

Living Working Belonging

We're Talking Mental Health



Welcome to the inaugural issue of *talk*, CMHA Toronto's newsletter. We named it *talk* because that's what we want you to do – talk about mental health issues. Have you noticed that more and more people are talking about mental health? It used to be that people living with significant and chronic mental health challenges would hide their illness. It was only spoken in whispers, but not any more, now it's a full roar. People are speaking out, learning the facts about mental illness and sharing stories of recovery.

We hope this newsletter will be a place to spark conversations about all aspects and issues related to mental illness and mental health. We will talk about stigma, wellness, services and supports, and we will share with you stories of recovery.

So let's talk . . .

Did you know that mental illness is more common than most people think? Statistics show that one in five Canadians will have a mental health problem at some point in their lives. Mental illness affects males and females, young and old, and is found in every ethno-cultural and socio-economic group.

Mental illness happens when the brain is not working the way it should. It is a collection of disorders such as depression,

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bipolar disorder, and anxiety. The symptoms can range from a loss of motivation and energy, a change in sleeping patterns, extreme mood swings, disturbances in thought or perception, or overwhelming obsessions or fears. Mental illness interferes with relationships and affects a person's ability to function on a day-to-day basis, often leading to social isolation.

But did you also know that people can, and do recover from mental illness? Hope, healing, a sense of empowerment and social connections are key to a person's recovery from mental illness. You can help! Keep reading *talk* and share the information and stories that you read here with your family and friends. The earlier that people get help the better their chances of recovery.

But at CMHA Toronto, we are doing more than talking about mental health. We work hard everyday to build supportive communities for people living with mental illness. Everyday our staff help people with significant mental illness to live, work, and belong in the community. We provide services and programs right where people need it – in their communities.

What do you want to talk about? If there are stories you would like to share or see here, reach out to us at talk@cmha-toronto.net. We want to hear from you.

www.toronto.cmha.ca

Mindful Minute

Managing your stress level can greatly improve your mental health. Instead of sitting down for another cup of stress-inducing caffeine on your coffee break or lunch hour, try going for a stress-relieving and energizing walk. If you don't like walking by yourself, ask one or two co-workers or friends to join you.



CANADIAN MENTAL
HEALTH ASSOCIATION
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POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE

Toronto Branch

Grounded in Love

Last year, on October 13th, 2009 Mandi Siatkowski walked onto the stage at the Drake Underground to sing in honour of her brother Daniel, who lost his life to suicide in 2004. That was the beginning of *Get Grounded*, a campaign to reduce the stigma of mental illness and a benefit concert supporting CMHA Toronto. But just as importantly, *Get Grounded* is the story of a family's journey of recovery from the loss of their beloved Daniel.

Suicide has a devastating effect on family members and friends. Survivors may experience a range of intense emotions such as sadness, confusion, helplessness, blame, shame and anger while at the same time living with the stigma that is associated with the death of a loved one to suicide.

It would have been understandable if Mandi and her family had chosen to grieve privately, to share their pain with only family and friends. But instead they chose to share their loss publicly and raise awareness of mental health issues. The *Get Grounded* concert was born out of Mandi and Dan's shared love of music. For Mandi, who is a singer and songwriter, a benefit concert was a natural way to memorialize Dan and to bring the silent struggles of mental illness out of the shadows.

Mandi has spoken openly about her loss. "It has been almost six years since I lost my brother Dan. My family, forever changed, continues to grow and survive following the sudden and tragic end to his life. It has been because of a deep love of each other and him, as well as friends and our own individual ways of dealing with the grief that my family has sustained. You can never know the depth of your strength until you have been put to this most extreme and profound of life's tests."

This journey is mirrored in Mandi's music. Her song Broken Open is a powerful and emotional witness to the grief she has



My brother Daniel was a beautiful person, a sensitive soul and my best friend

experienced: "I've been twisted and turned; I've been broken and burned. I've been broken open." As she and her mother sang these words at this year's *Get Grounded* concert, they touched the hearts of everyone watching.

While the depth of their pain and loss was evident, so too was the strength of their love for each other, their courage, and the healing that is taking place in their lives. In those moments they empowered each person to be a voice of hope and support for people living with mental illness.

The willingness of Mandi and her family to share their loss and to be a voice of change are shattering the perceptions of mental illness. All proceeds raised from *Get Grounded* are used to support our ASIST Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training program and our Early Intervention program.

www.toronto.cmha.ca

What's Coming Up!

CMHA Toronto Annual General Meeting: November 9th, 2010 at 6 -9 pm at the Delta Toronto East
Holiday Gift Program Volunteer Days – Nov 15 - 19

Workshops

ASIST - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training: December 8 & 9 at 9 am – 5 pm Cost \$190

Face to Face: Understanding Mental Illness: December 15 at 9 am - 4 pm Cost \$95

For more information on any of these events call us at (416) 789-7957.

