

Media Advisory

For Immediate Release

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Community partners rally to fight the stigma of mental illness

The battle to fight the stigma of mental illness will continue with the launch of a region-wide anti-stigma campaign on Monday, February 13. A group of 39 people representing a wide range of community partners has been planning the campaign for nearly two years. The campaign launch will include the premier of a video public service announcement, the launch of the campaign website, and information about other campaign initiatives.

“One in five of us, regardless of age, will experience a mental illness in our lifetime,” said Ellis Katsof, CEO of Pathstone Mental Health, and Chair of the Anti-Stigma Campaign Committee. “The reality is that many people will not seek help because they are afraid of what people will think. The goal of the campaign is to help people change their minds about mental illness.”

Media and the community are invited to attend the launch, which will be held in the Atrium of Niagara Region Headquarters, 2201 St. David’s Road, Thorold, Campbell East, starting at 12:10. Mr. Katsof and the rest of the planning committee will be available for interviews and photographs.

For more information contact:

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The stigma of mental illness marks an entire group of people as socially different, unacceptable or undesirable; it is this belief that leads to *discrimination*.

What are the effects/impacts of Stigma?

Stigma and the resulting discrimination *exclude* people with mental illnesses from activities that are open to other people. Stigma hurts people in ways that are impossible to measure.

Stigma limits a person's ability to:

- get and keep a job
- fit in at school without being bullied
- find a safe place to live
- attend college or university
- receive adequate health care (including treatment for substance use and mental health problems) and other support
- be accepted by their family, friends and community

Why does Stigma Surround Mental Illness?

While acceptance of certain groups of people has increased greatly over the past 50 years, specifically those with AIDS, breast cancer, those of different races, and those with disabilities, this tolerance has not yet been fully extended to individuals with mental illnesses. Stigma surrounds mental illness because:

- Mental illnesses are invisible
- Mental illnesses often manifest themselves through behaviour- a common misconception is that everyone is able to choose and therefore control how they behave, think and feel
- People fear what they don't understand. It is only recently that we know that mental illness is a biological illness, just like diabetes, cancer, heart disease, etc.
- Many people think that young people are just acting out and will eventually "grow out of" certain behaviours
- Stigmatizing language - psycho, schizo, retard, junkie, nuts, mad, loony, mental - are still prevalent in our vocabulary and serves to reinforce the stereotypes

What is mental health and what are mental health problems?

Mental Health is a broad term that involves finding a balance in all aspects of your life; physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It is the ability to maintain productive activities, sustain fulfilling relationships, deal with daily stressors and adapt to changes in your environment.

Mental Health Problem is a term that includes both mental health disorders and symptoms of mental health disorders which may or may not be severe enough to warrant a diagnosis of a mental health disorder. The symptoms of a mental health problem can be the same as a disorder however they will improve with time. An individual can experience reactions of distress due to their parents getting divorced, the loss of a job or a relationship which are considered normal; this may be

Shatter the Stigma

Mend the Mind

considered a mental health disorder or illness when the length, intensity or effect they have on a person is prolonged and constant.

Some examples of situations that someone could be experiencing that could negatively affect their mental health are:

- being bullied
- parents going through a divorce
- going through a divorce
- dealing with the death of a loved one
- involvement in a car accident
- coping with a physical health problem
- growing up in a war-torn country, leaving the country you came from or adjusting to a new country (which often means dealing with immigration and resettlement experiences)
- dealing with racism or other forms of prejudice (because of sexual orientation, age, religion, culture, class, etc.)
- having a low income or being homeless
- not having equal access to education, work and health care
- having a history of mental health problems in the family
- being a victim of violence, abuse or other trauma

(Source: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)

Goal of the Campaign

The ultimate goal of the campaign is to help change the way people think about mental illness. To achieve this, the campaign committee has planned a number of activities designed to steer people to the website mendthemind.ca. The website will provide information about mental health and mental illness as well as where people of all ages can get help. The information on the website will be updated regularly to encourage frequent visits.

The logo and slogan, as seen above, will be used in print ads, posters, radio ads, on-line, and as the basis for a video public service announcement. The committee is urging community partners and businesses to put the campaign logo with a link to the video on their website.

The committee has also planned a postcard initiative designed to encourage people to anonymously share their experiences with mental health problems or the stigma they have faced. The postcards will be displayed on the campaign website.

The Anti-Stigma Planning Committee is made up of 39 individuals representing a wide cross section of Niagara.

Ellis Katsof - Pathstone Mental Health	Hilary Abbey - DSBN, Principal
Arlene Arch - Thorold City Council	Yolanda Baldasara - NCDSB
Mary Barzyk - CMHA Niagara	Cheryl Bechard Howe - DSBN, Social Worker
Laura Bruno - CMHA, Niagara	Sarah Cannon - Pathstone Parent Advisory Committee
Laurie Columbus - Niagara Region Public Health	Jill Dennison - Schizophrenia Society of Ontario
Barb Eade - DSBN	Steven Gallagher - Niagara Falls Review
Laurie Garner - Community Member	Laura Guirguis - NCDSB, St. Paul High School
Kevin Harding - Corporate Communications, PR Consultant	Kyle Horvath - Brock University, Student
Mary-Therese Keenan - NCDSB, Blessed Trinity	Brittany Keskinen - Community Member
Diane Kon - Pathstone Foundation	Nadia Laselva - NCDSB, Monsignor Clancy
Brittany Marshall - Brock University, Student	Susan Misfud - Brock University, Staff
Heidi Mori - Community Member	Ashleigh Myers - Astral Radio Niagara
Katherine Perry - NCDSB, Blessed Trinity	Dave Pierce - DSBN, Social Worker
Diane Pizale - Monsignor Clancy	Jessica Rathwell - Pathstone Mental Health
Karen Robson - CMHA, Niagara	Heather Scott - NHS, Manager Mental Health
Kealan Sisler - JMR Logics	Susan Tromanhauser - NCDSB, St. Patrick Elementary School
Joann Tweney - Rockpoint Productions	Stephanie Vale - Pride Niagara
Nadine Wallace - Niagara Regional Police Service	Laurie Walsh - Astral Media Niagara
Adam White - Social Media Consultant, JMR Logistics	Julie Wiley-Pol - Pathstone Parent Advisory Committee
Karen Wright - DSBN, Orchard Park	Carrie Zeffiro - Pathstone Foundation

The following individuals are available for interview:

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