

Your Voice in Guelph

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Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis executive director Sly Castaldi stands outside the group's new headquarters at 38 Elizabeth St. It's four times the size of the organization's previous building.

TRIBUNE PHOTO BY PAIGE HILTON

Room for a promising future

BY PAIGE HILTON
Guelph Tribune

Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis has quadrupled its space, and executive director Sly Castaldi is looking forward to the future.

"This is the exciting part," she said of the group's new location and the upcoming renovations

to create more usable space for its clients.

"This is about the future. We're trying to see the needs not just for now but for years from now," she said in an interview.

Women in Crisis moved into about 4,000 square feet of office space at 38 Elizabeth St. on July 21. There's also about 8,000 square feet of warehouse

space, about two-thirds of which will be renovated this fall.

It's a huge change from the cramped 3,000-sq.-ft. building at 18 Norwich St. E. that the group called home for the last 10 years. Castaldi said the group outgrew that space five years ago.

The lobby of their new office is bright. Down the

hall there are counselling offices, wheelchair-accessible bathrooms and a temporary group meeting room. Upstairs is the administration area. "We've never had an administration area before," said Castaldi excitedly. The expansive warehouse connects to the office space.

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Renovations to start in fall

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Castaldi estimates they'll start renovations this fall. They're still working with local architect David McAuley on the designs.

Part of those renovations will include an elevator being installed so the whole building is wheelchair accessible.

The Norwich Street building's basement was wheelchair accessible, Castaldi said, but it was still difficult for people with disabilities to access services at times.

"Disabled women are extremely vulnerable to violence," she said, highlighting the importance of accessibility.

The renovated warehouse will feature two community

rooms, which Castaldi hopes will be used not only by Women in Crisis, but also by community groups if they require space.

There will be more counselling rooms and a resource library. She said in their designs, they're avoiding an "institutional" feel, opting for a space that can be a haven for women and their children.

Structure for a second floor in the warehouse will also be roughed in, should they need to expand further in the future, Castaldi said.

She said after looking for three years for a new location, she wondered if they'd ever find somewhere to expand. (The move doesn't affect the women's shelter Marianne's Place.)

"But when we walked in here we knew immediately this was it," she said.

There's a lot to be done before a grand opening in roughly six months.

The building needs a new roof. There's some fundraising to be done to finish paying for the building. They still need about \$200,000 plus renovation costs, after the \$802,000 in funding they received from Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Some of that will come from a mortgage, she said.

And perhaps the icing on the cake for the centre is that their old building will be used as an emergency shelter for homeless and at-risk youth.