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# THE HALDIMAND PRESS



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## Holiday cheer is here!



JARVIS—Haldimand residents are continuing to spread holiday cheer this month with a variety of Christmas and holiday-related events. This weekend, residents in both Jarvis and Cayuga had local options for a meet and greet with Santa over breakfast. Above, Kellen Bryson is shown with his kids, 6-year-old Sawyer (left) and eight-year-old Charlie, enjoying breakfast made by the Jarvis Lions and colouring some fun holiday photos ahead of meeting Saint Nick on Saturday, December 9, 2023. Cayuga's St. John the Divine Church also hosted a Breakfast with Santa on Saturday. See more photos on Page 10.  
—Haldimand Press photos by Sheila Phibbs.

## MP Lewis, residents debate use of medical assistance in dying due to mental illness

By Tara Lindemann  
The Haldimand Press

The following article may be distressing for some readers.

HALDIMAND—People suffering intolerably from mental disorders will be able to die with medical assistance (MAiD) starting March 17, 2024 – a decision from the federal government that has seen a mixed response locally.

Hagersville resident Holli Moser said that she believes there should be specific criteria to meet, but that ultimately MAiD is, for her, a final solution to lifelong suffering.

Moser, who is 25-years-old, said she's struggled with mental illness since she was seven. She was diagnosed with depression at 11, an anxiety disorder at 12, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Borderline Personality Disorder at 17, and, after giving birth at 20, postpartum depression.

"As I get older, I get diagnosed with more and more mental illnesses," she said. "I've spoken with many professionals over the years, but nobody has been able to help me."

Moser has taken so many different prescriptions over the years that she's lost count of them.

"I currently take just two prescriptions that seem to help me get through life, but I have no real quality of life. I don't think I remember what it feels like to be genuinely happy."

Moser said crippling depression and anxiety prevents her from working, going into the public, or even getting out of bed.

"I don't really have any dreams to pursue as I have no desire to do anything other than sleep or get intoxicated," she said. "I want to die because I truly suffer from the moment I wake up until the moment I close my eyes at night. I've tried for over a decade to find the right medication, therapy, or person who can help, to no avail."

She believes Canada should "show compassion and add the ability for people suffering with mental disorders to have the option to end their lives humanely, because the (mental health system) doesn't help those like myself."

The legal right to die with medical assistance has existed since 2016, and in 2021 that right was extended to those suffering from a mental illness. A temporary delay has been in place to allow for more research and dialogue to write policies for it.

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## Canborough farmland transforming into hobbit-inspired fantasy village

By Tara Lindemann  
The Haldimand Press

CANBOROUGH—An approved minor variance to allow a 12-unit farm resort is leaving some neighbours concerned for a loss of the agricultural lands.

Selkirk resident Justin Awde is in the process of building a fantasy-inspired village around a small farm with hobbit-themed accommodations, harking back to what fans have seen in The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings movies.

"The houses will go here," Awde shouted over the engine noise of his UTV, pointing to a hillock on farmland. "And we plan to build the barn on the east side, and farming plots around that."

The entire property is 24.28 hectares, with 209 metres of frontage on the north side of Highway 3 between Canfield and Canborough. Almost a third of the property has been actively farmed.

Awde, a Selkirk resident whose

“  
This would be the first of its kind in Canada.... We believe people will see this as a destination spot.”

Justin Awde

family has farmed the area as far back as the 1800s, said he wants to create a farm resort, where people may be exposed to "the usual animals you see on a hobby farm."

There's intended space for up to 10 events annually, which Awde said could vary from Live Action Role Play (LARPing) to weddings.

The hobbit structures were chosen because he was fond of the architecture: "They're pretty eco-minded, they're energy efficient, and they look pretty cool, building into the landscape."

And the business is fairly lucrative.

"This would be the first of its kind in Canada, and obviously we couldn't compare with the Tolkein mecca in New Zealand, but we believe people will see this as a destination spot."

The County sees the tourism potential as well.

"As identified in the County's Tourism Strategic Plan and supported by recent studies, there has been a surge in demand for on-farm tourism experiences," said Communications Supervisor, Kyra Hayes. "The lack of overnight lodging options in rural areas – in Haldimand and across the province – is a major obstacle in attracting tourists and promoting tourism-related activities."

