

PART 2: GETTING STARTED

Each community has a unique reality and resources, so no two will initiate the program in the same way. Part 2 contains information that will be helpful to people working in a variety of contexts. For people working in communities where some groundwork will be needed to get an awareness program going, this section addresses the first steps involved in bringing a program to life. For people working in communities with a well-developed network of mental health-related resources, there are some useful ideas and tips that will help your group move forward quickly.

2.1 BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Connecting people to one another and to the issue is a vital first step in taking action to reduce stigma in your community. Participants in successful awareness-raising initiatives find out experientially that they can be heard and they can make a difference, and that a group of diverse people can address difficult issues, such as the stigma of mental illness, constructively.

When community members are actively engaged with one another and with community life, relationships are formed that not only become a support for individuals, but also become a resource for the entire community.

Forming a planning committee

The first step in organizing your program is to bring together people who are invested in the goal of reducing the stigma associated with mental illness. A few enthusiastic people is all it takes to initiate a successful collaboration — a small group of people with the credibility to convince others that something can and must be done.

You may not have to start from scratch; there could be a group in

Bringing a working group together was not a challenge for Kingston, because the community already had a coalition mobilized around mental health issues. The city of Kingston has a very diverse population, four hospitals, including a psychiatric hospital, and eight prisons. Although the coalition

was already very active, members recognize there is still a lot more work to be done to make the community more aware of, and more comfortable with, mental illness.

After a few casual discussions between some of the coalition members (including the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and representatives from the Kingston branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Mood Disorders Association), an initial program group was formed and ready to get to work. This initial team was expanded to include representatives from the Family Resource Centre of Kingston Friendship Homes, the Kingston Psychiatric Hospital, the social work department, as well as a number of people who had experienced mental illness, who participated as presenters and/or professional support during presentations.

The ease with which the group moved forward with the program was largely due to each partner's experience with public education campaigns. Each had participated in various public awareness and education campaigns in the past, but felt that more could be achieved by joining forces. The opportunity to work together educating youth about mental illness was exciting but not overwhelming since

your community that is already active and potentially interested in working with you to create a local awareness program.

If your community does not already have a group or coalition you can work with, you can start by bringing together a few interested people to help you do some planning. Your group can begin by gathering information on the issue, finding out about local resources and identifying a broad range of stakeholders. Remember that the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (camh), the Canadian Mental Health Association (cmha) and the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario developed this program jointly. Each of the local branches or offices of these organizations in Ontario has a copy of the *Talking About Mental Illness* materials and may be able to provide assistance in developing the program.

The role taken by each organization will depend on local needs and resources, and what other initiatives are under way at the community level. Your local camh office may provide a starting point, helping you to develop networks with other resources and sources of support in your community.

Broadening the base of participation

Our communities consist of people from a broad range of ages, cultures and abilities. If your group represents a diverse cross-section of the community, it may gain broader community support. By joining forces with individuals and organizations that have credibility and a presence in the community, you can accomplish a great deal more than you would on your own.

- Potential participants may come from a variety of backgrounds, such as:
- people with mental illness, their family and friends, and other individuals who have a personal interest
 - people who work in a setting where mental health issues are important, such as teachers, students, hospital workers, mental health professionals, police and members of the local business community
 - people involved in local voluntary organizations such as self-help and support groups, community information centres, libraries, family resource centres and women's hospital auxiliary
 - members of community clubs and groups such as Rotary, Lions, Legion and Kiwanis
 - members of local religious congregations.

Tips for getting started

Use your networks.

Start with people you know. It is easier to interest people you already have a relationship with.

Find out what other groups, organizations and individuals are active in your community. Get in touch with ones that share the same concerns. You may be able to form partnerships that benefit everyone.

Go to where people are.

Instead of trying to get people to come to you, go to them. Go to the meetings of other groups and to the places and events where people gather. This is particularly important if you're trying to involve youth, seniors, different cultural and ethnic groups and others that may not come to you.

Ask people to invite others.

Most community volunteers become involved because they were asked to participate by a friend, a family member or a neighbour.

Support the participation of all people.

If you want to have a diverse group of people committed to your program, it is important to support their participation. Make sure the program is accessible to everyone, including youth, and people from ethno-cultural and disability communities. Provide practical support, such as transit allowances, and make sure meetings are held in accessible locations at times convenient for everyone.

