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# Neighbourhood projects tap power of change

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4-5 minutes



News

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Edna Malcolm says she used to feel tired, alone and worthless and would isolate herself at home in Eagle Place.

Getting involved in her daughter's school helped her deal with her depression. Now Malcolm wants to help other residents of Eagle Place who struggle with mental health and depression by providing

low-cost or free activities to bring them together regularly to socialize.

Her first idea – bingo nights with small prizes and pizza – was right on the number.

“The response to it blew me away,” said Malcolm, who used a \$1,000 grant from the City of Brantford get it started.

“They needed to form those connections, find people to talk to,” said Malcolm, a member of the Eagle Place Community Association.

Her next step was circulating surveys to see what other types of activities residents want in the future.

Malcolm was one of 24 people enrolled in the inaugural class of the Neighbourhood Changemakers certificate program, a partnership between City Brantford and Wilfrid Laurier University.

The program’s objective is to have residents create neighbourhood projects that support social inclusion, health and community safety.

The students attended five hands-on workshops with Laurier faculty to help them create, budget and implement a community project.

At graduation at Laurier Brantford’s Carnegie Building on Monday night, the participants shared their ideas and stories and received a certificate of recognition.

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“Everybody can make an impact, everybody can use their skills in

the community and networks to create positive social change,” said Joanne Benham Rennick, director of social innovation and venture creation at WLU.

“To me this represents the very best of what a university can be and should be. A university should serve the people, it should serve the community, it should serve anybody who wants to learn,” she said.

Aaron Wallace, Brantford’s manager of strategic planning and community development, said Neighbourhood Changemakers is a natural extension of the city’s neighbourhood associations and community hubs program. It also supports the Safe Brantford initiative intended to reduce crime by addressing risk factors and increasing resident involvement in their neighbourhoods.

“It’s already getting that reputation of getting action on the ground,” Wallace said.

City staff in the parks and recreation and social services departments will help the graduates to find funding to launch their projects.

Thom Foster and Rob Langley’s idea is to improve employability for residents of East Ward and Echo Place.

“A lot of people that are working at lower-end jobs need the ability to try and upgrade somehow,” Foster said.

They plan to conduct a study asking the people what skills they need to learn or upgrade.

Denise Crabb of the Brant County Health Unit in partnership with Will Ratelband of the Salvation Army started a “crockpot club” to teach seniors how to make meals for themselves.

John Gefucia's idea is for a permanent sign and notice board in Tutela Park to keep users up-to-date on community events in Eagle Place.

Interest in Neighbourhood Changemakers was so strong that the first session was filled to capacity with more people on a waiting list. WLU is thinking about extending the program pioneers at Laurier Brantford to other communities with a campus.

Registration is open for the next installment of the program beginning the week of May 23. Visit [www.sivclaurier.ca/](http://www.sivclaurier.ca/) to learn more.

The program is funded in part by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services in support of Safe Brantford.