

Canadian Mental Health Association
The Pas, MB
Theresa Hatch, Peer Support and Public Relations Facilitator

Interviewed and submitted by Denise Duncan, Make Shift Happen

We are in the year of 2020, and the stigma around “mental health” is still there. The Canadian Mental Health Association Parkland and The Pas Region (Swan Valley Branch) is working on providing education, workshops, and information to the public about the harmful, damaging effects that stigma still has on individual mental wellness as well as what supports and resources are available to individuals within our communities.

Each and everyone of us has mental health along with physical health. Mental Health is our mind. It deals with our emotions, our feelings, and our thoughts. It affects the choices we make in situations as they happen each day. Ninety percent of those asked by Terry during her awareness events or conversations, respond that they do not have mental health. This is often due to a misunderstanding between what is mental health and what is mental illness. 5 out of 5 people have mental health which again equals everyone, while 1 in 5 individuals will experience a mental illness during their lifetime.

Mental illness is a large spectrum including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, bipolar disease, schizophrenia, post partum depression, and PTSD to name just a few. Mental illness as well as mental health challenges can also affect our physical health over time. As our mental wellness deteriorates, so can our physical wellness and vice-versa.

Our mental wellness can become affected in a negative way not only by a mental illness but in other situations such as diagnosis of physical illnesses including chronic health conditions, loss of a job, struggling finances, breakdown of relationships, an accident causing bodily harm, or even by experiencing some kind of small change. Some people can become very overwhelmed and/or feel alone with the stresses of life both large and day-to-day. Internalizing and not being able to resolve or talk about these feelings and emotions can also affect not only your mental wellness but your physical wellness as well. This can lead to becoming withdrawn, loss of self esteem, and poor self care. The important thing to remember during times of struggle and challenges is that you are not alone and that it is okay to reach out and ask for help/support.

Canadian Mental Health Association Parkland and The Pas Region (Swan Valley Branch) offers a variety of local support services and programs for anyone and everyone over the age of 18. These support services and programs include Peer Support, Anger Management, Recovery Oriented Courses through the HOPE Learning Centre Swan River and Dauphin Campuses (via distance/technology applications), and many print/online resources as well as service navigation. In The Pas, CMHA Parkland and The Pas Region (Swan Valley Branch) Peer Support and Public Relations Facilitator, Terry Hatch, works out of the same building that the radio station is located in and is in the office Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM each week. Terry’s role is to be available to the community for support purposes, resource dispersal, and service navigation. All appointments are confidential and client lead which means the individual seeking support decides on the support plan they would like to receive and leads all support-based sessions.

Terry says that when someone opens up to you with their struggles, responding with a “get over it” “your not the only one”, “get off your butt and do something” only shuts a person down. These types of responses are adding to the stigma associated with mental health/illness. Usually one of the best things someone can do when being talked to by an individual who is struggling, is to listen. Simply let them talk and share with you what they are going through and how it is affecting them. Often, the individual struggling knows that the person they are opening up to does not have all the answers but speaking out about our individual challenges is a positive way to deal with what we are experiencing. Doing so helps us to release the built-up stresses, anxiety, and pain that we might be experiencing. When we internalize our challenges and problems, that is when everything can start to feel overwhelming and unbearable. This is often when we want to turn to unhealthy coping strategies such as substance use (illegal drugs, alcohol, and marijuana) and self-harm.

Continuing down a path of the utilization of negative coping strategies can also lead to thoughts of suicide. It is important to remember that if you suspect someone is suicidal or self-harming themselves, its okay to ask them if this is true. Asking and talking about suicide and self-harm does not cause suicide or self-harm to happen. What it can do however, is let the individual who is struggling know that you care about them and are a safe person to talk to if needed. This helps eliminate more of the stigma that is associated with mental health/illness.

Terry mentions that although the services in the North can seem limited, there are lots of individuals, organizations, and agencies working to provide support to those who need and encourages anyone struggling with mental health/illness challenges to reach out and access the services that currently exist. One of her wishes for the near future is to see more connection between all the people working within a mental health role in The Pas and surrounding area to provide more collective and collaborative services. Another idea Terry has for the future is a local conference (once physical distancing is no longer required and it is safe to do so) which would include speeches by both individuals with lived experience and service providers to provide an opportunity for participants to hear about individual challenges and how they overcame them as well as to gain an understanding of what different mental health based supports and programs there are in the local area being offered currently. Terry believes that this would help with connecting services and would bring our communities to the next level of mental health awareness and support/care. Her last comment to me was “Everything that happens to us, changes our being”. Honestly, I found this to be incredibly thought provoking.

If you require mental health peer support and/or resources/service navigation, you can contact Terry at 204-623-1028.