

Citizen Advocacy considering an S, D and G expansion

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Cornwall - It's a match being made, if not in heaven, then at least in Canada's capital.

And this week, Ottawa-based Citizen Advocacy announced it would be exploring whether to expand its one-on-one support program, which matches "volunteer advocates" with disabled or otherwise at-risk individuals, to the S, D and G area.

The advocates would help their "benefactor" with any public service issues they encounter, like navigating the legal and medical systems, for example.

It's a program that would create a more intimate relationship than paid support staff can provide, said Chantal Prieur, a supervisor with the Family Counselling Centre of Cornwall & United Counties.

"We support many people throughout the three United Counties who are without 'natural support' (family or friends)," said Prieur. "Most of our support system is paid staff."

Volunteer advocates, she said, would go through a dedicated screening process before being accepted into the program.

But once advocates are paired with their benefactors, Prieur said they often find themselves becoming part of that person's extended family, being invited to events like Easter celebrations and Christmas dinner.

"It is a commitment, and we hope to have a long-term relationship that's built as a result of this initiative," said Prieur.

Citizen Advocacy's current study is also looking at the possibility of expanding the program to Lanark, Renfrew, and Prescott-Russell counties. The organization currently pairs more than 200 disabled persons in Ottawa with volunteer advocates.

Other at-risk candidates for the program would include women escaping abusive relationships, geographically-isolated seniors, and at-risk children, said Prieur.

She expected the results of the feasibility study would be known by March 2007.