

FOREWORD



I have worked and lived in the mental health field for thirty-five years. It is paradoxical, exhilarating, and disheartening, that there is one critical aspect of mental wellbeing that has both changed the most, while at the same time changed the least. It is stigma!

What is immensely encouraging is that there is far more dialogue and discourse about mental illness than ever before. Further, as the floodgate of increased acceptance has opened, the rate at which further gains are made seems to be exponential. I am convinced that this great progress is not driven by the media and various campaigns by organizations to get the word out. It has been, and always will be, the people with lived experience—those who have the courage and conviction to tell all they can, that they are not their mental illness, that they are equals in ability.

Fittingly then, the impetus for this book came from the Speakers' Bureau at the Canadian Mental Health

HEARTS LINKED BY COURAGE

Association York and South Simcoe. This diverse group, comprised of CMHA volunteers, are connected through their passion to strive to share their success and educate and inspire others to embark on their own recovery journey. Over the last six years they have delivered extensive presentations, led numerous discussions, and answered an immeasurable number of questions. The credo for the Speakers' Bureau is:

**Raising Awareness – Reducing Stigma –
Inspiring Hope ...** And they certainly have!

To persevere in fighting the battle against stigma is central to all that the Speakers' Bureau is and does. This book holds their stories of struggle and triumph. They have been crafted with great thought for you to shed any remnants of stigma you may hold and to see the reality of recovery. Then, as you embrace this new-found hope you can, with compassion, offer support wherever needed. Consider starting with the most important person, yourself.

— Neil Howard
Director of Programs
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