

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY 2016

Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre



Fiscal year ending March 31st 2017

Board of Directors

Wilma Di Gaetano
Co-Chair

Lana Hann
Co-Chair

Joanne Cassidy
Treasurer

Katia Sarla
Secretary

Directors

Arwen McKechnie
Katie Montague
Elizabeth Momodu
Melissa Rodgers
Annik Wills

Carol Wu
Ex officio

Ex officio - 2 Staff Members
(rotation)

Staff

Counsellors

Nighat Ara
Marlia Biggart
Linda Blot
Allie James
Elke Keating
Elise Harris
Gundel Lake
Nadine Letang
Patsy Morency

Jocelyn Bigras
Administrator

Allie James
Catalyst Input Worker

Claire Lacelle
Intake Worker

Jeannette Muzinga
Health Promotion Coordinator

Lois Ross
Community Relations Coordinator

Carol Wu
Coordinator

Message from the Board of Directors

Once again, in our Annual Report, we celebrate the Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre and the lives of the women who look to Amethyst for counselling and support on their journeys.

We applaud these women for their courage and resiliency. We acknowledge our profound appreciation to our dedicated staff members who provide addictions counselling for drug, alcohol, and gambling dependencies as well as our programs for health promotion, sexual abuse support, and early childhood development for pregnant and parenting clients.

During the past year, the Board of Directors welcomed several new members who demonstrate their commitment to the women served by Amethyst. As a full working board, we are 12 members. In 2017 we will have vacancies to fill and will be recruiting new members. We ask a lot of our board members and we are fortunate to work with such wonderful and giving women. We want to express our profound appreciation to departing members for all they have given to Amethyst.

The Board of Directors acknowledges the challenges ahead and our commitment to work together with our staff and the wider community to continue to make a difference in the lives of the women who come to Amethyst.

Wilma Di Gaetano and Lana Hann, Co-Chairs

Report from Management Committee

Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre served 534 women seeking counselling for substance use and/or problem gambling issues in the fiscal year 2016-2017. The women we see come from diverse backgrounds and all walks of life. Regardless of their path, we are here to help them take control of their lives and of the factors that are causing them to use substances as a way to cope.

We continue to deal with the challenge of uncertain economic times with no increase in permanent funding but with continued increases in the number of women waiting to receive services from Amethyst. The need for the services and for the unique approach that Amethyst brings to addiction counselling is needed as much today as ever. Amethyst functions so efficiently and effectively due to the daily commitment of our counsellors and staff. The women we support often provide us with words of thanks and stories of strength, living testimony to the impact our small organization has had on their lives.

In 2016, the collective welcomed two new permanent staff members. In April, Jeannette Muzinga, joined us as the new Health Promotion Coordinator. Then in November, Lois Ross joined us as our new Community Relations Coordinator, Welcome to Jeannette and Lois! Amethyst is pleased to have such qualified and committed women come on board!

As well, Allie James, our Catalyst Worker, became a unionized member this past January and is now a permanent part-time staff member. Allie's youthful energy and dedication provide all of us with the extra support required to efficiently run a number of projects.

We are also working with *Le Réseau des services de santé en français de l'Est de l'Ontario* to complete our French Language Designation Plan for the Ministry of Health Long Term Care.

As well, at the end of March 31st, our fiscal year, we received a one-time grant from the Champlain LHIN. We used these funds to upgrade the security system for our house.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Amethyst's Board of Directors for their outstanding work and continued support as well as Management Committee members and Staff who did excellent work throughout the year. Finally, I would like to extend a big thank you to our community members, donors, and volunteers.

Carol Wu, Coordinator

English Treatment Team

The English treatment team underwent another productive year in 2016-2017. In January of 2017, we were pleased to welcome back from maternity leave Elise Harris, our Sexual Abuse Support Program Coordinator and English Treatment Counsellor. Natasha MacLeod, who replaced Elise during her maternity leave, completed her contract at the end of December 2016. Natasha has been a dynamic, knowledgeable and dedicated member of our team, and we are pleased she will remain with us as a relief counsellor.

Rose McDade, a long-time member of our team who retired in 2015 has continued to lend her wisdom and experience to our clients as a relief counsellor for our weekly groups and some of our workshops. Another relief counsellor, Sarah Murphy has taken a leave of absence to explore a new career opportunity. We wish her well on her adventure.

