Amethyst Women’s Addiction Centre

Report to the Community
March 31 2018 — March 31 2019
On February 2nd, 1979, Amethyst officially opened its doors.

Sure, those specific doors may not exist anymore, but the core of Amethyst still persists.

40 years of government changes, funding cuts, new positions, shifts in the structure, lost lives, gained lives... and we are still here.

On February 2nd, 2019, we celebrate 40 years of resiliency.

Celebrate with us.
Report to the Community — 2018-2019
Amethyst Women’s Addiction Centre

Message from the Board of Directors

This year — 2019 — is more than just another year for Amethyst Women’s Addiction Centre. We are celebrating 40 years of providing programs and services to women in the Ottawa region in a safe, warm, and friendly environment. The art work contained in this report is a collection from clients celebrating Amethyst!

The Amethyst Board of Directors, on this special occasion, would like to deeply show their appreciation towards our dedicated staff and volunteers for their cooperation and efficient work. We also want to thank our funders as well as the resilient women who come to Amethyst, for helping to ensure Amethyst’s continued success.

During the 2018-19 year, the Board of Directors welcomed new members who continuously demonstrate their commitment to the clients served by Amethyst. As a full working Board, the challenges are high, but the Board has been able to commit and meet most of our duties and goals. We would like to extend our thanks and gratitude to departed board members for their hard work and commitment.

For our 40th year celebration, the board, staff and our amazing volunteers will be organizing various events that will celebrate the women of Amethyst as well as give the community a chance to know who Amethyst is and the services rendered. We are also using this opportunity to raise funds for our various programs and services. We are receiving donations on our website as well as directly on canadahelps.ca

We will continue working together with our staff and the wider community to make a difference in the lives of the women who come to Amethyst.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Momodu & Christiane Saad — Board Co-chairs
What Does Amethyst Mean to Me?

In celebration of Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre's upcoming 40th anniversary, we gathered past and present clients, volunteers, and staff to explore what Amethyst has meant to our community. This is a collection of their creations.
Report from the Management Committee

“We must open the doors and we must see to it they remain open, so that others can pass through.”
— Rosemary Brown, politician, activist, and Canada’s first black female member of a provincial legislature

It's exciting to know that Amethyst Women’s Addiction Centre has now been providing services in the community for 40 years! That is a huge contribution and a remarkable success story given the constant challenge of being a small feminist organization working in the field of trauma-based addiction.

Amethyst supports women 18 years and older by offering services along the continuum of care, from our Health Promotion Program to our Treatment Programs, where clients seek counselling for substance use and problem gambling issues. The women we see come from diverse backgrounds and from 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 of coping.

We are still dealing with the challenge of uncertain economic times with no substantial increase in permanent funding for the demand of our services. The need for our services is large, and we continue to have a referral list of women waiting to get into our English and French Treatment Programs.

We received a One-Time Grant from our funder, the Champlain LHIN, that provided the opportunity for our Health Promotion Coordinator to do some educational workshops in the community regarding opioid addiction. We were also fortunate to get some funding that allowed us to do some upgrading to our IT infrastructure as well as getting some repairs done for the roof of our house.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Amethyst’s Board of Directors for their wonderful work and continued support. As well, a big thank-you to Amethyst's dedicated staff who did exceptional work throughout the year as well as extending a big thank you to our community members, donors and volunteers.

— Carol Wu, Coordinator
SAFETY
POWER
RESPECT
Treatment Team

The treatment team underwent another busy, yet rewarding, year in 2018, as we continued to provide support to our clients through individual counselling and our weekly support groups.

In addition, throughout the year Amethyst has offered several structured programs including: Family Dynamics; the Structured Relapse Prevention Program; and three series of six psycho-educational workshops centred around recovery.

The French program provided a six-week mindfulness program to clients. This past year, we also began offering informational workshops for clients on our wait list in addition to the weekly wait-list group.