Awde is also in talks with Charlie Bee, who is excited to create an apary at the front of the property. This is in part intended to offset the agricultural land being used for structures, a septic system to support up to 120 people, and a parking lot with up to 75 spaces.

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# Mental illness and MAiD intersect



DUNNVILLE—MP Leslyn Lewis (right) hosted a panel at the Dunnville Legion to discuss medical assistance in dying (MAiD) and the scheduled addition of mental illness for eligibility to access MAiD. —Haldimand Press photo by Tara Lindemann.

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The final report from the Expert Panel on MAiD and Mental Illness in Parliament was tabled on May 13, 2022. The independent review recommended protocols, guidance, and safeguards to apply to MAiD requests by persons who have a mental illness. It included 19 recommendations for assessments.

There have been 44,958 approved medically assisted deaths since 2016. In 2022, the most cited sources of suffering by individuals requesting MAiD was the loss of ability to engage in meaningful activities (83.6%), followed by loss of ability to perform activities of daily living (81.9%), and the inability to control pain or concern about controlling pain (59.2%).

“Look, if I was writhing in pain with an incurable illness like cancer, there wouldn’t be an issue,” said Rainham Centre resident Brett McDonald. “Why should people with mental illness have to wait when the science and the system hasn’t caught up? No one should die alone in secret.”

McDonald shares this remembering his mother, who died by suicide when he was 20-years-old. He explained, “She had depression really bad, and she had enough with the medication changes, then having to deal with the (mental health) system, being expected to be ‘normal’ for everyone else – it was impossible for her, and I love that she tried for as long as she did.”

He noted the lack of mental health support at the time, adding, “And 20 years later, how much worse, not better, has the system gotten?”

The Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH) wants further delay to the approaching March addition. Dr. Tarek Rajji, Chair of the Medical Advisory Committee at CAMH, explained, “We want to be clear that this position is not based on the belief that suffering caused by mental illness is not comparable to suffering caused by physical

illness. There is no doubt that mental illness can be grievous and cause people physical and psychological suffering. We are not here to debate that.”

Rajji said the primary concern is that the healthcare system won’t be ready for the March deadline, citing that the “clinical guidelines, resources, and processes are not in place to assess, determine eligibility, support, or deliver MAiD” when eligibility is based solely on mental illness.

“This includes differentiating between suicidal plans and a request for MAiD,” he said. “More time is needed.”

Rajji noted that while mental illness can be severe and cause great suffering, the healthcare system for mental illness “is not comparable to the healthcare available for physical illnesses.”

“Mental healthcare has been significantly underfunded compared to physical healthcare,” he said. “There are also inconsistencies in treatments covered by different provincial health plans.... Many people across Canada do not have ready access to the full range of evidence-informed treatments that can assist in their recovery.”

“For that reason, a delay in MAiD expansion would also allow governments and healthcare experts to work together to determine the best way to integrate MAiD into the broader mental healthcare system.”

MP Leslyn Lewis hosted a panel to speak against the upcoming March MAiD expansion. It included MP for Abbotsford BC Ed Fast, who introduced Private Member’s Bill C-314, which would state that a mental disorder would not be considered a ‘grievous and irredeemable medical condition’ and therefore not be eligible for MAiD. The bill had its First Reading on February 10, 2023 and was defeated on October 18 by 17 votes.

“It’s objectionable to making (MAiD) available to those with mental illness because it has never been resolved within the mental health profession,”

said Fast. Lewis agreed, asserting the focus must be on upgraded care: “We need to have stronger services, and better community activity and outreach, so that those people who are most vulnerable are identified early on, and that the supports are given early on before it magnifies their situation,” she said.

Lewis is not alone in that opinion locally. Mike Cooper has had bipolar disorder since he was 19.

“I was at U of T pre-med and I broke,” he said. Since then he’s been homeless and experienced addiction for years before getting consistent help. He believes, “Canada needs to fix a system and not kill off we, the societally inconvenient.”

Cooper said he’d wanted to die so many times but now, as an X-ray technician and married father of two, he’s glad he made it through. Based on his experience, he is vehemently opposed to MAiD’s addition to include people with mental disorders.

“I understand wanting to die; it is literally hell at every moment, not being able to trust what you see or think is real,” said Cooper. “But if I had been successful in dying, I’d never have had this incredible life now.”

To those struggling with applying for MAiD, he said, “Don’t. This is the greatest struggle you will face, and you’ve got this. Do not give up, do not ever give up. People are rooting for you – you just don’t know us yet.”