Communicate clearly.

Effective communication is also an important part of supporting people's participation. Avoid using jargon and make sure everyone understands what is being said. Act quickly on input from people about making the program more diverse.

Create leaflets and bulletins.

Community bulletin boards, libraries, city hall, community centres and other similar locations are great places to post information about your group. You might want to create leaflets as well, so that people have information they can take with them.

the program drew equally on the strengths of each partner.

In Hamilton, coalition-building started with a letter, signed by both CAMH and the CMHA, introducing the idea for the program to several key community contacts, including representatives of the Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital, the Mental Health Rights Coalition and the local branch of the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario. The letter also invited potential community partners to an information session to find out more about the program.

The program was introduced at the information session and participants were presented with an orientation package. After some discussion, everyone agreed to play a role in the development of the program. Several meetings were held to discuss the program. Two issues raised in these meetings were the need to tailor the program to reflect the local community and the need to reach out to include local people who had experienced mental illness.

Group members were able to get in touch with a number of potential presenters through their personal and professional networks. An effort was made to ensure the pool of speakers included youth and people with a variety of mental health concerns.

Group members offered varying degrees of time and commitment, based on their availability and workload. At times, it was difficult to co-ordinate meetings accessible to all members, especially youth. The group realized it had to make a special effort to arrange for transportation and schedule meeting times so youth could attend. Also, they had to conduct the meetings in a way that made them feel included and engaged.

Use Local Leadership.

Well-known, respected community members who are active in civic life can be excellent resources for your awareness program.

Invite people to participate to whatever extent they wish.

Be sensitive to people's needs and limitations. Even those who are very interested may have time constraints. People will be more willing to participate if they feel their availability and interests are respected.

Keep your efforts visible.

Make sure you're getting the attention you need from the broader community by developing contacts in the local media. We talk more about working with the media in Part 3.

2.2 WHAT'S NEXT: YOUR GROUP'S FIRST QUESTIONS

Covering the basics

One of the first tasks your group should do is answer some basic questions about who you are and what you're doing. The process allows group members to share their ideas about what the program means to them, and also helps groups develop a sense of cohesiveness and identity. The following is a list of questions you may want to put on the agenda of your group's first meeting:

- Why are we coming together?
- What do we have in common?
- What are our goals?
- Where will we meet?
- When will we meet and how often?
- How should our time be spent?
- What kinds of topics should we cover?
- What kind of resources will we need?

- Who can help us out? (Create a help list with names and phone numbers of local organizations, groups and professionals that can help your group.)
- Who else should be here?
- Should we set some guidelines for the group? (For example, confidentiality issues, decision making processes)

Naming your program

Choosing an appropriate title is very important in establishing the identity of your program. The title on the cover of this guide, "Talking about Mental Illness," is simply a working title. We hope people using this guide will change the title to reflect the reality of their group and community.

You can brainstorm possible names with your committee or host a contest to come up with an appropriate name. Pick a name that is catchy and reflects the objectives of your program. Consider focus-testing the name outside of the immediate group to ensure it is meaningful and well-liked.

You may also wish to develop a logo. A logo helps identify and draw attention to your program. Use your logo on all of your promotional materials, including press releases, correspondence, and background and support materials such as those you take to schools and distribute to teachers.

Planning for action

Once you've convened your group, develop an action plan. What steps do you need to take to organize and deliver the awareness program?

The following is a list of some general questions to address in your brainstorming session:

- What specific tasks need to be completed?
- Who will carry out these tasks?
- When do these tasks need to be completed?
- What resources will we need to carry out these tasks (such as funding, time, photocopies, etc.)?
- Who should know about these actions?

Specific tasks for your group

Your action plan sets out the tasks that need to be completed, and the person or people assigned to carry them out. Some of the specific tasks might include:

- finding sponsors for such things as providing honorariums, travel expenses or snacks
- gathering in-kind resources, such as meeting space, photocopies, refreshments for meetings,

and so on (A list of ideas for potential community donors is in the Tools section at the end of Part 2.)

- recruiting presenters (Use the networks and contacts of your local partners to contact people who have experienced mental illness to participate in your program as organizers, presenters or both. Extend the opportunity widely, including self-help groups for family members and individuals and local community mental health services.)
- making contact with local schools, mental health service providers, community colleges, supportive housing and other community organizations
- contacting local media and soliciting their support.

