

Alpha Court marks its 30th Anniversary



Reflecting on 30 years of helping people move beyond mental illness and addiction.



Written by Robin Moss

For Karen Smith, life might have turned out very differently were it not for Alpha Court.

“I don’t think I’d even be alive today,” she says, the emotion clearly evident in her voice.

But thankfully that was not to be. It was mental health challenges within her own life that brought Karen to Alpha Court’s door some 30 years ago. On January 1st, 1988, Karen became a full-time resident, and she remains there to this day, ever grateful for the lifeline that Alpha Court offered her.

“Megan Prince [former Alpha Court case manager] came to interview me at my parents’ house and then she made an arrangement to take me here to pick out an apartment that I wanted, a two bedroom apartment for my daughter and I,” she explains. “It was very exciting,

I was so very very excited and happy and felt that I was very lucky to be asked to come here and take a look at the apartments.”

In addition to the support and housing that she so desperately needed, Alpha Court was able to provide Karen with something altogether more essential: hope.

At the heart of Alpha Court’s philosophy is the belief that hope is the cornerstone to change and recovery, that all individuals, regardless of their mental health or addiction challenges, can reach their full potential and live productive lives. Alpha Court Executive Director, Nicole Latour agrees,

“Hope is definitely the foundation of Alpha Court,” she explains. “Hope is something that we’ve

always aspired to at Alpha Court, and it’s part of our psychosocial rehab model – that people can, and do, recover from mental health and addictions issues.”

A CONSISTENT CONTINUUM OF CARE

Funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Service Canada and the North West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), Alpha Court is a non-profit community organization providing housing and case management services to individuals with mental illness and addiction issues. When Alpha Court first opened its doors in 1988, its primary mandate focused on housing and support for people with mental health issues. Over the next three decades, demand for Alpha Court’s services has

increased considerably, which Nicole Latour believes is the result of shifting demographics and attitudes towards mental health and addictions.

“Alpha Court continues to get a significant number of referrals,” she says. “In fact, in the last two years we’ve had a wait list, which we’ve never had before.”

A sentiment echoed by Nicole’s colleague Paul Sutton, Addiction Case Manager for Alpha Court.

“I think people are becoming more comfortable with the idea of addressing their mental health issues, and hopefully as society understands and the stigma around mental illness lessens, people feel more comfortable asking for help.”

As demand has grown, so too has Alpha Court’s staff, services, and mandate. In 1988, Alpha Court employed four staff members. Today, that number has peaked at 35, with as many as 27 employees working on the frontlines. These developments have led to significant changes throughout the organization, most recently the addition of support and housing for individuals with addictions – all the while staying true to the organization’s original mission, vision and values. In fact, you could say on that score, it’s still business as usual.

“It’s my understanding that the mission and the values have been consistent throughout the years,” says Paul. “Alpha Court has taken some important components from psychosocial rehabilitation and incorporated them into the mission and values. Things like respect and dignity. Certainly to do with how people should be treated and the understanding that everyone has value and everyone can reach their full potential. Also hope. It’s certainly a vital component within recovery.”

Hope, respect, dignity, strength, independence: these are the common threads that run through the experiences of Alpha Court staff and clients alike.

“I could not be happier,” says Mykala Pryce, a trans woman and Alpha Court client for over 10 years, “I’m finally true to myself and true to who I am and who I always have been since I was little. I wasn’t who I was. They really helped me, they accepted me and treated me with respect where I didn’t really get that from society at large. Now things are starting to slowly change.”

Alpha Court prides itself on giving its workers the freedom and flexibility to be a partner in their clients’ recovery journey. Ultimately, it is the client who determines their goals and what direction they want their recovery to go. And it is that very same flexibility that allows Alpha Court’s team of dedicated case managers to support their clients at a level of involvement and at a pace that they are comfortable with.

“If somebody needs support just to get out of their home, the workers can work with them on a goal such as that,” says Nicole. “They could also do some volunteering with the client to get them accustomed to being around other people in a specific environment. From there, they can gradually take away the amount of support they’re giving so the person can gradually become more independent.”

And it’s precisely this supportive approach that has given Mykala the strength and courage to make concrete plans and to boldly face the future head on.

“With the help of Alpha Court, I ended up going to college,” she explains. “I just graduated my third year of business administration and marketing. I got accepted into LU (Lakehead

University) going into my third year of bachelors. I’ve also been accepted into Leadership Thunder Bay and I’m also the president of one of the local clubs that I’m a member of. And it’s been through the help and guidance of [Alpha Court] taking the time and working with me.”

THE FUTURE

So what does the future hold for Alpha Court? Will its doors remain open for another thirty years? For Director of Finance and Administration and Alpha Court employee for 28 years, Darlene Belliveau,

“It’s hard to tell in the climates we work and depending upon your funders and what they see in the future,” says Darlene. “Obviously there’s a definite need and that hasn’t changed, if anything it’s more needed now than it was before. We keep on being open to opportunity, but still the premise is – our main business – is case management and dealing with the clients that we serve and I don’t think that’s going to change.”

For Karen Smith, the future remains bright and there’s no doubt in her mind that Alpha Court will remain a viable, healthy and much-needed organization in the community.

“It just kept getting better and better all the time. I love it here, it’s my home. I made a home for myself. I love Alpha Court. I always will, they’ll always be in my heart.”