

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 make a difference through education and awareness programs. ***This guide includes ideas and tools that can help teachers increase awareness about mental illness and the stigma that surrounds it.***

The guide is based on learnings from Beyond the Cuckoo's Nest, an awareness program for youth, aged 15 and older. The program was started in Toronto 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). It was developed in response to the community's expressed need for information on mental illness. The original program consisted 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. Presenters 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 a unique learning experience, particularly the opportunity to meet and talk to individuals who have been affected by mental illness. After attending the program, students often say, "people with mental illness are just like everyone else."

The program's success, and the desire to share the benefits of Beyond the Cuckoo's Nest with people in communities throughout Ontario, led to the development of a second project in 1998. This project 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.

The project took place in three communities: Hamilton, North Bay and Kingston. Its goals were to develop and deliver awareness presentations in each community, and to develop resource materials that would assist other communities across the province in delivering their own awareness programs. Although the communities used Beyond the Cuckoo's Nest as their template, they changed the program to reflect local needs and resources.

In focus groups and evaluations that were conducted with student and teacher participants who took part in the program, both groups recommended certain changes to improve the program. They suggested that the program should:

- (1) include a classroom component to cover preparatory and follow-up activities to better equip students for the presentation
- (2) devote the presentation entirely to people's stories.

These changes are reflected in this guide.

In keeping with the participants' recommendations, the program described in this guide prepares students and provides follow-up to the presentation, which consists entirely of people's accounts of their experiences with mental illness. The preparation enables students to get the most out of the presentation and the follow-up addresses concerns and issues that were raised. Section 2 further discusses the four flexible component modules around which the program is organized.

OVERVIEW OF THE GUIDE

Who is this guide for?

This guide is intended for teachers in secondary schools across Ontario, particularly those who teach courses in which mental health and mental illness are highlighted. However, it is relevant for any teacher who is interested in exploring these topic areas in other courses.

What's in the guide?

Section 1 discusses the stigma surrounding mental illness and examines the rationale for the awareness program. It also provides a brief outline of the program's goals and objectives.

Section 2 provides an overview of the four components of the program, which include:

- an introduction to the concept of stigma
- an overview of major mental illnesses, their causes and treatment
- the presentation
- follow-up activities.

These components address ways of preparing for, carrying out and following up on the presentation in order to maximize students' learning. This section provides a rationale for each component, as well as a description, instructions and necessary tools to carry out the suggested educational activities.

Section 3 discusses the program's evaluation, and provides helpful suggestions and tools that you can use to evaluate the program in your school.

In Section 4, the Appendices, you'll find a variety of useful resources, including master copies of all overheads and handouts, excerpts from the Ontario curriculum guidelines for relevant secondary school courses and a list of suggestions for further information, including articles, Web sites, organizations and audiovisual resources that deal with mental illness and stigma.

The accompanying *Community Guide* outlines the process for building local coalitions and the steps involved in planning and organizing awareness programs.