



J U L Y 2 0 1 6

Newsletter

BC Schizophrenia Society, Victoria Branch

“Doing the Work”

For info or self referral: visit www.bcssvictoria.ca or call 250-384-4225 email: admin.bcss@shaw.ca

Doing the work - What I do to stay well

by John G Mitchell

It is nearly impossible for me to discuss my own personal means of recovery and long-term stability without trotting out the well-worn and oft-quoted most basic of tools - "Meds, doctors, therapy, diet, exercise"

The cornerstones of most people's recovery, as stereotypical as that sounds, and I am no exception. Each presents its own set of challenges, and each are a work in progress, but I know the price of complacency so I do the work that is needed. And somewhere along the line of having to do the work and pushing myself, it has become second nature, and I find myself wanting to do the basics every day, or even better - not even noticing I am doing the basics.

And this is the line, I believe, between recovery and long-term stability.

With the benefit of hindsight the basics have allowed me to achieve, I can now focus on the parts of me not necessarily hinged upon recovery, but instead reclamation. If I'm completely honest, my worst fear when I had my psychotic break was that I had lost the creative part of myself to the illness, and that I was going to be stuck in survival mode and self-regulation for the rest of my life. And for years it was lost. I am treatment resistant. The first dozen or so meds my doctor tried were constantly somewhere between 'not so good' and 'discontinue immediately' (I can joke about it now, but at the time, it was a helpless feeling) And finally that last piece of the puzzle has fallen into place, and art and music are coming back to me. With it, the parameter of what I do to maintain long-term stability has expanded to include it. Self expression and creativity were vital to my wellness before I became ill, and finally, once again, it is a tool I can hang on my belt and a means to explore my furthest imagination. My old safety net.

I guess the point I am trying to get across is mostly directed to anyone seeking recovery, or in the early days of recovery, that may be having the same fears that I had - There is a light at the end of the tunnel. You can reclaim yourself, and your identity. It just takes time.

Original Artwork by John G Mitchell



Celebrating 10 years with our Executive Director Hazel Meredith!!



A Tribute to Hazel ~ “The Wind Beneath Our Wings”

by Don Palmer

Ten years ago this past June BCSS Victoria acquired a new Executive Director – Miss Hazel Meredith. Hazel brought with her an incomparable fresh outlook, optimism, and enthusiasm that continues to be infectious for anyone who meets her. From the very first day of Hazel at the helm, she sought to make recovery the prime directive for every service that BCSS Victoria offers. Her ever present cheerfulness and thoughtfulness gives every staff member and client the sense that with Hazel in your corner you would be supported and encouraged through any situation. Empathy for others is second nature to her and her modeling of it has elevated the experience of all who interact with her. Thanks to all of those virtues, her matchless vision and tireless efforts, Hazel has worked collaboratively and with unquestioned success with the staff and Board to strengthen and expand the services already present upon her arrival at BCSS Victoria. Those services are the peer support program; the Strengthening Families Together workshop; the support groups for family members, caregivers, and spouses of those living with a mental illness; and the Hope and Recovery support group for those with lived experience. In the past 10 years Hazel has been able to find the most capable of family counselors as we have had three leave us in that time. They all found themselves in positions where they had to leave for personal reasons. The two that worked here since Hazel’s arrival have remained a part of our BCSS family.

Seeing that the need was even greater than what was provided and growing with each passing year, Hazel regularly explores avenues to train staff in ways to raise their skill level and develop their confidence to ever greater heights. Undeniably the greatest import for that purpose was the WRAP workshop (Wellness Recovery Action Plan). All peer supporters completed a WRAP workshop and developed their own WRAP for their personal life and for their work life. Most of them have gone on to take the intensive training to become WRAP workshop facilitators and have gone on to deliver WRAP to nearly two hundred people in the last four years. We continue to offer WRAP and there is always a wait list of at least 25 people every time a workshop is scheduled. Over the years Hazel has worked closely with the coordinator of the peer support programs (Wendy Mishkin for 3 years, then Don Palmer the last 7 years) to enrich all peer support services and encourage us to engage with other mental health servers in the community to build bridges and develop partnerships so that our clients can benefit from the results of those efforts in every aspect of their lives.

Hazel herself displays peerless modeling in building bridges and forming successful partnerships. Hazel has brought so much to BCSS Victoria and has served as such a bright beacon of hope and inspiration that I find I could write many more pages about her accomplishments and gifts. Thank you Hazel.
Thank you so so much !

Moving on through the Recovery Journey in psychosis.