Amethyst served hundreds of women through individual and group counselling. This past year has seen an increase in attendance at our Tuesday evening group, most notably since January when it was decided that the start time would be moved from 6:00 pm to 5:30 pm.

Throughout the past year, Amethyst once again offered several structured programs including the Mother and Daughter Program, the Structured Relapse Prevention Program, and the 8-Day Intensive Program. The treatment team has recently begun the process of exploring creative ways to revamp the 8-Day Intensive Program to better reflect the needs of our clients.

This past year treatment staff underwent intensive training in the implementation of a new standardized provincial assessment tool for new clients and clients seeking residential services. There is also a shift towards a centralized system of assessment and referral through Ottawa Addictions Access and Referral Services (OARRS), which liaises with Amethyst and other agencies and treatment centres offering addictions services.

Throughout the changes of the past year, Amethyst has continued its commitment to provide support to women on their journey towards healing and recovery.

In the words of one client: “I am happy to have Amethyst in my life. The opportunity to share, talk, and be heard, is the best thing for me. The woman-centred environment is inviting and I feel comfortable.”

We look forward to the opportunities and challenges ahead and to implementing new program ideas that further help women in rebuilding their lives with renewed hope and optimism for their future.

Elke Keating, Counsellor

French Treatment Team

We have had a good year, and one in which our francophone clientele has also increased. Our waiting list is testimony to our busy year as it has stretched from two weeks through to two months. Still, our priority remains the same: the well-being of the women we counsel, many with increasingly complex conditions. We count among our clients increasing numbers of women with nutritional issues, trauma, and personality disorders, all alongside substance use issues related to drugs and alcohol which impact their daily lives and healthy functioning.

We do all we can to support these women. For the past two years, the francophone program, has benefited from the internships of four student nurses. As part of their final year of university studies, these student interns provide service to the francophone community.. The first year these students came to Amethyst we decided to undertake workshops. The first workshop was on sexuality and the second about chronic diseases such as fibromyalgia. The workshops were tremendously successful and our women clients very pleased with the practical content and presentation. This year we undertook workshops on eating disorders. A video presentation on the topic was very well-received.

From the 17 to the 26 of October, we held the French Intensive Program. To date we have 13 women in the program, with eight who attend on a regular basis. If this number continues to increase, we will need to plan for a second intensive session.

On the request of Jeannette Muzinga, Amethyst's Health Promotion Coordinator, Counsellor Nadine Letang and I presented a workshop to the francophone community. We met with the Director of Maison d'amitié, Francine Groulx, who provided context for our presentation. With her support we prepared a training session on harm reduction presented to more than 30 representatives from shelters. Several attended from Timmins, Toronto, Sudbury as well as Ottawa.

Nadine and I are now working on presenting a eight-week workshop on mother-daughter relationships. We are currently preparing documents for this workshop, but have been delayed somewhat since the Counsellor hired last year has accepted an offer with another agency. We are currently actively recruiting for this position.

Linda Blot, Counsellor, Substance Use and Problem Gambling

Problem Gambling Program

Amethyst offers individual and group support to women who have concerns about their gambling behaviour.

For most women who access the program, problematic gambling involves the slot machines, although women also report problematic behaviour related to lottery play, video lottery terminals (VLTs), and casino games. While they access support around gambling specifically, further investigation often shows that gambling is an attempt to deal with other issues that women are facing in their lives.

Our services are important to the community because we offer an alternative model to 12-step-based recovery that many women are seeking. While some women may make use of 12-step programs, they often note the value of Amethyst's alternative perspective and the opportunity provided by our women's only space.

One of the main challenges in the Problem Gambling Program continues to be the low numbers of women accessing service. Prevalence rates indicate that a significant number of women in our community may have problems with gambling, especially considering the ease with which women can access gambling opportunities in the Ottawa region. Low attendance at gambling support services, however, is not unique to Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre. This trend is province wide and has been noted for several years. As a result, Amethyst will need to continue to seek new and innovative opportunities to raise awareness about women's problem gambling and the services we provide.

When you are speaking about the important work that Amethyst does around addiction services, be sure to include recognition of the valuable work we do around problem gambling; we are the sole women's only problem gambling service east of Toronto.

