partum depression.

The social work student recognized that she needed help and sought treatment. Now she draws on this experience of mental illness as peer-support crisis intervention worker on the new Regional Warm Line – whose service expanded across the North East. She finds she’s able to connect with callers, drawing them out their shells.

“I have one person who calls in, quite often. We’ve had very similar upbringings. I find it helps with her – you’ve been through this, you’ve dealt with that so maybe I can too. It’s been a journey for me to share my life story but it has been very empowering,” she said. “We’re here now working. So I think the concept of peer support is empowering

With its new expanded regional role, peer support crisis intervention workers have been hired in Parry Sound, North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, and Timmins, in addition to those in Sudbury. Altogether a staff of 20 operates the Warm Line. Staff are able to not only offer peer support but direct callers to local programs and services providing mental health and addiction services in their area. Since it rolled out across the region, volumes have also increased by about 25 per cent and on average it receives about 19 calls a night.

Last year, the North East LHIN supported the creation of an enhanced Regional Warm Line, taking it from a Sudbury-based operation managed by the Canadian Mental Health Association/Sudbury Manitoulin to a region wide one, operated by consumers of mental health services so that Northerners in need of mental health, addictions or other support after hours can talk to a peer and find out about services in their area.

“It’s part of the North East LHIN’s strategy to reduce visits to emergency departments and better connect people with Mental Health and addictions to community services,” said Louise Paquette, North East LHIN CEO.

Now operated by the Northern Initiative for Social Action (NISA), it offers peer support for anyone needing a friendly ear not only those diagnosed with a mental illness. An additional benefit of the Warm Line is that it empowers people with “lived” experience of mental health services by providing employment opportunities.

About 91 per cent of those with a serious mental illness are unemployed, said Shana Calixte, Executive Director of NISA. This high percentage is partly due to the stigma attached to mental illness – a stigma that they’re hoping to break down.

**Quick Facts:**

- Open 6 p.m. to 12 a.m., seven nights per week, Northerners can access the Warm Line by dialing 1-866-856-9276.
- NISA is an organization run by and for consumers of mental health services. It develops occupational skills, nurtures self-confidence and provides resources for recovery by creating opportunities for participants to contribute to their own well-being and that of their community.
- To order Regional Warm Line posters or magnets call 705-675-9193 ext. 8206.

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- 30 -



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