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FOCUSING ON POSSIBILITIES - A MESSAGE FROM THE MENTAL ILLNESS CAREGIVERS ASSOCIATION'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

As we know, families represent the largest group of community caregivers for those with serious and persistent mental illness, advocating for access to treatment, planning for future needs, and dealing with emergencies and crises.

In most cases we do what we can to better understand the illness that has had a lasting and profound impact on our family member. Although important, we soon learn that it is not only about the diagnosis but is also about what has changed for you and your family member.

Your family member is now on a different path that has significant and certainly unexpected obstacles – both painful and life altering. For example, you remember your daughter or son as she or he was before the illness and your first response is to do whatever it takes to fix what is broken. It may take some time but most

of us come to realize there is no easy fix and with that realization there is often a sense of hopelessness.

However as difficult as it may seem, it is also a turning point that compels us as caregivers to reflect on what is important and focus on the possibilities not the illness.

It begins by clearly understanding what your family member wants – it is not a discussion about limitations rather it is about supporting your family member in achieving his or her potential. This is not to suggest that you avoid the obstacles but rather you develop the confidence together to overcome the inevitable challenges ahead.

In this issue of the newsletter, meet Board member Louis Seguin who is working on an important project related to the employment of persons living with

mental illnesses. As the project proceeds we will need your support going forward – more about what that means as we share our progress in exploring what more can be done to support persons living with mental illnesses seeking employment opportunities.

In closing, by connecting with others who are searching to find solutions we are more likely to provide for the appropriate support to our family members while personally staying strong and healthy. The result is the shared strength and confidence to support our family member as she or he continues along the path to recovery – a journey that allows them to realize their potential in their own way in a context that may have changed supported by relationships that remain the same.

Paul McIntyre,
Chair, MICA

SHARING OUR STORY – INTRODUCING BOARD MEMBER LOUIS SEGUIN

...”It is very important to create an environment of trust. Trust in those who are ill, trust in those in the many institutions designed to assist, and trust in yourself.” – Louis Seguin

I consider myself fortunate.

In many ways, the challenges that I have faced or been exposed to in my life have allowed me to grow and develop as a person. As is the case with many individuals in Canada, I have felt the grip of mental illness. In fact, I have seen it from many angles – as a child, as a brother, as a parent, and as an employer. The issues ranged from addiction, depression, cognitive disorders through to personality disorders.

My role throughout this journey has been equally varied. I have seen myself do what I could to, amongst other things, understand, adapt, actively assist, coach and support those in need. I can honestly say that I didn’t succeed all the time, but I never gave up.

Needless to say, there is no “blue-print” or “script” for all situations. What I have discovered, however, is that with some well-placed effort, tenacity, and compassion,

volunteers, families – and yes, even employers – can make a difference in the life of someone in need. I have also come to the conclusion that it is very important to create an environment of trust. Trust in those who are ill, trust in those in the many institutions designed to assist, and trust in yourself.

Respect has been a cornerstone of my approach. It is too easy to fall into the trap of judging, blaming, or even dismissing. Trying to understand the varied perspectives and the multiple issues/possibilities at play have channelled my energy to one where we “can do” rather than the alternative.

As I mentioned earlier, I have seen first-hand what mental illness can do to a loved-one and their family. In many ways, it’s for this reason that I joined MICA. Situations at home and at work can be complex and demanding at the best of times. Adding to that, the dimension of an illness can make it seem almost

unbearable. That’s where support is necessary and beneficial. Support from the community, support from family and friends, and support from organizations such as ours.

Tackling the issue of mental illness crosses over into the workplace as well. As a senior manager in the federal public service working in the field of human resources, I recognized the need for employers and organizations to do even more. As much as great strides have been made by many organizations – both public and private – more still needs to be done. We need to further heighten awareness of the needs of those struck with mental illness, as well as the needs of those acting as caregivers.

My hope is to help contribute to a better working environment.

If you are interested in helping us out in this journey, your assistance and participation will be greatly appreciated.



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES – WORKING ON A PILOT WITH COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT

Employment and employment-related matters are important to all of us.

As such, MICA has embarked on a project to assist those affected with a mental illness and their caregivers to further advance their situation through employment opportunities and workplace improvements.

More specifically, we have reached out to the federal and provincial governments and their key representatives in matters related to employment and organizational wellness in order to engage them in further enhancing job opportunities for individuals

affected with mental illness. Our objective is to also improve the working environment of the caregivers, who themselves are employed in the public service, but could benefit from greater assistance and innovative solutions as they strive to support their loved ones.

Our intention is to build on the work that the government has done to date, and in tandem with them, strive for even greater results.

Our plan is to host a two day workshop led by mental illness caregivers focused on developing a better understanding of current

programs and services offered by the federal and provincial governments, while considering potential opportunities for improvement. The planned results are two-fold. Firstly, through this engagement with the federal public service, we hope to pilot a Mental Illness Caregivers Resource Centre in the workplace. Secondly, we want to secure even greater employment prospects for those who are mentally ill, while doing so through a simplified process.

Should you be interested in helping us, we invite you to come forward and join us in this important initiative.

“Some of the most beautiful things worth having in your life come wrapped in a crown of thorns.”

□ Shannon L. Alder

THE VOICE OF CAREGIVERS – COMMUNITY MEETINGS

In our last issue we announced the creation of a MICA Project Office to develop, implement, track, and manage MICA projects and activities. As the Project Office proceeds with its work plan for the coming year, we are planning on hosting community events in Smith Falls, Cornwall, Ottawa, and Pembroke. Our intent is to present a progress report on

projects underway, and while doing so both confirm we ‘got it right’ and encourage others to get involved – from becoming a member to working with us a member of one of our project teams.

Although details are to be confirmed our tentative schedule is as follows:

- ***Cornwall:***
May 24th, 2017
- ***Smith Falls:***
May 31st, 2017
- ***Ottawa:***
June 2017

Stay tuned! Flyers promoting our events (including locations and times) will be available in early May.

WORKSHOPS AND FUNDRAISERS TO SUPPORT CAREGIVERS AND THOSE LIVING WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

WORKSHOPS:

- ✓ **Schizophrenia Society of Ontario's 2-day Caregiver Workshop**
 - *Topics:* making sense of psychosis, normalizing schizophrenia, preventing relapse, working with medication, coping strategies, key caring principles
 - *When:* **Saturday, May 27 & Sunday, May 28**
Where: McMaster University, Hamilton, ON
 - For more information [click here](#) or go to the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario website and click on the Caregiver Workshop tab.

FUNDRAISERS:

- ✓ **Art in Strathcona Park**
 - A public awareness and fundraising event to support families and caregivers impacted by mental illness. Find that perfect painting, photograph, piece of jewelry, pottery, or glass. A free, fun event!
 - *When:* **August 19th, 2017 – 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM**
 - *Where:* Strathcona Park – 25 Range Rd., Ottawa, ON
 - For more information, visit http://micaontario.com/news_events.php.

FRIENDSHIP SUPPORT GROUP

- The FSG is a peer support group of adults living with mental illness. Join us every week for an evening of friendship and engagement.
- *When:* **Every Wednesday from 5:45 to 7:45 PM**
- *Where:* Carlington Community Health Centre – 900 Merivale Road, Ottawa, ON
- For more information, visit <http://micaontario.com>.

“It is an absolute human certainty that no one can know his own beauty or perceive a sense of his own worth until it has been reflected back to him in the mirror of another loving, caring human being.”

□ **John Joseph Powell,**
The Secret of Staying in Love