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City, YMCA join forces Partnership for spinal chord rehabilitation

Staff at the City of Cambridge and the Chaplin Family YMCA are working together to fill a significant gap in service for the community.

Andrea Riley, city co-ordinator of corporate accessibility planning and inclusive services, said a new initiative between the YMCA and the city will soon provide a much-needed rehabilitation service to those suffering spinal chord injuries in Cambridge.

"When the Bailey Wellness Centre closed (at Cambridge Memorial Hospital), it was a big hit for the community, as it was the only facility available specifically for rehabilitation in the city," Riley said.

That closure left hundreds of stroke recovery, spinal chord and multiple sclerosis patients with no options for continued rehabilitation and specialized exercise.

According to a report to city council: "People with mobility impairments are at greater risk of developing a number of physical diseases, depression and psychological issues as a secondary complication to their disabilities. Studies show a substantial reductions in these complications when those with the disability remain physically active following their injury."

Over the last two years, the disabled community, with the support of the accessibility advisory committee, the city and the YMCA have hammered out a partnership that will see some of the lost services reinstated. Other members of the coalition include Community Living Cambridge, Independent Living Centre, Developmental Services Access Centre, KidsAbility and Fairview Mennonite Home.

In January, the community coalition will announce that the YMCA will become home to new and accessible fitness equipment.

The equipment, an equalizer resistance trainer and a specialized Saratoga arm ergometer, is the first of its type in Cambridge. It has been purchased by the city and YMCA and will be delivered to the YMCA late this month. It will be installed in early January and an official launch is set for Jan. 28.

"One of the problems we had initially was there was no space available at city facilities, but the Y is willing to take out some of its old equipment to make space for this," Riley said.

In addition to working out the deal to purchase and install the new equipment at the YMCA, the community coalition is working to refresh old partnerships and rebuild local programs for individuals living with a disability as the result of an illness or injury.

Early in the new year, members of the group will sit down to identify the remaining gaps in service created when the Bailey Wellness Centre closed down and start to look for ways to fill those voids, Riley said.