

Heroes unmask, go public

Former Nominees use media to transform adversity into advocacy

You don't need a cape, a mask, or to be faster than a speeding bullet. But being a hero of mental health is no easy feat. For Benj Funk, a nominee at last year's Heroes of Mental Health Awards, it means being open about your mental health illness, which is especially difficult in the face of social stigma and internalized shame.

Another past nominee, Sean Miller, agrees. "People who are determined to live their lives to their full potential, in spite of challenges they face, that's a hero," Miller says.

On October 8th, CMHA Manitoba and Winnipeg will be celebrating the 14th annual Heroes of Mental Health Awards. The awards celebrate advocates who challenge stigma, foster hope, and promote mental health awareness.

Benj Funk and Sean Miller, along with his wife Doris, have all transformed the challenge of experiencing mental illness into strong messages of hope.

Benj Funk is a visual artist, graphic designer, musician, and writer who currently has an art exhibit at Maison des Artistes in St. Boniface. His work, *LOSSY: Specters of Schizophrenia*, include paintings that personify the voices Funk heard before he was on medication. He recently released an album of 10 original songs that are linked to the paintings.

The show grew out of a blog Funk started (lossy.benjfunk.com) to journal his experiences with mental illness and the side effects of the medication. As he received feedback about the site, he realized his project was also helping others.

"I'd hear from people who told me that they were now able to help a friend, or were now able to relate to something that is often misunderstood," Funk says.

Miller and his wife, Doris, are also advocates. In recovery from schizophrenia, both Miller and his wife began to share Sean's recovery story in workshops and coffee houses. Soon, requests



Benj Funk in front of his art, now showing at Maison des Artistes

LARISSA BARR

for one-on-one consultations from all over the world flooded in. They soon realized coffee houses and phone calls wouldn't reach the audiences that were clamoring for their work.

Their documentary, *When the Voices Fell Silent* (www.thrive-mentalhealth.ca) was launched this past spring, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Viewers have reached out to thank them for giving hope, validating the important role of family in the recovery journey, and for their candor.

Ultimately, the Millers' mission is to "empower people to express their inherent value as human beings and help them understand that the illness is not their identity."

Noting that the Heroes of Mental Health Awards is an important event to celebrate recovery and resilience, Funk says we also need to remember that everyone living with a mental illness can be considered a hero.

"Just being able to get out of bed in the morning, or taking your meds, or having the courage to talk to someone about your struggles," says Funk, "That's what makes someone a hero."



Message from the

Executive Director

Participating in the democratic process is an important right; so much so that it's a central feature in a recovery-based practice in mental health services. CMHA's Framework for Support includes full citizenship as a cornerstone for recovery.

CMHA encourages all mental health service providers and health leaders to reflect on whether their services support a person's right to vote, for example, by helping to remove barriers, or by facilitating dialogue on current issues.

Our colleague at CMHA Toronto, Steve Lurie, says mental health needs to be an election issue. He's looked in detail at funding levels for mental health in our health care system. Although there is a perception that funding for mental health has improved over the past decade – we're all talking about mental health more and there is greater recognition of the importance of mental health – Lurie says that's sadly not true. According to him, the facts around mental health funding in Canada are anything but positive. He shared with us some highlights:

- Mental health is one area of health care funding that did not benefit from the increased health care transfers since 2004.

- Access to mental health care and community services is poor and has not improved since the release of the Mental Health Commission Strategy in 2012, as provinces and territories have not been able to increase the share of the health spending devoted to mental health to the 9 per cent recommendation by the Mental Health Commission.

- Canada lags behind other countries in this area. For example, the UK spends 10.8 per cent of its health spending on mental health compared to 7 per cent in Canada.

- On a per capita basis Canada could achieve the 9 per cent target by investing an additional \$121 per Canadian each year over a 10 year period. This would allow provinces and territories to make needed investments in the mental health systems, improve access, and really be a recovery-oriented mental health system.

With upcoming provincial and federal elections, we encourage all Manitobans to ask candidates about their plans for investing in mental health.

**Do you
have your tickets?**

Presented by



Heroes of Mental Health Awards Luncheon

Thursday, October 8, 2015 11:30-1:00 pm, The Delta Hotel

Tickets: Individual \$55 • Table of 8 \$440

Available at CMHA, 930 Portage Ave, by phone at 204-982-6100 or online at winnipeg.cmha.ca



Esdale Printers Taylor McCaffrey
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STAFF NEWS

Welcome Gabriela Avendano-Gonzalez and Sandra Tower-Pace, our new Bounce Back coaches.

Our new Employment with Supports program welcomes staff members Curtis Brandt, Natalie Rich, Oriane Donig-Harder, and Desiree Lancaster.

Congratulations to students Charlotte Ofori Adjei and Andrea Caron, who completed their practicums.

Congratulations and best wishes to Leisa Mines,

former Regional Director of CMHA Central. Leisa starts a new position of Manager of Operations this fall with CMHA Kootenay Region in British Columbia.

We welcome Jordan Friesen as the new Regional Director for CMHA Central. Jordan comes to CMHA from the Southern Regional Health Authority.

Newsletter contributors: Marion Cooper, Bill Burrows, Adina Lakser, Tyler Pearce, Pam Porth, and Cara Zabudny. Layout by Dawn Huck.



Dial up, bounce back

Innovative program coming to Manitoba

A two-year pilot of Bounce Back: Reclaim Your Health is set to go live in October. The program, which uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques to assist people experiencing low mood, mild to moderate depression, and anxiety, will be available to residents in the Interlake-Eastern region with referrals from select physicians and nurse practitioners.

