

It Begins With Family

Families, the deep love of families, has led to the creation of many of the social service structures that today serve millions of people.

As with other groups, families were at the forefront of the creation of community options for those with mental health needs. Mens Sana (now part of VITA) was created in 1991 by families who had someone who needed specialized support in order to be successful in the community. Out of that concern grew a grass roots initiative which raised money to fund a program that was designed with love and care. Since that date, Mens Sana has never received any funding other than that provided through sheer hard work and determination. Hours of bingo games and fund raisers brought in funds that were magically transformed into services.

A call for funding proposals was recently put out by the United Way of York Region and VITA responded. The process was a long and grueling one, but it was a process that involved others coming in and looking carefully at how VITA and Mens Sana provided service and how it shepherded funds.

"I've never seen a process where a funding body looked so closely at a service," said Manuela Dalla Nora, Executive Director,

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VITA and author of the funding proposal. "The process involved first writing a proposal and then going through an evaluation. They asked insightful questions and were clearly concerned about the quality of care offered to people with mental health needs and our ability to successfully carry out that work."

When Mens Sana was approved for funding it represented the first time the organization would receive stable funding dollars. But it represented more than that, it represented validation for those parents who initially dreamed of a service that would truly care for their children.

The funding will expand day supports for adults with mental illness living in the Vaughan community. The day program will operate Monday to Friday and provide an opportunity for adults with mental health needs to have a safe and respectful place to socialize, learn new skills and enjoy a nutritious meal together. Referrals are now being accepted by VITA for the Mens Sana Day Program.

With the support of the United Way of York Region, VITA will continue to ensure that the dream of that original group of parents continues.