Besides our treatment staff, which includes Gundel Lake, Nighat Ara, Marlia Biggart, Elise Harris, Elke Keating, Anna Lom, Amethyst programs are supported by our relief staff who aid in the facilitation of groups and workshops. We offer appreciation and gratitude to Rose McDade, Kailey Brennan, Natasha MacLeod, Amanda Rocheleau, Karen Barclay, and Katia Larsimont-Seguin for committing their time and energy.

It has been a time of transition and change for the French Treatment Program. We welcome our newest counsellor to the team, Anna Lom. As well as providing individual counselling and group and workshop facilitation to our Francophone clients, Anna has been offering group Accudetox sessions to clients on a weekly basis. We have said good-bye to one of our counsellors, Linda Blot, who recently resigned. We appreciate Linda’s commitment to the women she has supported over the years and wish her well in her future endeavours.

We continue to work collaboratively with Service Access to Recovery (previously known as OAARS – Ottawa Addictions Access and Referral Services), to coordinate access to treatment options for our clients. Throughout the changes to our team and the evolution of our programs, Amethyst continues its commitment to provide support to women on their journey towards healing and recovery.

A recent graduate of our services described the role of Amethyst in her life in this way; “Amethyst has been my anchor in my recovery; it has been my safe place to share and explore my experiences of addiction with women who have walked a similar journey. I want to pay it forward by supporting other women in their recovery.”
We look forward to the opportunities and challenges ahead for implementing new ideas into our programming in ways that continue to help women to rebuild their lives with renewed hope and optimism for the future.

— Elke Keating, Counsellor, English Treatment Team
— Anna Lom, Counsellor, French Treatment Team
Amethyst  Oct. 28, 1986
This is the day I came here
for help with alcoholism.
I have been clean and sober
ever since.
Because my counsellors cared
Because lesbians are welcome
Because I made friends here.
Because women and our needs
and concerns are understood
from a feminist perspective.
Because I was able to give
back as a board member
and outreach volunteer.
Thank you, Amethyst.
you helped me save
my own life.
Barbara Freeman
The Early Childhood Development Program

The Early Childhood Development Program is a bilingual program offering services in both English and French. The services we offer include counselling, referrals, and case management to pregnant and parenting women with addictions and mental health issues.

The goal of this program is to provide long-term counselling, which includes individual counselling sessions, and support groups. Women in this program often present with chronic, complex trauma and mental health.

This year, we are seeing more clients come to us with a diagnosis of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). It is crucial to support these women with their mental health and substance use, but also as important, to support them in their parenting of young children. Many clients in this program are mandated by the Children’s Aid Society and the legal system, and so it is necessary to work closely with these agencies to create treatment plans.

We continue to work closely with many agencies including Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services, St Mary’s Home, The Royal Ottawa, Children’s Aid Society of Ottawa, Wabano Centre of Aboriginal Health, The Canadian Mental Health Association, and the Montfort Hospital. In the course of a year there are many interactions that stand out. Here is but one.

A client, who has been coming to Amethyst since October 2017, is currently working on updating her nursing skills and hoping to get back her nursing license. She has been working hard on her recovery, and her schooling. It has been very difficult for her to juggle the demands of school and stay sober. She is not only a mother but also a grandmother. It was heartwarming to see how excited and grateful she was when she had the opportunity to pick a gift for her granddaughter for the holidays. These gifts are often donations, and possibly the only gifts these women may get.

Amethyst is a house filled with exactly these types of stories and important moments in the lives of clients. It is what has made Amethyst not only a counselling service for women struggling with addiction, but also a warm, welcoming, supportive home for many.

— Marlia Biggart, Counsellor
Landing

A place for everything
Sexual Abuse Support Program

The Sexual Abuse Support Program (SASP) supports clients both in healing from experiences of childhood sexual abuse and recovering from substance use addiction and problem gambling.

Consistently our statistics show that almost 70 per cent of Amethyst clients have experienced sexual violence during their lifetime. And, increasingly, research points to the fundamental link between addiction and experiences of trauma for many.