Gundel Lake, Counsellor

Sexual Abuse Support Program

“Bearing witness is a sacred act. Being witnessed makes us feel like we matter. It makes our life worth living.”

— Rose Kumar, Founder/CEO of the Ommani Centre for Integrative Medicine

The Sexual Abuse Support Program is an incredibly powerful program.

Most women who attend this program carry the double burden of shame around having both survived sexual abuse and addiction. Often, there are few spaces in their lives where they are able to talk openly about these experiences in an environment where they are met with support, understanding, validation, and care. But these qualities are the very foundation for healing. We bear witness to women’s experiences because it is crucial for women to know that they are believed and that we understand how using has, at one time, played a major role in their survival.

During the past year, women have used these words to describe the program: honour, healing, hope, compassionate, accepting, peace, sisterhood, precious, loving, and growing.

The Sexual Abuse Support Program at Amethyst Women’s Addiction Centre is a unique program in the Ottawa community. During this 12-week program, we help women make links between their experiences of addiction and childhood sexual abuse. This program is a combination of psychoeducation and therapeutic processing. In the fiscal year 2016-2017, we supported nine women in this process, while also offering support to several other women about whether or not they were ready to participate.

Beyond direct support to our clients, we are also a part of both the Sexual Assault Network (SAN) and the Front Line Support Committee (FLSC) of the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW). This community involvement is important in that we have the opportunity to network with other organizations and service providers, while also providing education and advocacy around the unique issues that women face when they also experience addiction.

Gundel Lake, Interim Sexual Abuse Support Coordinator (2016)

Early Childhood Development Program

This program is bilingual with services offered in both English and French. These services include counselling, referrals, and case management for pregnant and parenting women with addictions and mental health issues.

Case management is key to recovery as often these women need an advocate to help them access community services such as housing, health care, long-term disability, child care, and sometimes access to programs that can bridge their need for financial support.

This Early Childhood Development Program also emphasizes training of other professions such as nurse practitioners, social workers, and shelter workers who need an understanding of addiction-related issues in order to meet the client's needs. Similarly, community-based capacity building undertaken by Amethyst helps to support young families dealing with addictions.

Amethyst works closely with several community partners including Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services, St. Mary's Home, the Royal Ottawa, the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Montfort Hospital.

The responsibilities of the Early Childhood Development Program include one-on-one counselling, facilitating Amethyst's Intensive Program and its support groups, and advocating for clients' rights. The majority of the clients in this program are mandated by the Children's Aid Society or by the judicial system. In 2016 we saw an increase in the number of pregnant women dealing with concurrent disorders, meaning complex mental health and substance use issues.

Nadine Letang and Marlia Biggart , Counsellors

"I want to take a minute to thank you for all your support. You are the only ones during all my life that have supported me and taken me seriously regarding my health. You have no idea what your work at Amethyst has meant to me and how it is helping me to become a stronger person every day. I remember when I first came to Amethyst. I was so shy and afraid of expressing myself due to my difficult childhood. Your great recommendations have helped me so much in my self-confidence. I thank God every day that you and Amethyst came into my life"

—A grateful client of Amethyst's

Health Promotion Program

Amethyst's Health Promotion Program supports women in Ottawa to create healthy lifestyle changes through helping them take control of their lives, regardless of their relationship to alcohol, drugs, or gambling.

In partnership with community organizations, we provide a series of wellness workshops for women who are considered to be at risk in the community. At risk individuals include women who are low income, socially isolated, pregnant, young single mothers, unemployed or underemployed, students, and immigrants or newcomers to Canada.

We believe that women often engage in substance use or gambling as a way of coping. The programs explore the complex issues in women's lives, making links between these issues and women's coping strategies.

In 2016, we began to explore creating new partnerships with the Francophone community in Ottawa. From October 2016 to March 2017, we reached out to 43 women through a series of workshops:

- Self-esteem workshop (French Intensive Program, Amethyst Women Addiction Centre)
- Health Promotion Program Awareness workshop (Centre Espoir Sophie)
- Ten-week Assertiveness Program (Partnered with Centre Espoir Sophie)

With our community partners we delivered five programs and reached out to more than 53 participants. The list of workshops also shows the variety of organizations that we work with to serve the needs of women.