Keeping it going — Sustaining people’s enthusiasm

Successful community groups do not happen by chance. They are the result of careful planning, attention to detail and a leadership style that recognizes and facilitates the different ways in which members contribute to attaining the group’s goals.

At the heart of every successful community-based program is a core of enthusiastic individuals. People become dedicated to a group because they gain something important from their involvement, such as the opportunity to do work that helps others, to be part of a team, to challenge themselves or to learn how to be a leader.

Commitment grows as people gain experience working and making decisions together, overcoming obstacles, building relationships and having an impact on something they care about. When you invite someone to participate in your awareness program, you aren’t imposing something on that person; you are offering him or her something of value.

Tips for building and maintaining your group

Welcome people into your group.

All people need to feel genuinely welcome in order to become involved; if people don’t feel welcome, they won’t stick around. Greet people individually as they arrive and get to know them. Make it part of the culture of your group to provide a welcoming environment for newcomers and members who have been involved from the start.

Be sensitive to diversity.

People involved in awareness work need to communicate their openness to diversity by including people of different cultures, ages, abilities, sexual orientations, religions, and so forth. People will become committed to your initiative if you respect them and value their cultural identity.

Be open and clear about your mission, goals and objectives.

Post your mission, goals and objectives in your meeting space, so everyone will be familiar with them. Talk openly about why they are important to your group. People have to know what

they are committing to.

People will be interested in your group if they share the same principles and goals, and their commitment will be greatest if they participate in the process of naming the group's goals and objectives.

Model dedication yourself.

If people can count on you, it is more likely you will be able to count on them.

Enthusiasm is contagious. However, if you are working so hard you are burnt out and unhappy, people will take note of that, too, and they will shy away from following your lead. Remember to keep a sense of balance and delegate tasks to others.

Promote renewal and growth.

As the initial energy and enthusiasm gives way to more tedious tasks, many community groups go through a stage when they lose members and flounder a bit. This stage is a normal part of group process — some turnover should be expected — and it may even be healthy. Unfortunately, the loss of some participants may discourage those who stick it out.

You will take these changes in stride if you have developed new leadership and involved new people throughout your group's development. You can accomplish this by circulating minutes of group meetings, making presentations in the community (to service clubs, churches, etc.) and making contact with local media to publicize the work of the group.

Give people the right kind of work to do.

People need to feel they're making a significant contribution to feel committed. Find out what people are interested in doing and see if you can match their interests to the work that needs to be done.

Assess people's abilities so they don't feel overwhelmed or bored. Talk to people about the jobs they would like to attempt and encourage them to try new things. Try to give people jobs that bring them into contact with other people involved in the program, which will help them feel part of the group.

Build a culture of appreciation and respect.

People who feel appreciated and respected are more likely to stay committed to your program. Create an environment where people treat each other well and appreciate each other's work.

In heated discussions or conflicts, make sure that people show respect for each other. Conflicts are natural and provide important growing periods. To ensure conflicts are constructive, rather than destructive, try to keep discussions focused on issues instead of individuals.

Ensure equity within the group.

The people sitting around the table may have very different access to resources. Some will be professionals participating during paid work hours, while others will be unpaid volunteers. Your group might want to consider providing honorariums for unwaged presenters to support their

participation and acknowledge the value of their contribution to the group and the community.

Listen.

It is important to ensure everyone's voice is heard when decisions are being made. Active and respectful listening is a crucial to foster commitment from group members.

Support people's leadership.

Even though people have varying levels of leadership skills and experience, everyone can contribute something of importance. If people see themselves as leaders, they will develop a sense of ownership, and are more likely to take initiative to ensure the program's success. Think about each person as a potential leader and help each one to recognize his or her leadership talents.

Celebrate your accomplishments.

Don't forget to celebrate your accomplishments and enjoy each other's company. Spending some social time together helps people get to know each other better and feel more a part of the group. Share letters of thanks from audience members with the entire group. Look for opportunities to encourage and support your members as they progress through the program.

CHECKLIST

- Your organizing committee involves partners from many different sectors of the community.
- The members of the group reflect the diversity present in your community.
- You are tapping into available community resources.
- Your group has a plan for raising funds and other resources.
- You are promoting the development of new leadership in the group.
- Your group is reaching out to the whole community to recruit new members and publicize their work.
- You are taking the time to acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments of the group.

