

Medicine Hat News

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Champion Centre is going national

TENILLE TELLMAN

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One of Medicine Hat's youngest charity organizations, the Champion's Centre, has gained enough momentum on a provincial level to earn national attention.

Klaas Klooster, executive director, first opened a supportive housing centre in Ponoka three years ago.

The first of three Medicine Hat centres is currently under construction.

"For a person, I guess of my stature - I mean I'm just an ordinary guy. My training is to be a minister, a pastor in a church, but God has lead me in this direction to help the poor. So the fact that it's catching on and people are catching the vision, I mean, that's not only humbling, it's exciting," said Klooster.

The registered, non-profit national charity provides low-income room and board for men who are homeless or at-risk of being homeless. Klooster said there is a great need for safe, affordable long-term housing in all communities.

"I think other agencies or other organizations should adopt this concept, because I think this concept works, as a matter of fact, we've proven that it does."

The national board and local centre committees have helped run the one existing centre and promote the idea in other communities.

Communities in Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and even Ontario have expressed an interest, and information sessions for new centres are already beginning in Calgary and Edmonton.

"These kinds of things take time and, I mean, we can't move too fast," said Klooster. "The interest is there, for sure, and that's not only here in Alberta."

The Medicine Hat centre, which is expected to open in late spring, will be built along the concept of rooming houses, but supports are in place for the 10-12 tenants, including meals, access to outside agencies and medication monitoring.

The centre will generate it's own funds through a public cafe and antique shop, but like any charity, Klooster said they are in need of more financial support as they get started.

Information on Medicine Hat homelessness and the Champion's Centre can be found at www.thechampionscentre.org