SASP recognizes the need for integrated care for both trauma and addiction. SASP program counsellors understand problematic substance use and gambling as a coping mechanism for managing trauma-related symptoms, and support clients to heal from trauma without returning to substance use or gambling as a means of survival.

Common goals for this program include decreasing isolation, addressing shame, and building a positive history of experiences. In the past year clients described the program using words such as inspiring, worthwhile, intense, fulfilling, healing and loving. This year we supported nine clients in two 12-week programs, along with many others by phone, providing them with information about the program or referrals to other agencies.

Beyond direct support to our clients we also provide information to service providers in the community about the program and about the connection between experiences of sexual violence and addiction. For example, this year we presented on the connections between gender, violence, substance use, mental illness, and trauma-informed care through the City of Ottawa’s Community Capacity Building program. That presentation was made to 50 front-line workers who support people experiencing homelessness.

As well, Amethyst is a member of the Sexual Assault Network and the Front-Line Support Committee of the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women where we have the opportunity to network with other organizations while also providing education and advocacy around the unique issues that women face when they also experience addiction.

— Elise Harris, Counsellor
I STARTED TRAPPED AND GATED...

AMETHYST
To the Rescue...
THROWING ME
A LIFELINE
OF TOOLS &
FOLLOWED
STEPS.

FAB
Problem Gambling

Did you know that more than 9000 women in Ottawa struggle with gambling?

Whether it is casino games or slot machines, online gambling, Bingo, lottery or scratch tickets, Ottawa-area residents have access to numerous gambling options. Meanwhile, with increased access also comes an increase in risk for members of our community to develop gambling related problems.

One issue specific to women’s problem gambling is that women’s “problem” gambling doesn’t always look like “problem” gambling. In other words, women tend to spend less money in part because women typically have access to less money. So, it is important to not make assumptions about the scope of the problem based on finances alone.

Sometimes, women’s gambling gets minimized because the financial implications seem less consequential. And because women still tend to be primarily responsible for caretaking in society, women often maintain their roles as caretakers even while gambling.

In other words, while women may problem gamble, it may not interfere with day-to-day life in the same way as it does for men who are not expected to maintain caretaking duties.

The 2018-2019 year has been busy for Amethyst’s Problem Gambling Program. We have experienced a significant increase in the number of clients accessing our services and many women continue to make the link between their experiences of problem gambling and historical trauma.

In addition to providing direct service, we continue to engage in Health Promotion programs intended to prevent problem gambling. We also continue to collaborate and advocate at the local and provincial levels to ensure that the specific needs of those who problem gamble are taken into account, and that these needs are also approached through a gender-based lens.

— Gundel Lake, Counsellor
Community Relations

The past year has flown by — and Amethyst is now well on-track in celebrating—its 40th anniversary in 2019.

While the last three quarters of 2018 were filled with many events, Facebook posts along with likes and shares, as well blog posts to our website — much of the year was spent on the creation of four videos about our work. It was an intensive and fruitful project.

In July of 2018, Amethyst was very fortunate to have a student intern come on-board to work as our digital content creator. I was pleased to have Candide Uyanze, a University of Ottawa student, work alongside me to help create four separate videos leading into 2019. Candide worked tirelessly to help us chronicle Amethyst’s history as well as create very professional, first-person stories, based on interviews with some of our clients.

We are grateful to three of our clients – Carla, Deb and Lesley – for sharing their stories so openly, so that others might be empowered and also learn about the work we do here at Amethyst. Unfortunately, Lesley passed away of cancer shortly after our interview — too soon for someone so young.

As well, another strong feminist who was interviewed for our 40th anniversary video, a long-time supporter and former board member Helen Levine also died in the fall of 2018. We were so pleased that she accepted to be interviewed in the summer of 2018. Time does not stand still, but our oral history is an important component of remembrance and empowerment.