If you or someone you know is in crisis, contact:

- The Suicide Crisis Line: 988
- Crisis Assessment Support Team: 1-877-909-4357

To contact a mental health professional, contact:

- Youth: 1-888-668-6810 or text WELLNESS to 686868
- Adults: 1-866-585-0445 or text WELLNESS to 741741
- Community Addiction and Mental Health Services of Haldimand-Norfolk: 1-877-909-4357

## A timeline of legalized euthanasia in Canada

The debate of medical assistance in dying (MAiD) has gone through courts and legislature for decades under various names. Here is a snapshot of that history.

**1972:** The federal government decriminalizes attempted suicide.

**1982:** The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms passes, precipitating the legal right for a person to refuse medical intervention.

**1992:** BC resident Sue Rodriguez, diagnosed with ALS, challenges the Supreme Court after trying to convince them to change a section of the Criminal code that made helping another person commit suicide punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

**September 1993:** The Supreme Court of Canada dismisses Rodriguez’s appeal for her to die with medical assistance. The decision included concerns about potential abuses and the difficulty of creating safeguards.

**February 1994:** Rodriguez, 43, dies at home assisted by an unknown doctor.

**1998:** Quebec doctor Maurice Généreux becomes the first doctor to be sentenced (two-year jail sentence followed by three years probation) for prescribing sleeping pills to two men with AIDS who were depressed but not terminally ill. One of the men survived.

**June 2007:** BC doctor Ramesh Kumar Sharm is given a conditional sentence of two years less a day and his licence is revoked after prescribing a lethal dose of drugs for a 93-year-old patient.

**December 2008:** A Quebec jury acquits Stéphan Dufour of assisted suicide. Dufour admitted to installing tools so that his uncle could die by suicide in September 2006. Dufour was the first Canadian to stand trial by jury for assisted suicide.

**January 2010:** Kathleen “Kay” Carter, who suffered from spinal stenosis, travels to Dignitas Clinic in Switzerland with her family to die with medical assistance.

**June 2012:** BC Supreme Court Justice Lynn Smith calls Canada’s laws against doctor-assisted suicide unconstitutional, because it discriminated people with physical disabilities. The ruling came after five people, including assisted suicide advocate Gloria Taylor, asked for the right to die with medical assistance.

**October, 2012:** Taylor dies of an infection.

**June 2014:** Quebec passes a ‘dying with dignity law,’ allowing terminally ill patients experiencing “unbearable suffering” to die with medical assistance.

**August 2014:** BC woman Gillian Bennett, suffering from dementia, dies by suicide; she first blogs about her fear of becoming a burden on her family and her beliefs about assisted suicide to ignite more debate.

**January 2015:** The BC Civil Liberties Association appeals to the Supreme Court to overturn the ban on doctor-assisted suicide.

**February 2015:** The Supreme Court overturns the ban.

**June 2016:** MAiD becomes legal in Canada after the Criminal Code was changed to make it legal for eligible adults to request medical assistance to die, if they had a “grievous and irredeemable” medical condition and if their death was foreseeable.

**September 2019:** Quebec’s Superior Court justice ruled the reasonably foreseeable death restriction unconstitutional, asserting that people who were intolerably suffering still had a constitutional right to be eligible for euthanasia.

**December 10, 2020:** Bill C-7, also known as the medical assistance in dying bill, is given a first reading in Parliament.

**March 2021:** The federal government passes MAiD (formerly Bill C-7), expanding it to be accessible to all people experiencing intolerable suffering. Individuals whose sole medical condition is mental illness, and who otherwise meet all eligibility criteria, are to be able to die with assistance on March 17, 2023, providing time to consider an expert panel and findings from the parliamentary Special Joint Committee on MAiD.

**May 13, 2022:** The federal government tables the expert panel and mental illness final report.

**June 22, 2022:** The parliamentary Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying release an interim report regarding MAiD and mental illness.

**December 15, 2022:** The federal government announces its intention to introduce new legislation to extend the temporary exclusion of eligibility for mental illness.

**February 15, 2023:** The Committee tables its final report in Parliament, supportive of a one-year extension.

**March 9, 2023:** The extension of the temporary exclusion of eligibility of MAiD for those with mental illness received Royal Assent, postponing eligibility for persons suffering solely from mental illness until March 17, 2024.

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