

New hospital needs 150 volunteers

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St. Joseph's needs at least 150 adult volunteers for the nearly completed new mental health hospital on the west Mountain.

"Don't be afraid," patient and volunteer Ian Cox said about working for a hospital that specializes in mental health care. "If you can get past the stigma and have an open mind, you can have the most rewarding experience."

The 47-year-old Mount Hope man was diagnosed with bipolar disorder 15 years ago and has been both an in-patient and outpatient of the (<http://www.cmha.ca/mental-health/understanding-mental-illness/bipolar-disorder/>) West 5th Campus (<http://www.stjoes.ca/default.asp?action=article&ID=191>) of St. Joseph's Healthcare. He also volunteers there, selling heavily discounted clothing to patients.



"This is my safe haven," said Cox. "I come in to work for the patients. I still get the warmth and I know everyone from the doctors to the cleaning staff."

He sees firsthand the good his work does at the hospital store, which takes donated adult clothes and sells them to patients for between 50 cents and \$5. All of the money raised goes to buy toiletries and personal hygiene products, sold in the shop at a deep discount.

"It makes a huge difference," said Cox. "There was a man I helped out two weeks ago who'd had a very rough time and had hardly anything. For \$11, he bought 23 items. When he paid for it he was almost crying, he was so thankful."

Adult volunteers available during the day are needed for the clothing shop and other stores when the Margaret and Charles Juravinski Centre for Integrated Healthcare opens in February. There's also a wide variety of other jobs — from moving patients into the hospital to helping visitors find their way around to assisting with staff orientation to working in the museum.

"We take great strides working with our volunteers to make the experience meaningful," said Susan Zidaric Seymour, director of volunteer resources and retail services.

She hopes Hamiltonians will be enthusiastic to be part of the opening of a modern mental health facility.

"The (old) site is dated and that's why you can see how excited we are to move into this brand new space because the patients deserve that."

"Dignity" is the word Cox uses to describe the new hospital that gives patients private rooms and washrooms, their own desk and window, multiple common rooms to choose from, an enclosed garden to enjoy and card keys to their room "like a hotel and not an institution."

"You have a chance of getting better in a more dignified manner," said the former chef and restaurant designer. "The goal is not locking people up. The goal is getting people back into society and back into a life worth living."