- Eight-week Stress Busters for Women Program (Pincrest-Queensway Community Health Centre)
- Eight-week Assertiveness Program (Carlington Community Health Centre)
- Six-week Self-esteem Program (TRY at YMCA)
- Skills for Change (The Well)
- Living with Anxiety (The Well)

There are always challenges for non-profit service organizations. For Amethyst, our work continues, though it is never done. Our main challenge is to bridge the funding shortfalls in an environment where the demands for our services are increasing.

Despite the constant search for monetary resources, we are always very excited to unveil new partnerships. In 2016-2017, Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre sought out partnerships with

immigration organizations who serve newcomers to Canada, a group that has been historically underserved by our programming.

In 2017, the rejuvenation of the program will continue.

Jeannette Muzinga, Coordinator

Here are some of the ways women have described their experience in our programs:

*Uplifting – Insightful – Growth –
Encouraging – Comforting – Strength
– Trust – Validating – Accepting –
Amazing – Educational – Fun –
Positive – Thought-provoking – Much
to work on – Awesome – Informative
– Interesting – Understanding –
Helpful Educative – Supportive –
Useful – Too short – Choices are very
powerful – Supportive – Great tools to
move forward – Good opportunity of
learning – Respect – Be proud of
myself – Assertive behaviours –
Expressing myself – Not responsible
for others feelings*

Art at Amethyst

Over the last year, Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre has had the opportunity to offer art programming in both formal and informal ways.

From April through to July 2016, we partnered with two local artists, Christine Mockett and Karina Bergmans, to offer Stepping Stones, a 12-week program made possible by funding through the Ontario Arts Council.

During our time together, we learned about the mediums of concrete and hypertufa, and created both garden stepping stones and garden containers.

In addition, we have continued the tradition of offering various craft days at Amethyst. While focused on specific crafts, these events are opportunities for women to engage and connect with one another outside of traditional therapeutic settings. These days are immensely popular among women who attend Amethyst. During the past year, we have made pom-pom wall hangings, holiday garlands, knitting projects, and spring wreaths.

Gundel Lake, Counsellor

“My experience of the Art Program at Amethyst was one of positivity and inspiration. The Art therapists and facilitators showed endless patience and offered good-humoured guidance with everyone. This made for an accepting, quite social and creative atmosphere for everybody, regardless of what the art projects we were working on. A wonderful idea!”

—G.E.

Outreach Volunteer Team

Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre has a unique outreach volunteer team composed of women in recovery who have successfully completed the Amethyst treatment program.

Our volunteers are a highly motivated, smart, compassionate group of women who generously give their valuable time to help other women in recovery. Outreach Volunteers usually offer help over the phone when someone reaches out to them in crisis. Sometimes they meet face to face, take clients to AA or other self-help groups, and help women make important recovery related decisions. Sometimes our courageous volunteers are so driven by goodwill and compassion that they don't hesitate to take extra steps beyond their usual role as an Amethyst Outreach Volunteer. This is how they connect as human beings, set examples for others, become role models, and make true friends. They can be a huge source of inspiration to one another.

"I'm an outreach volunteer because I really believe in the good that Amethyst does for the community. I've seen it in my own life and the lives of the clients I talk to.

Being part of Amethyst gives me a chance to give back to others and share some of the benefits that have come to me through the one-on-one counselling, as well as the community of women who come here. It feeds my soul to be connected to and to contribute to the healing power of women helping women."

—Djuna

It is such a joy to see these relationships blossom into something that is much more than what was initially meant to transpire. I would like to share a beautiful story of two women. Initially they started as a volunteer and a client looking for support in recovery. That relationship has grown into a more mature, meaningful, and lasting friendship over time. Since then, they have travelled together and even started a new self-help group in the community. As well, they both continue to sit on the Outreach Volunteer Team of Amethyst to offer helping hands to new clients! Treatment counsellors can't do the work that our volunteers do for women in recovery. It is these volunteers that complete the cycle of care by filling in the gap.

“Through Amethyst I learned how to take my power back rather than being a people pleaser and servant to alcohol. And, since I’m no longer a servant to alcohol, I can share my experiences with other women who are where I was. Simply put, Amethyst gave me the courage to be the woman I always wanted to be. I have to share this priceless gift.