Developed by CMHA BC Division in 2008 under the leadership of CEO Bev Gutray, Bounce Back uses materials written by UK psychologist Chris Williams. The program includes a sixty-minute DVD called *Living Life to the Full*, which teaches viewers how to recognize their moods and challenges, and offers CBT-based strategies to make change. A second, more in-depth component of the program, pairs participants with a telephone-based coach whose role is to encourage them through a number of self-selected workbooks.

“The real front door of the mental health system is the doctor’s office. But physicians are really busy, with tremendous caseloads,” says Gutray, explaining the impetus behind Bounce Back’s development. “Bounce Back provides a service that makes sense to the individual. We get back to the physician so they can retain clinical responsibility of their patients.”

Patients experiencing mild to moderate symptoms are underserved in Canada’s health care system. Access to CBT therapies are expensive, often including multi-year waiting lists across the country.

Clinical psychologist Michelle Haring, one of two CBT experts that provide clinical oversight for the program, says her work for CMHA is all about access.

“I want CBT to be available to people that otherwise wouldn’t be able to fork over the dollars,” Haring says, citing the high cost of private CBT therapy. “Bounce Back is about making CBT available to as many people as possible.”

Currently, over 1,700 health care clinics in BC refer patients to Bounce Back, with health care providers seeing vast improvements to their patients’ mental and physical health.

Ashley Grant, who worked as a Bounce Back coach for three years, says, “Coaches help participants focus on the material, engage with it, and help them tackle obstacles that might come up while they are going through the self-help materials.” Grant is now Bounce Back’s Quality Assurance and Training Coordinator.



Bev Gutray, CEO of CMHA BC Division, in Vancouver

Gutray is confident Bounce Back will be a success in Manitoba as well as across Canada. The program is CMHA’s first direct engagement with service delivery in primary care.

“We are very good at building hospital beds, finding medications, and being really invested when people are the most disabled, versus that opportunity when people are struggling,” says Gutray, speaking broadly of health care policy in Canada. Bounce Back is that “first opportunity”

to help people when they start to struggle, Gutray says.

“Primary health care physicians are seeing patients who start to manage and begin to improve their mood. This is CMHA investing in the health care system. It’s investing in helping people earlier.”

Bounce Back is a flagship service to be offered by CMHAs throughout Canada. Outside of BC, Manitoba is the second site to offer Bounce Back. The first opened in Ontario in July.

Funded by Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority, the Manitoba-based project will see 700 participants linked with coaches and 7,000 DVDs distributed over the two years.

To learn more about Bounce Back: Reclaim Your Health, visit bouncebackbc.ca.

Semicolon inks hope

“When we talked about it, we thought we would have maybe 50 people. But we had over 50 the first week. We extended it for two weeks and there were over 300 people,” says Della Steinke, the force behind bringing Project Semicolon to a Winnipeg tattoo shop in July.

Project Semicolon was started in the US by a woman who lost her father to suicide. According to their website, the punctuation mark, used when one could have ended their sentence but chose not to, symbolizes the “will to continue on” for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-harm, and suicide.

Steinke relates. She dealt with serious depression while supporting her son who was in hospital for many months after a life-threatening accident. At her lowest point, exhausted and feeling hopeless, she says she battled thoughts of suicide.

Steinke learned about Project Semicolon when it showed up in her Facebook feed. She says the Project reminded her how hard it can be to reach out for help.

“I wanted to make sure people don’t feel alone and people don’t feel like there’s nowhere to go or no one to talk to,” says Steinke. The owner and artists at Dead Mans Hand Custom Tattoo on Main Street agreed to host the Project, including donating one-third of proceeds to CMHA Manitoba and Winnipeg.

Debbie is one of those who came looking for a semicolon tattoo. “It has taken a long road to get to where I am right now,” says Debbie, whose depression started when she was young and became severe as she moved into adulthood. “I didn’t talk to anyone about depression or mental health. I was one of those people who kept quiet.”

“I was nervous walking into the shop but they made me feel at home,” says Debbie. “They knew why I was there. It was complete acceptance.”

Although Debbie has had previous tattoos, her semicolon, which incorporates a butterfly to symbolize renewal, was her first in over 18 years. Steinke estimates that for 20 or 30 people



Della Steinke shows off the punctuation mark that has people talking

who participated in the Project, it was their first tattoo.

“There were people in their 60s who had never had a tattoo before,” says Steinke. “It was men as well as women. Older men. Moms with their kids. Younger women.... It was a bonding thing for everybody.”

Amazed by the response, Steinke’s efforts have garnered her city-wide recognition, including being nominated for a CMHA Heroes of Mental Health Award. But the biggest reward was being in the tattoo shop hearing people’s stories, says Steinke.

“You could tell that some people had never talked about it before,” she says. “Sitting in a room with 10 or 15 other people and we’re all sharing – next thing you know, they are telling their story, too.”

Della Steinke and Dead Mans Hand Custom Tattoo, 1942 Main Street, are booking for a second round of Project Semicolon as part of Mental Illness Awareness Week, October 5 to 16. To book, call 204-334-3144.

Community Education Courses

Mental Health Education for Families
6 weeks, starting October 19

Mental Health First Aid, Adults Who Interact with Youth
2 days, October 15 and 16

Mental Health First Aid, Basic
2 days, September 30 and October 1
2 days, November 25 and 26

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
8 weeks, starting October 5
8 weeks, starting January 11
Registration opens October 5

See winnipeg.cmha.ca for more information or to register.

Exploring the Journey of Recovery, Introductory Workshop

**Tuesday, October 20
1 pm - 4 pm**

See winnipeg.cmha.ca for more information or to register.