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Advocacy group hopes to expand volunteer recruiting beyond Ottawa

By NELLY ELAYOUBI, OTTAWA SUN

An advocacy group for the disabled is looking to expand services across Eastern Ontario, linking the disabled with volunteers who offer friendship and support.

Citizen Advocacy of Ottawa aims to reduce isolation and vulnerability of people with disabilities, from teens to seniors, by matching them with a volunteer. There are more than 200 people twinned in Ottawa. A volunteer is called an advocate and a client is called a protege. Citizen Advocacy also matches volunteers with group homes.

"They bring themselves, their interests and their friendship," said regional project co-ordinator Kathleen Stephenson. Proteges range are primarily developmentally delayed. They can be blind, wheelchair-bound or non-verbal.

Visits are two to three times a month for a few hours and the twinning is done based on similar interests and hobbies. "The nature of the relationship depends entirely on the match," Stephenson said.

EARLY STAGES

The Ottawa-based organization is looking to spread beyond city boundaries to Eastern Ontario and a feasibility study is underway after funding came through from the province's Trillium Foundation. Still in its early stages, Stephenson is corresponding with service providers and frontline workers in those outlying areas.

Needs will be assessed and delivery of the service will be determined by the study, which is expected to be complete by November. Recommendations for implementation will be made at that time and the Trillium Foundation is expected to provide funding to enable the project to move forward.

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