

NEIGHBOURHOOD MAKEOVER Queen St. mental health and addiction centre moves into second phase of huge overhaul

CAMH 'leapfrogs' into 21st century

TERESA BOYLE
HEALTH REPORTER

When the Provincial Lunatic Asylum was built in the mid-1800s, it rose on what was then the outskirts of Toronto.

The paternalistic thinking at the time was that "lunatics" needed safe asylum in a quiet, pastoral setting, far away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Modern lore has it that the decision-makers of the day also thought it best for the rest of society to keep anyone "different" out of sight.

More than a century and a half later, the city has enveloped what is now known as the Queen St. site of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Though the original Victorian monolith has since been demolished and replaced, the 11-hectare site remains stuck in time, cut off from the city.

While people with mental illnesses and addictions now live and work among us, Canada's largest centre for treatment and research of these problems is still an island unto itself. But that's starting to change.

The sprawling, drab administrative building that, for more than 50 years, was the face of 1001 Queen West, has seen its last days. Demolition is almost complete and little more than a mountain of rubble remains.

Groundbreaking for the second phase of redevelopment of the site is set for April 6.

"This is an opportunity for us to leapfrog into the 21st century," says Dr. Catherine Zahn, the new president of CAMH.

"The language of the day is inclusivity. It is the idea of inclusion, to reduce prejudice and reduce opportunities for discrimination of people who have issues in their lives," she explains.

The goal is to integrate CAMH with the surrounding neighbourhood. But it's about more than urban planning; there's a recognition that being connected to the community is simply good for anyone's mental health.

Currently, most people who venture onto the site are clients, staff and the odd dog walker.

Local business people say the south side of Queen is a "dead zone" at night. But given that much of the redeveloped site will be taken up by non-CAMH functions, that's expected to change.

Four buildings will be constructed in this phase, joining four that went up in Phase 1 starting in 2006. The new buildings will look more residential than institutional. One will include a retail ground floor and seven storeys of affordable housing.

Once the four phases of the redevelopment are complete, in about 2020, six new city blocks will have been created. Surrounding streets, including Ossington, will be extended through the site to create new streetscapes, with parks, cafes and stores.

Outpatient Angela Foot says integrating the centre with the neighbourhood helps "normalize" men-



Dr. Catherine Zahn, president of CAMH, left, and outpatient Angela Foot tour site. Phase 2 is expected to be ready in 2012 at a cost of \$341 million.



The original Victorian Provincial Lunatic Asylum, built in the mid-1800s, left, and an artist's impression of the Gateway Building. This new building will include office space, a gym, sidewalk patio and cafe.

GOAL IS TO MAKE CENTRE RESIDENTIAL, 'HOMELIKE'

The new mental health centre won't look much like a hospital.

"We're trying to make it as non-institutional as possible, and homelike," explains architect Alice Liang, spokesperson for the three architectural firms leading the redevelopment.

Not only will the new facility "transform" the care patients get, but it will dramatically improve the neighbourhood, she says.

One of four structures going up,

the Gateway Building, will look like a seven-storey warehouse loft. This is the centrepiece of the redevelopment.

In addition to treatment and office space, it will include a cafe complete with sidewalk patio, to be run by clients and open to the general public. There will also be a gym available for community use.

Other new buildings include a six-storey treatment facility, a seven-storey affordable housing building

and an eight-storey parking and utilities building.

Four buildings in the first phase, finished in 2008, are on the new White Squirrel Way. The four-storey buildings look more like walk-up apartment buildings.

The iconic wall surrounding the site, a remnant from the asylum days, will remain intact, except for a few sections that will be removed to allow streets to run through.

Theresa Boyle

tal illness.

She notes parallels between her family's history of mental illness and the evolution of the facility. Her Uncle Doug, who suffered from schizophrenia, lived a lonely existence in a Parkdale group home un-

til his death in 2004. He was never included in family functions. Foot's parents thought it best to shield their children from him, so she met him only once.

Foot, 36, wasn't diagnosed with bipolar disorder until five years ago,

though she now realizes she had suffered symptoms as early as age 6. Stigma and fear kept her and her family from addressing the problem earlier.

"I didn't want to be abandoned by my family by telling them I had

these problems," she says, observing how her family's experience demonstrates the link between integration and compassion.

"I wish I had gotten to know Uncle Doug. It breaks my heart that he was abandoned."

TEENS OFFERED DUAL TREATMENT

A new facility offering inpatient treatment to teens with both mental health and addiction issues will be a key feature of Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Phase 2. These 12 "concurrent disorders" beds will be the first of their kind in Canada.

Though dual diagnoses are not uncommon, treatment has been limited in the past because it has focused on only one of the issues. The inpatient program will complement an existing outpatient one for concurrent disorders.

High-school-age patients will be able to complete high school at the centre in cooperation with the Toronto District School Board.

Meanwhile, the centre will also house 48 in-patient beds for CAMH's geriatric mental health program.

The new buildings will join four others built in Phase 1, on White Squirrel Way, which house 72 beds for patients with mood and anxiety disorders and addictions.

Phase 2 is expected to be completed by the summer of 2012 at a cost of \$341 million.

Theresa Boyle