

# A reborn Ottawa men's counselling service is now training the U.S. military on male sexual trauma



*DON BUTLER, OTTAWA CITIZEN*

More from Don Butler, Ottawa Citizen

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Rick Goodwin has reinvented The Men's Project, a non-profit sexual assault centre for men in Ontario, as a for-profit corporation called Men & Healing. *WAYNE CUDDINGTON / POSTMEDIA*

When the provincial government cut off funding for The Men's Project after 16 years last fall, it could easily have spelled the end for the Ottawa non-profit counselling service, the only men's sexual assault centre in Ontario.

Instead, founder Rick Goodwin reinvented the service as a for-profit corporation, and renamed it Men & Healing (<http://menandhealing.ca/>).

It now has more clients than it did before the province cut the funding umbilical cord. And through a subcontract with 1in6, an agency for sexually abused men in Los Angeles, Goodwin is busier than ever training the U.S. military on a counselling model for men developed in Ottawa.

"We're no longer a charity, but the demand for individual services has certainly picked up," Goodwin said. "I've got more work than I can handle.

"I think we're on to something, and it's unfortunate that the province won't support it. There's a need out there, and we're getting attention because we're serving that unmet need and that population."

At its peak, The Men's Project received nearly \$300,000 in annual funding from Ontario's Ministry of the Attorney General. But the funding was always on a year-to-year basis and had dwindled to \$100,000 before it was cut off last Oct. 31.

Goodwin never got an explanation for the province's decision, but said the ministry "was never truly supportive of a men's sexual abuse centre."

That bugs him, because the province funds three sexual assault centres for women in Ottawa and about three dozen in Ontario, but none at all for men.

"When we think of victims of sexual violence, it's essentially girls and women," Goodwin said. "This is the sector that the province has built up and funded."

He has no objection to that, but wonders why the needs of sexually abused men are ignored. One in six men has experienced childhood sexual trauma, according to estimates. For physical abuse, the number is closer to one in four.

Despite that, “The notion of having men as victims — men who are in the one-in-six population — still doesn’t seem to resonate with provincial funders,” Goodwin said.

“I’ve had lots of talks with ministry officials, lot of talks with our MPP, on this matter. But it didn’t go anywhere. And I think it’s because it’s about men.”

While the province does provide some support for men’s programs by funding family service agencies, they typically offer a “very brief model” of therapy, Goodwin said.

“Trauma work is not a brief therapy model. It would not be sufficient at all. We’ve got men in programs for one, two, three years. When they graduate, it’s a sight to see. These guys are living life fully. They’re no longer the walking wounded.”

The day after The Men’s Project closed, Men & Healing opened its office on Beechwood Avenue. Almost all of its 70 clients, many of whom were in long-term therapy, transferred over to the new service.

Though Men & Healing charges market rates for its individual and group counselling services, no client of The Men’s Project was turned down for inability to pay, Goodwin said.

But the higher fees are definitely a barrier for new clients. “Low-income men essentially can no longer access our services directly,” he said.

That said, most of those involved in group programming don’t have to pay because the cost is picked up by referring organizations, such as the John Howard Society and the City of Ottawa.

Men & Healing currently has about 80 clients receiving individual counselling and another 100 involved in group therapy.

About half of its services are related to childhood trauma, including sexual

assault. It also runs a “very robust” anger management program, an emotional intelligence program and offers services that deal with depression.

Goodwin became involved with training for the U.S. military through his relationship with 1in6, which adopted his clinical model nearly a decade ago.

When the military hired 1in6 to train its first responders, social workers and medical professionals on how to deal with their sexually abused personnel, the American non-profit agency subcontracted with Goodwin for the work.

He’s in the midst of a training tour to five U.S. air force bases in the Pacific Rim that will conclude in Hawaii in December.

With about 1,000 U.S. bases around the world, Goodwin expects to be even busier in the future. “There’s a sense that there’s an impending wave of training needs and resource needs to help engage with men in a profoundly male-centred way.”

Not many Canadians get to work on an American military base, Goodwin observed. “They were thirsty for this knowledge. It’s pretty cool to be in a position to help them with that.”

[dbutler@postmedia.com](mailto:dbutler@postmedia.com) (mailto:dbutler@postmedia.com)

[twitter.com/ButlerDon](http://twitter.com/ButlerDon) (http://twitter.com/ButlerDon)