Each of these videos provides an excellent way to help de-stigmatize addiction by showing the very human face of the women we serve. A huge shout-out to the women of Amethyst — including staff, board, and clients — for being a part of this 40th anniversary project. The 40th anniversary video can be viewed on our homepage, while the stories from former clients can be viewed on our blog page.

As well, during the past year we have continued to apply our 5-year Communications Strategy beyond the very labour intensive video project. We have updated our promotional brochure and ensured that the branding of this important document is in keeping with the new look of our website and other materials.
Today, the door is opened and I can NOW BREATHE and see MY future PEACEFULLY and grow old happy.

Thank You AMETHYST!!
When an organization works on a slim budget, new materials, projects, and branding occur in stages and over various years.

Such is the case at Amethyst, but we are on track.

As well, early in the new year of 2019 we began planning for our 40th anniversary celebration, scheduling an event for June 6, 2019, in Ottawa. More on that event in the 2019-2020 Report to the Community.

—Lois Ross, Community Relations Coordinator
growth takes time
Health Promotion Program

During the past year, Amethyst’s bilingual Health Promotion Program engaged with more than 1,000 people in the Ottawa community through workshops, group presentations, and agency fairs.

The main goal for this year was to sustain and extend our partnerships, join the opioids prevention movement, and support efforts to reduce stigma and problematic substance use in the community.

Amethyst was able to build capacity and knowledge by attending the workshop *Stigma ends with Me* organized by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and the Community Addictions Peer Support Association. Throughout the workshop, participants resolved to work toward “changing the stigmatizing language of addiction to support recovery”.

Amethyst’s Health Promotion Program also took part in discussions to develop an integrated intervention model that will reduce the impact of the opioid crisis in Ottawa during the Ottawa Summit on Opioids, Substance Use and Mental Health. The goal of these on-going discussions is to give people of all ages better access through coordinated support.

The Health Promotion Program also provides an eight-week Women and Wellness Program through our partners, the Western Community Resource Centre, the West Carleton Place Health Team, as well as Le Centre Espoir Sophie.

Among the many highlights during the year were meetings with community members at the following events.

Actions in the Community: Agency Fairs and Presentations

- Algonquin College Harm Reduction Awareness week
- Addiction, stigma and change our language to support recovery — Presented to the Lower Town Community Resource Centre, St Joe’s Women Centre, Centre Espoir Sophie, The TRY Housing Support Program
i-SHINE
Testimonials

“Thank you very much for participating in our Harm Reduction Week Agency Fair! We truly appreciate it so much and hope that you enjoyed your time working with us!”

“It was an extremely successful event with over 350 students and faculty learning more and more about what our community has to offer in terms addictions and harm reduction services.”

“I am taking my second self-esteem program with Amethyst. These groups have taught me that I have the power to be happy. I have a part of my life in darkness and dependence. This program has provided me with the tools to help empower me peacefully. After having written these words, I cried, because I suddenly realized that I have been liberated and that I too have the power to accomplish things in this world.”

“I have learned to be aware of my qualities and that I am a good person.”

“I have been surprised how many factors have contributed to my current situation over the many years”

“The facilitators have been very informative and supportive, made it comfortable and safe to open and share with others. Keep up the good work”

“I feel more positive — I can reduce my anxiety or accept it as it is”

“I learned how anxiety is complex and not scary anymore”

— Jeannette Muzinga, Health Promotion Coordinator
Dear Addiction

We’ve been together a long time
Through pain, trauma, shame and crime.

I thought we were friends,
You never left me alone,
On the street, in shelters, hospital and home.

Through pregnancy, parenting, loneliness and despair,
Mr dear friend Addiction
You have always been there.

You have changed through the years,
Sometimes sex, food or self-harm.
But whenever stressed or overwhelmed
You always helped me feel calm.

As my constant and familiar
I thought you had my back.
Then I met my arch enemy
The drug known as Crack.

You became my everything,
My identity, my life.
I felt I couldn’t live without you
Although you brought only pain and strife.

