

SUNSHINE FROM DARKNESS SETTING US FREE FROM THE STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS

What Is Mental Illness?

Mental illnesses are disturbances in emotions, thinking and behaviour that cause distress and that interfere with functioning at school or work and cause problems in relationships.

Although the causes of mental illnesses are not fully known, research shows that genetic and biological factors often are involved. However, the amount of support that people receive can make a difference.

Current Realities

Mental illness indirectly affects all Canadians at some time through a family member, friend or colleague.

Approximately 20% of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness in their lifetime.

In Canada only one out of five children who need mental health services receive them.¹

Over 80% of adults with mental illnesses are not receiving appropriate treatment.²

Effective treatments are available today, and the support of caring people in the local congregation can often help lead a person to seek and accept effective treatment. Conversely, stigma is often a barrier to accessing treatment.

"...If not for the grace of God and the kindness of one friend...I wouldn't be here today. It wasn't until I had the courage to accept that I did have a mental disorder...that I needed help,...that I started to get better." Margaret Trudeau

What We Can Do?

Offer a prayer in regular worship – Order resources from MCC Canada – Invite a parishioner to contribute an article for the newsletter – Hold a forum open to the public – Develop a support group – Connect with your local mental health resources.

Why We Should Do It?

Research shows that people with mental illness are just as interested in faith and spirituality as the rest of the population. However, they often do not feel accepted by the local congregation.

Treatments for mental illnesses, such as anxiety disorders, depression and schizophrenia are equally effective or more effective than many treatments for heart problems and other medical problems.³

People with mental illness can make important contributions to the community.

People such as Margaret Trudeau, Elizabeth Manley, Ron Ellis, Jim Carrey, Sir John A. MacDonald and Michael Wilson all have had mental illnesses, including major depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

Opportunities to participate in supportive communities help people to recover from mental illness.⁴

Our faith communities can be enriched by the expressions of faith and by the life stories of people with mental illness, *if we will listen.*

¹The Report on Mental Illness in Canada, October 2002

²P. Wang and colleagues, *American Journal of Public Health*, January 2002

³The National Foundation for Brain Research

⁴C. Harding and J. Zahniser, in *Psychological and Social Aspects of Psychiatric Disability* (Edited by LeRoy Spaniol), 1997

WHERE TO GET HELP

Canadian Resources:

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (CASP) – www.suicideprevention.ca, 780-482-0198

CASP will help you to know the warning signs of suicidal behaviour and what you can do if someone is thinking of suicide, understand how to help those grieving the suicidal death of a relative or friend, and learn about suicide intervention and postvention activities in your community.

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) – www.cmha.ca, 416-484-7750

The CMHA is a nationwide charitable organization that promotes the mental health of all and supports the recovery of people experiencing mental illness. To find your local chapter visit the CMHA website.

Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation (CPRF) – www.cprf.ca, 800-915-2773

The CPRF supports mental illness and addictions research nationwide. Contact the website for the newsletter, "Today", or to order resources such as; "When Something's Wrong", Ideas for Families, or to watch for upcoming events.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) – www.camh.net, 416-535-8501

CAMH is Canada's leading addiction and mental health teaching hospital. CAMH improves the lives of those affected by addiction and mental health problems and promotes the mental health of people in Ontario and beyond.

Mennonite Central Committee of Canada: Mental Health and Disabilities Program –

www.mcc.org/canada/program/health, 888-622-6337

MCC: mental health and disabilities program has a threefold mandate: to educate congregations about the issues faced by people living with a mental illness, to provide resources to empower congregations to be more effective in supporting and including people who live with mental illnesses, and to provide a network of professionals in the area of mental health and disabilities within the Mennonite and Brethren of Christ constituencies.

Mood Disorders Association of Canada – www.mooddisorderscanada.ca, 519-824-5565

The Mood Disorders Association is a national, nonprofit, volunteer-driven organization that is committed to improving quality of life for people affected by depression, bipolar disorder and other related disorders. Visit the website to find support near you.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) – www.nami.org, 800-950-6264

Although NAMI is an alliance in the United States with over 1,000 self-help groups for people with serious mental illness and their families, they may be able to help you find an affiliate in your area. NAMI's faith section can be linked directly by going to www.faithnetnami.org. Faith NAMI facilitates the development within faith communities of a supportive environment for those with serious mental illness and their families, educates clergy and congregations and advocates hope and help for all those affected by mental illness.

Shalem Mental Health Network – www.shalemnetwork.org, 866-347-0041

Shalem Mental Health Network seeks to encourage and support faith based care and prevention for those who struggle with emotional distress or mental illness. Shalem supports faith communities to respond to people with emotional and mental health needs with various programs that reach out directly to clients. These programs include counseling, consultation, seminars/workshops, Wrap Around, Restorative Practices and the Congregational Assistance Plan.

Schizophrenia Digest – www.schizophreniadigest.ca, 866-672-3038

The Schizophrenia Digest is a bimonthly publication dedicated to bringing hope, dignity and support by providing information about mental health issues.

Schizophrenia Society of Canada – www.schizophrenia.ca, 888-772-4673

The Schizophrenia Society's mission is to improve quality of life for those affected by schizophrenia and psychosis through education, support programs, public policy and research.