Amethyst helps me to remember my humble beginnings (which I never want to forget). Amethyst reminds me that it’s okay to be human with flaws, and not a perfectionist always wanting to please everyone. Amethyst keeps me sober.”

—Rita

Elise Harris and I work jointly as the coordinator of this team. Elise was on maternity leave for most of 2016 and has returned to work recently. Welcome back, Elise! We hope to work together to make this team even stronger and dynamic in coming years. Last year attendance at outreach volunteer meetings was quite good. Amethyst celebrated the 2016 volunteer appreciation day by handing flowers to our volunteers. It is a small gesture of acknowledgement of all the good work they do. One of our volunteers has even shared her personal story of recovery for Amethyst fundraising purpose. Kudos to her and thank you from all of us!

The greatest challenge we face as coordinators of this team is meeting the fluctuating demand for this important service. It is also challenging to match the personalities and engage clients at the precise moment when the service is meant to work best. Despite all the challenges, we are proud to say there are many women who received help from Amethyst who are now willing to give back to the community! Help is just one phone call away!

Nighat Ara, Coordinator, Outreach Volunteer Team

Student Placements

Student placements are an integral part of the work we do at Amethyst. Not only do we have the opportunity to model alternative and empowering ways of supporting and working with women, but we also benefit from the energy, creativity, and knowledge of women who are coming into the field! This past year has been no different.

“The field placements provided by Amethyst are an invaluable experience and allow our students to gain skills and knowledge while being mentored by professionals in the field. It allows for networking opportunities and for the discovery of the vast community resources available to clients. We are so grateful to you and your team for taking the time and putting in the effort to provide this dynamic experience.”

*—Lisa Roots, Coordinator/Professor,
Community and Justice Services Program
Algonquin College*

In 2016-2017 we had the pleasure of welcoming Jenna Harney from the Bachelor of Social Work Program at Carleton University, Darienne Martell from the Community and Justice Services Program at Algonquin College, and Rebecca Balasa, Bernadine Exantus, Néomie Séguin, and Sophie Van Den Bremt from the Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Ottawa University.

Darienne captures the value of her time at Amethyst:

“My time at Amethyst was not only eye-opening to see first-hand how important feminist agencies are for women in need, but also to understand that women’s needs and experiences are very different from those of men. The fact that Amethyst provides services by understanding those differences shows genuine care for the clients. Personally, my time at Amethyst shaped me into a more confident person. I now recognize that I can create positive change and help people in need, something that I didn’t necessarily believe before my time at Amethyst.”

To all of the students who choose Amethyst, thank you. We benefit tremendously from your time here, and your energy and ideas continually shape the work we do.

Gundel Lake, Counsellor

The 2016-2017 year in numbers

Number of clients and visits per program

English and French Clients Served	534
Substance Abuse Program Visits	3,944
Problem Gambling Program Visits	144
Intensive Treatment Program Participants	21
Health Promotion and Awareness Visits	1,781
Sexual Abuse Support Program —	2 Groups of 14 Women
Enriched Play Care Visits (women and children)	120

Clients at Admission

Client - Alcohol/Drug	357
Client - Alcohol/Drug/Gambling	5
Client - Gambling	8

Language of Service at Admission

English	276
French	89
Other	5

Problem Substance Identified at Admission

Alcohol	272
Tobacco	204
Cannabis	92
Cocaine	68
Crack	45
Prescription opioids	35
Benzodiazepines	10
Other	50

(other substances identified include amphetamines and other stimulants, over-the-counter codeine preparations, heroin / opium and ecstasy)

Income Source at Admission

Employment	144
Employment Insurance	6
Ontario Disability Support Program	70
Disability Insurance	32
Ontario Works	65
Retirement Income	15
Other	9
None	7
Family Support	22

Education at Admission

No formal Schooling	1
Some Primary School	0
Primary School	3
Some Secondary or High School	52
Completed Secondary or High School	43
Some Community College, CEGEP Technical College, CE	32
Completed Community College, Technical College, CE	96
Some University (Not completed)	48
University Degree Completed	94
Unknown	1

Legal Problems at Admission

No	337
Yes	33