I became so lost, so hopeless,
I felt totally alone.
The shame and guilt so overwhelming
I couldn’t pick up the phone.
Lying, cheating, stealing, prostitution and fraud,  
I would’ve done anything for the drug I adored.

Chaos and drama,  
Trauma and pain.  
Self-hatred and self-pity,  
I saw myself with disdain.

I lost my children, friends and self-respect,  
There was not one part of my life that you did not affect.

To your credit Addiction  
Life was never a bore,  
But when I looked in the mirror I would hate what I saw.

Now the time has come that I must say goodbye.  
If I don’t, I know with certainty that I will die.  
If not in body, then in spirit, mind and soul.  
With self-care, love, faith and friendship I will fill the gaping hole.

I now know Addiction,  
You were never my friend,  
Just a self-destructive and painful means to an end.

—Sam 2017
The waters deep therapy
the ecological cycles
continuity
no longer at as
much of a loss
of sadness
Changes
  Jean Bell

24.10.2018

Awaken to a better life
Mend and repair with care
Support and strengthen
Bonded with others
discovery of a happier
journey's path
Relationships like
branches of the trees.
Grow the anger winds
protecting prayer.

Reaching out
water, soil
Compassion
Companion
growth and
nourishment.
Art at Amethyst

“Creativity gives us the ability to see things in a different way and the courage to step out and do something in a way that hasn’t been done before.”
—Jane Chu / Artwell Art Therapy

Art Days continue to be a much-loved and well-attended program at Amethyst.

This year we have hosted a variety of events, from mandala-inspired painted rocks to paper lanterns, pumpkin painting and carving, through to paper-stacked Christmas trees and knitting. Our clients regularly express their appreciation for the exposure to such a wide-range of creative endeavours.

As part of this programming, Amethyst also participated in the Clothesline Project. This project is meant to raise awareness about gender-based violence by having survivors and allies paint t-shirts that are then publicly displayed. This community activity has been an important site of activism for many years in Ottawa. Since many of our clients have experienced gender-based violence, the Clothesline Project is a powerful and therapeutic way of sharing through creative expression and healing.

Another exciting opportunity we have been able to offer our clients is a series of Movement Workshops, led by local performance artist Elizabeth Emond-Stevenson.

Elizabeth has generously donated her time and expertise to lead clients through exercises aimed at helping them to connect with their bodies in gentle and playful ways. Clients have expressed that this workshop is a fun and uplifting way to spend an hour, moving to great music.

— Gundel Lake and Marlia Biggart, Counsellors
Truly I just want to say is

Thank You Amethyst for all your years of service to all the different women that have come to your doors. I've been living in Ottawa for over 40 years. And until Amethyst was offered to me, I had no clue that this place even existed......

And let me say you here have all made a big difference in my life! Which really there is NO AMOUNT of thank you's I can give to show how I truly feel about Amethyst.
Student Placements

The 2018-2019 year was slower than usual in terms of student placements as a result of staffing changes that impacted our ability to host placements. Nonetheless, we continue to partner with local colleges and universities to provide quality learning opportunities for a variety of programs in which field experience is critical.

This year, we were incredibly fortunate to have Katie Cameron join the treatment team from May to August. Katie’s practicum was her final requirement for her Master of Social Work Program at Carleton University. Katie’s quiet presence and critical analysis were appreciated by all. Staff and clients also valued her contributions in groups and workshops, including a workshop that she developed about creative writing as a tool for recovery.

We were also thrilled to have been selected by a group of Carleton research students, also from the Master of Social Work Program, who have been conducting research entitled “Moving Beyond the Gender Binary: Expanding Gender Inclusion at Amethyst”.

Jenna Spagnoili, Mili Jobanputra, Jess Kalman, Shelby Spottiswood, and Jori Armishaw worked with us from September – April and have compiled a report that will assist us in exploring how Amethyst may begin to better serve trans and non-binary individuals whose experience might best be viewed through the lens of gender-based oppression and discrimination.

Amethyst values these opportunities immensely; while it is true that students benefit, so do we as staff, clients, and community. Student placements greatly enrich our work.

