

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE PROGRAM

Stigma continues to be a huge problem for people living with mental illness. It undermines a person's sense of self, relationships, well-being and prospects for recovery. Communities are proving they can make a difference through education and awareness programs. The program described in this guide helps to increase awareness about mental illness and the stigma that surrounds it. It is based on the experiences of three communities that participated in the program, and the steps they took to increase awareness and understanding of mental illness.

The community sites used Beyond the Cuckoo's Nest, an awareness program for youth age 15 or older, as their starting point. The program was originally developed in 1988 by nurse case managers at the former Clarke Institute of Psychiatry (one of the founding partners of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health). This program was developed in response to the community's expressed need for information on mental illness. It consists of a two-hour presentation designed to give secondary school students facts about mental illness and create opportunities for them to interact with people who have first-hand experience with mental illness.

People who have experienced mental illness, family members of people with mental illness, and health professionals deliver the program. The presenters who have lived with mental illness talk about their experiences — what it was like when the symptoms of mental illness first developed,

where they went for help and how they are currently managing. Students benefit from the unique learning experience the program offers, the opportunity to meet and talk to individuals who have been affected by mental illness. After attending the program, students often comment, “people with mental illness are just like everyone else.”

The success of Beyond the Cuckoo’s Nest and the desire to share the benefits of the program with people throughout Ontario led to the development of a second program in 1998. This program involved three partners: the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Canadian Mental Health Association (Ontario Division) and the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario. Each partner shares the goals of increasing knowledge and understanding of mental illness, and eliminating stigma. Developing the partnership allowed the program to draw on the expertise and local networks of each organization.

The program goals were to develop and deliver awareness presentations in each of the three communities — Hamilton, North Bay and Kingston — and to document their experiences in order to develop resource materials to assist other communities across the province in delivering their own awareness programs. The learnings from the Beyond the Cuckoo’s Nest program became the template to develop individualized community presentations.

Each community modified the program to reflect local realities and resources. This guide is the result of their experiences and their best advice on how to develop and carry out an awareness program for youth.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE GUIDE

This guide examines the process for building local coalitions and the steps involved in planning and organizing awareness programs, recruiting speakers, publicizing the program, working with the media and the school system, and evaluating the program.

The accompanying guide, *Teacher’s Resource*, looks at the process from the point of view of secondary school staff. It demonstrates how the program fits into the curriculum; it provides concrete ideas and activities for incorporating mental health education into the classroom; and it prepares students for the learning they will receive through the program.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is intended for community groups, agencies and individuals interested in increasing awareness about mental health issues and challenging the stigma of mental illness by developing and delivering awareness presentations.

The accompanying guide, *Teacher’s Resource*, provides relevant information and resources for secondary school staff to help them enhance students’ learning about mental health and mental illness. It includes ready-to-use activities to prepare students for their presentation, as well as appropriate follow-up activities for use in the classroom.

How do you use it?

This guide highlights a process, used by several communities, to reduce the stigma of mental illness. Users can consult the relevant sections of the guide as needed; it does not have to be used in sequence.

What's in the guide?

Part 1 discusses the stigma that surrounds mental illness and the rationale for the awareness program.

Part 2 describes the first steps involved in bringing the program to life: recruiting community members, enhancing local resources and beginning the planning process that leads to the implementation of the awareness program. It illustrates the process with examples from the three communities. The Tools section contains useful resources, such as a template for creating a list of community resources and a list of places to look for donations of resources.

Part 3 looks at ways of getting the word out — working with the media, the schools and other community resources to promote and carry out your awareness program. The Tools section at the end of Part 3 contains useful resources such as a sample press release and public service announcement, information on ways the program meets the curriculum requirements for certain high-school courses and a sample letter to a school.

Part 4 considers ways to prepare for, carry out and follow up on the program presentation, from the perspectives of the organizers and presenters. Information for teachers is contained in the accompanying *Teacher's Resource*. Part 4 will help ensure your presentation is as effective as it can be.

Part 5 describes the process of evaluating the impact of your program. It includes a summary of the program evaluation conducted in the three communities, and sample tools to evaluate the program in your community.

In the Appendices, you'll find a variety of useful resources, including excerpts from the curriculum guidelines for relevant secondary school courses, a list of suggestions for further information such as Web sites, print materials, mental health organizations and resources that deal with the issues of mental illness and stigma.