

"Our Mission is to stimulate a shared community responsibility for improved mental health and to promote and provide a continuum of services which clearly reflects our beliefs for all individuals and families."

Introductory Tour

This is a narrated feature available on the CMHA cd-rom describing who the CMHA Cochrane Timiskaming are and what they do.

Running time: 5:50 6:00 minutes

The Canadian Mental Health Association, Cochrane Timiskaming Branch is a non-profit community mental health organization. As part of the Canadian Mental Health Association, we are affiliated with a network of more than 120 Branches across Canada.

Over the past decade, the mental health system in our community and across the province has been transforming from a system of institutions to a support network for community based care. Part of the process of that transformation is to provide treatment and support close to home for people experiencing mental illness.

The Canadian Mental Health Association has been on the front line of that process. We are here to provide support and treatment to the people who need it; consumers of mental health care. We also provide support to their families and to the communities they live in.

Our vision is to help form a community that values human dignity, respects human diversity, and enhances physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well being for everyone.

The Canadian Mental Health Association of Cochrane Timiskaming offers programs in two streams of direct services: the Mental Health Services program, and the Family Violence program. Our programs provide consumer support; help to people who need it; support for families affected by family violence or mental illness; and community support and education.

(end segment 1: pause)

Public perception of people with mental illness has been poisoned by generations of pop-culture bogeymen; monsters born out of movies like "The Silence of the Lambs", and television programs like the "X-Files". People are frightened by mental illness without having a real understanding of what it is, and part of our responsibility is to change public perceptions, and educate people about mental illness in their community.

Mental illness can't be easily profiled or predicted. It does not discriminate, and diseases like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder can strike anyone regardless of their background or education.

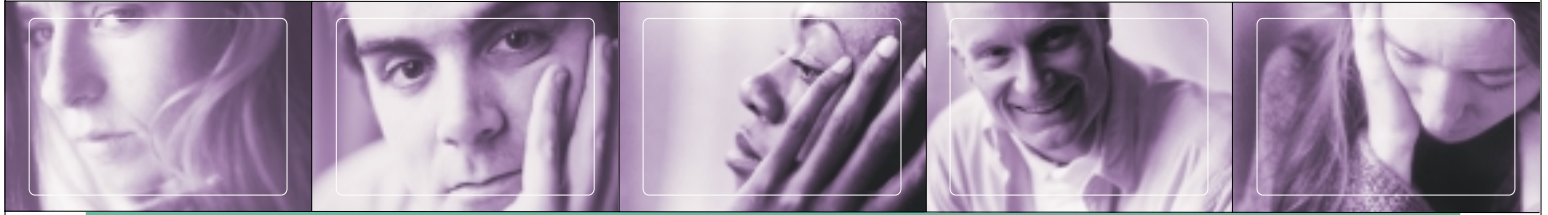
Schizophrenia affects about one out of every thousand young adults, and it can be devastating, not just for the people afflicted by it, but their families and loved ones, who feel powerless, watching the lives and dreams of people they love unravel because of this terrible illness.

Depression, while it is less spectacular, is equally devastating, and more pervasive, affecting one in four Canadians.

In addition to helping people with psychiatric counseling and medication, we also help their families with peer support groups and education.

We don't think of people who live with mental illness as "patients", but as "consumers" and "survivors". We call them "survivors" because they are just that, people who struggle with, and survive a daily challenge in their lives that is as real as any physical disability. Many of the consumers we work with have not only overcome their personal challenges, but have gone on to help others through social support and contact, and peer counseling. In Timmins, the Timmins Consumer/Survivor Network works with the Canadian Mental Health Association to provide day to day support for people living with mental illness. A similar program called the "Northern Star" network operates in Kirkland Lake, New Liskeard, and Haileybury.

(end segment 2: pause)



Mental Illness: Part of what we do is educate police and hospital workers, to help them recognize when someone is suffering from mental illness.

Introductory Tour Continued

People living with mental illness need more than medication and counseling. The Canadian Mental Health Association works cooperatively with other community agencies throughout the Timiskaming Cochrane region to provide a comprehensive range of services. Quite often, the homeless are suffering from mental illness. We work with the police and the legal system to help recognize and treat persons with mental illness. We work with local housing authorities and cooperative housing programs to find adequate and suitable housing for people who need it. We work with area social services to provide financial support where it is needed, and we work very closely with area hospitals, to help provide treatment where it is necessary.

Part of what we do is educate police and hospital workers, to help them recognize when someone is suffering from mental illness. We educate community leaders to make them aware that people with mental illness can lead normal and productive lives; that they can hold down a job; live independently and pay their rent just like anyone else. We educate the community at large, to show them that mental illness is just that, an illness that is treatable.

Part of what we do is more basic and human: we provide one on one support to people who need it. This can be as practical as helping someone with severe depression clean their apartment, and do their grocery shopping and banking, or helping someone with schizophrenia lead an independent life, and find an apartment.

This can be as simple as spending time with someone who feels isolated, and needs human contact and company.

Many of the people we help in turn help others through volunteering. At the Canadian Mental Health Association, we have a full-time volunteer coordinator, who helps to find suitable opportunities, not just for caring members of the community, but for consumers and survivors who are looking for challenges to help them build confidence and social skills. Quite often, consumer-survivors use their volunteer experiences to help equip themselves for full time jobs in the mainstream community.

(end segment 3: pause)

Some of the people we work with have serious mental illnesses. These are people who in some cases have lived most of their lives in institutions, and are now being re-integrated into the community. These people require a high degree of support, and we have created a special, multi-disciplinary team including a physician, a psychiatrist, nurses, and community mental health workers who are available to help, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We call this the Assertive Community Treatment Team, or "ACT" for short. The ACT team provides physical and mental health care, and visits their charges daily, to provide medication management and symptom management, counseling and personal support when it is needed.

We also provide help to women and children suffering from the effects of family violence. We operate a women's shelter, and provide crisis care, which can include residency in our shelter, medical, financial and legal aid, support, and comfort.

Some of the people who come into our care are referred to us by concerned family members, or the police, or health care workers; many people refer themselves. Events that stress the fabric of our communities, like closures or layoffs at large employers, or the fear and stresses caused by terrorist acts can cause people to feel powerless, or that their lives are out of control. These people aren't mentally ill, but nonetheless they know that they can turn to us when they need comfort or counseling.

We have a big mandate to fulfill, and in the Cochrane Timiskaming region we face a challenge that is common to all of northern and rural Ontario: a serious shortage of medical and mental health professionals.

We are actively seeking new recruits to help us in our mission. To help meet that mandate, we are building partnerships with other community organizations and health-care providers. We love the north, and we believe in our community. We know that we will never lose sight of that as we continue to grow and prosper in the communities we serve throughout northeastern Ontario.

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