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For immediate release:

Local Agency Receives Funding for Residential Youth Addiction Treatment Program

Kitchener, Ont.—Ray of Hope Inc., a local non-profit organization, has received operating funds from the Waterloo-Wellington Local Health Integration Network (WWLHIN), which is a branch of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, for a six-bed residential youth addiction treatment program.

This is planned as the first phase of a comprehensive service, called Youth 180, which will include a forty-bed treatment facility in central Kitchener. The program will teach 13-17 year old males and females life skills, job skills and strategies for overcoming their addictions. Most participants will be in residential treatment for four months. The next four months will be spent transitioning back into their families and communities with support. During the final stage, each young person will be paired with a volunteer mentor who will help them maintain an emotionally, physically, and socially healthy lifestyle. The initial six-bed program will only accommodate males due to the program's small size.

The six-bed project will open in January 2008 in an existing building that Ray of Hope owns in central Kitchener.

Some of the benefits of residential treatment that Ray of Hope expects to provide to the community include: crime prevention due to addressing addictive behaviours before addictive triggers become habitual; reduced medical and social services costs as substance abuse is addressed prior to the destruction of a person's health, independence and mental abilities; improved education results for each youth successfully treated during their schooling years.

Ray of Hope's board and staff have been working hard for the last two years to make this program a reality. "We are pleased the WWLHIN has taken a step to reduce the significant shortage of youth addiction treatment beds in the province and in our region by funding this project," says Ray of Hope Interim CEO, Noel Churchman.

Glynis Burkhalter, Youth 180 Program Director, is excited about the difference the six-bed facility will make for a number families and youth in this region. But she states "Addiction treatment, mental health and youth custody specialists all agree that the overall shortage of residential addiction treatment beds for youth has only been minimally addressed by this new project. Communities supporting addicted youth need to continue to advocate for more services for these vulnerable people."

BACKGROUND

Ray of Hope has been helping youth in-conflict with the law and people in poverty in the Waterloo Region for 40 years. **Since 2006 Ray of Hope has operated a four to six month Community Based Treatment Program for youth struggling with substance abuse and their families.** Participants in the program live at home while getting help for an addiction problem through weekly counselling sessions regarding their addiction and related issues. Youth are also helped to work with their families to heal relationships. An addiction counsellor offers day-to-day support to participants and home visits are arranged as needed.

According to experts surveyed in Health Canada's 2001 Report, *Best Practices Treatment and Rehabilitation for Youth with Substance Abuse Problems*, **the lack of programs, geographical inaccessibility of services, insufficient outreach and lengthy waiting lists are the most significant barriers for Canadian youth seeking treatment for addictions.** The report also identifies a need for more programs geared to the unique needs of adolescents and more workers skilled in counselling youth. In addition the report states, "There is a specific lack of residential treatment available to those youth who need an intensive and highly structured environment."

Currently the closest residential youth addiction treatment programs that are government-funded and accessible to anybody are in Ottawa and Thunder Bay. There is a treatment program in Elora, called Portage, but access is limited to families who can pay for the service, youth who are sentenced to this facility by a judge due to a crime the youth has committed, or to children under the care of Family and Children's Services.

Ray of Hope is uniquely positioned to provide youth addiction treatment services because of their 40 year history of working with troubled youth in this region. According to the 2001 Health Canada report, two of the hardest adolescent groups to help with substance abuse issues are street-involved teens and youth who have been part of the criminal justice system. Through their frontline work at Oasis drop-in centre and two custody facilities (Hope Manor and Hope Harbour Home), Ray of Hope has strong relationships with both of these populations.

In 2005, when Ray of Hope they shared their dream of a youth addiction treatment facility with local philanthropists, they found others who were also excited about making a difference in the lives of youth. **Steve Scherer, owner of Steve Scherer Auto, rallied a group of philanthropists who donated over 5 million dollars to build a forty-bed treatment facility.**

Property has been purchased on Charles Street in downtown Kitchener and master site plans for the three plus acre site were formalized and have been approved by the City of Kitchener. Building will commence when operating funds are secured from the provincial and federal governments.

Ray of Hope has strong relationships with other social agencies concerned with youth substance abuse including: St. Mary's Counselling Service, Lutherwood, Kids LINK, Catholic Family Counselling, and The Working Centre. The agency is also connected to faith groups, service clubs and government departments including Waterloo Region Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration department, City of Kitchener Planning Department, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.