FOR FURTHER READING

University of Kansas. *Community Tool Box*. Available on-line at: <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/>

This Web site offers practical guidance for community mobilization and development. There are over 3,000 pages of specific, skill-building information on over 150 community topics.

Mattessich, P. & Monsey, B. (1995). *Community Building: What Makes It Work?* Minnesota: Wilder Foundation Publications. Available on-line at:
<http://www.wilder.org/pubs/commb/commbwbk.html>

This book reviews factors influencing the success of community-building initiatives. It synthesizes the findings of community-building studies into an easy-to-use reference. The book also contains a glossary of terms, a list of resources, technical support information and an extensive bibliography.

Willinsky, C. (1999). *Mental Health Promotion Toolkit: A Practical Resource for Community Initiatives*. Canadian Mental Health Association. Available on-line at: <http://www.cmha.ca/>

Although there is no standard recipe for promoting mental health, this resource offers helpful examples and ideas. It includes a step-by-step guide for developing a program, summary tips and checklists, and tools such as a sample funding proposal. Three existing programs are used to illustrate concrete examples of effective approaches.

Winer, M. & Ray, K. (1996). *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey*. Minnesota: Wilder Foundation Publications. Available on-line at:
<http://www.wilder.org/pubs/commb/commbwbk.html>

This handbook is conceived to help diverse groups work together. It describes strategies for accomplishing goals and guidelines for successful collaboration. The book provides instruction, case studies and worksheets to guide users through the process of developing and sustaining collaborative partnerships.

TOOLS

- Template for Creating a List of Community Resources
- List of Places to Look for Donations of Resources

TEMPLATE FOR CREATING A LIST OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

A community resource list is a tool the organizing committee can prepare in advance. It provides teachers with an up-to-date listing of the various mental health supports and resources available in the community. You can also highlight resources present within the school such as guidance counsellors, school nurses, chaplains and social workers, as well as other possible resources in the community, such as hospitals, clergy and family doctors.

Completing the list is a valuable exercise for committee members because it helps familiarize them with the supports and resources in the community. It also provides a list of potential partners and contacts for arranging speakers, and so forth.

The following template should be adjusted to fit your community's unique resources.

Community Resources

Distress phone lines [Insert phone number of local services here]

Distress lines are an anonymous way for people to get support during a crisis, as well as information on longer-term help for themselves, family members or friends.

Distress lines are accessible 24 hours a day. When in doubt, call 911.

Kids Help Phone (1-800-668-6868)

Eating disorders support groups and services [Insert phone number of local services here]

Assertive community treatment teams [Insert phone number of local services here]

Local emergency shelters [Insert phone number of local services here]

Local hospital [Insert phone number of local services here]

Community mental health agencies [Insert phone number of local services here]

Supportive housing agencies [Insert phone number of local services here]

Canadian Mental Health Association — local branch [Insert phone number of local service here — Call 416-484-7750, or visit their Web site at www.cmha.ca to find the branch nearest you.]

Mood Disorders Association of Ontario [Insert phone number of local service here — Call 1-888-486-8236 or 416-486-8046, or visit their Web site at <http://www3.sympatico.ca/mdamt/> to find the nearest location.]

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health [Call 1-800-463-6273 for information on mental health issues and services or visit their Web site at www.camh.net to find out about a local office.]

Schizophrenia Society [Insert phone number of local services here — Call 1-800-449-6367, or visit their Web site at <http://www.schizophrenia.on.ca/> to find the chapter nearest you.]

The Self-Help Resource Centre of Ontario [Call 1-888-283-8806, or visit their Web site at <http://www.selfhelp.on.ca/> to find out about local groups.]

LIST OF PLACES TO LOOK FOR DONATIONS OF RESOURCES

Some of the things you will need, in addition to cash, are refreshments, meeting space, photocopying, telephone, office supplies and thank-you gifts. The following is a list of suggestions for places and people that may support you with resources for your project.

- local government
- local Chamber of Commerce
- local businesses (for in-kind donations, e.g., food, office supplies, thank you gifts)
- local places of worship
- local banks and credit unions
- local service clubs (Kiwanis, Rotary, I.O.D.E.)
- insurance companies
- hospital auxiliaries