— Gundel Lake, Counsellor
Thanks for Sharing!
Statistics taken at admission for problem substances show that:
- 75% of clients report alcohol
- 48% of clients report tobacco
- 27% of clients report crack and/or cocaine
- 25% of clients report cannabis
- 9% of clients report hallucinogens
- 8% of clients report opioids (3% prescription)
- 9% of clients report other substances not included here

GAMBLING

Statistics taken at admission for gambling behaviours show that:
- 47% report "other" (this typically refers to behavioural addictions)
- 29% reported slot machines
- 12% reported bingo
- 6% reported instant win/scratch tickets
- 6% reported internet gambling
STATISTICS

PROGRAM VISITS

English and French Admissions
Clients served: 471

Substance Abuse Programs
Total visits: 2,943

Problem Gambling Programs
Visits: 258

Intensive Program
62 groups

Sexual Abuse Support Program
3 groups with 11 clients

Health Promotion Program
Total visits: 1,871
Total groups: 40

Enriched Play Care
Total visits: 26

Client Type
14% identified gambling as a problem
92% identified substance use as a problem

14% of new clients were registered in our Problem Gambling treatment program, an increase of approximately 10% from last year.

OUR CURRENT CLIENTS

Language of Service
English: 82%
French: 18%
Other: 0.1%

Age
18-24: 4.3%
25-34: 23.0%
35-44: 31.6%
45-54: 20.8%
55-64: 1.8%
65+: 2.1%

Education Background
Some or all university completed: 33%
Some or all college completed: 34%
Some or all high school completed: 32%
Some or all primary schooled completed: 1%

Employment Status
Employed full-time: 34%
Employed part-time: 6%
Unemployed: 13%
Disabled (not working): 39%
Retired: 3%
Student: 2%
Not in labour force: 3%

Relationship Status
Married/partnered: 31%
Divorced/separated: 18%
Single (never married): 46%
Widow/widower: 5%
Statistics

Mental Health, Violence, & Addiction

Violence
At discharge, we collect statistics on clients' experiences of violence in its various forms.

Of clients discharged in the 2018-2019 year...
- approximately 1 in 4 were incest survivors (24%)
- approximately 1 in 3 (33%) experienced sexual violence both as a child and again as an adult (compounded traumas)
- 80% experienced adulthood physical violence
- 81% experienced childhood physical violence
- 48% experienced childhood sexual violence
- 53% experienced adulthood sexual violence

Mental Health
89% of new admissions in the 2018–2019 year reported having been diagnosed with a mental health issue, with 69% having two or more comorbid diagnoses, most commonly anxiety and depression (45%).

Common diagnoses included depression (64%), anxiety (60%), borderline personality disorder (8%), post-traumatic stress disorder (6%), and bipolar disorder (5%).

Other Client Experiences
Other common experiences for our clients include:
- significant losses (e.g. children, partners, employment) (90%)
- links between addiction and interpersonal relationships (98%)
- family history of addiction (82%)
- history of disordered eating (45%)
- psychiatric medication use (82%)

Amethyst helps clients make links between experiences of trauma and violence and their addiction and mental health.
When I dare
Deep
Therapize
Tak
Express yourself
I was terrified of my hell
More power
Discover
Present
Don't let a scar steal your
Self Love
Self Love
M.C.e
Board Members and Staff – March 31 2018 - March 31 2019

Board of Directors

Elizabeth Momodu – Co-chair  
Christiane Saad – Co-chair  
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Allie James – Catalyst Input Worker  
Claire Lacelle – Intake Worker  
Jeannette Muzinga – Health Promotion Coordinator  
Lois Ross – Community Relations Coordinator  
Carol Wu — Coordinator

Counsellors

Nighat Ara  
Marlia Biggart  
Linda Blot  
Elke Keating  
Elise Harris  
Gundel Lake  
Nadine Letang  
Anna Lom
“When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.”
—A. Den Heijer

To all who contributed, thank you.