Where is the map?

by David W Butler Family Counsellor



The Mental Health System for people with enduring mental illness and their families is a complex collection of services both provincial, local and not for profit and include a core of professionals and specialists. The Provincial Mental Health Services through Island Health are those services that provide the core clinical care and hold some of the key resources such as in-patient care, community follow-up and day-programming and also Tertiary Care services such as 70Oaks and Cowichan Lodge. In addition we have a number of non-profit organizations such as Island Community Mental Health and BCSS Victoria which provide an array of vital services to people experiencing mental health difficulties. These community-based services include provision of the Wellness Recovery Action Plan, vocational services, peer support and counselling, and family support and education. Families and loved ones accessing the mental health system often report that they feel overwhelmed at the complexity of services and they are accessing the system at a time of crisis and distress without knowing how the system is supposed to work or what to expect. Professionals taking the time to explain and guide people accessing the system and their families can help ground and reassure at a time of fear and anxiety. This should happen at the point of entry into the system with some basic information followed by a brief but concise manual of the different aspects of the system. If it does not happen it could be perhaps seen as a missed opportunity for the system to engage with families at a time when families are eager to learn. Families often tell me that professionals in the system are busy and overworked and do not always have the time to do this. Some families report that had this happened from the first point of entry into the mental health system some of their fears and anxieties would be alleviated and their experience of services would be more positive. The evidence from families I meet with is that when this engagement occurs it really helps build therapeutic alliance and trust. Powerful then. Other organizations not connected with health care manage to do a better job of customer service in fact they usually have people hired into this role specifically. The quality of the human contact at this time of chaos for families and loved ones needs to be high no matter how busy or overworked an organization might be. Setting the initial tone of this first contact with the system inspires confidence and a sense of being welcomed and understood.

Recovery is a person centered journey from impairment of mental health to a state of mental health wellness and stability. It is a journey rather than a destination. The determinants of good mental and physical health are complex and holistic so the journey is rarely a straight forward one! As with all journeys good preplanning is essential and there is a wealth of helpful information on the web about what to expect on the journey. The importance of ensuring that your researched information is evidence –based and up-to-date is also important. Why take the narrow congested route on a journey to recovery when there is a new freeway based on all the best knowledge and research available? Once you have that information you then feel more confident and prepared to set out on the journey knowing to some extent what you may encounter – as with any journey there are always unseen hazards but generally you then know what your destination might look like and what you might be able to do to deal with any difficulties along the way. A recovery plan or care plan in which the person experiencing mental illness is at the center is important when setting out on this recovery journey. The person experiencing the mental illness needs to be in the driver's seat.

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The common goal for the person and the system is to work together to identify the problems, identify a plan that helps to resolve the problems based on best evidence then identify and celebrate markers along the way. These are often small signs along the way such as feeling a sense of improvement of symptoms, learning what can be done to improve your outcomes and chances of a good recovery (this might range from cutting back on substances and taking medications as prescribed or getting more exercise and better sleep or eating more healthily). Having the recovery plan also ensures that the person on that journey feels that it is about their life and not merely a text book case. Sharing the recovery plan with others who are in a position to support is crucial. Often in my practice I ask a family member seeking support “so what is the plan for your loved one?” and then “what is the plan for you to keep yourself healthy?” Having timelines can also be helpful and encourage tweaking or re-visioning of plans and goals.

Having a plan with goals and measurable outcomes based on client choice is essential when setting out on a recovery journey. Recognizing and celebrating achievements along the way gives hope for the future. The celebration then becomes one that client, family and professionals in the mental health system can be involved in.



Journaling: A Sacred Path to Recovery by Junie Swadron

“If you do not write every day, the poisons would accumulate and you would begin to die, or act crazy or both - you must stay drunk on writing so reality cannot destroy you.” Ray Bradbury - The Zen in the Art of Writing

In 1970 after a series of traumatic events, I lost my ability to think and speak. I was hospitalized and after one month I was diagnosed catatonic. One year later, after another round of painful setbacks, I was hospitalized for mania and was officially diagnosed with manic-depressive illness.

Over these close to 4 decades I have run the gambit of devastating depression, which I call the torture chamber of my mind and I have experienced the other side of the spectrum of unbridled elation. The challenges have been tremendous but what I can say today is that each of those challenges has become valuable gifts.

Bi-polar disorder has set me in a direction of healing as well as a career path that I love that I may not have chosen otherwise. Years ago if you told me that one day my hardships would become gifts, I would not have believed it. They certainly were not wrapped with pretty bows! But I did the necessary work that gave me the strength to stay alive. I learned strategies that over time would give me hope, keep me safe, resourceful and for the most part, grounded and happy.

What’s kept me most balanced and sane is journaling. When I write, I tap into a realm where there is no time and no limits. I put my pen on the page and write whatever is on my mind and in my heart. Some of my most painful entries have become my best stories, plays, poetry and song lyrics. The pages don’t judge me and when I follow suit and don’t judge myself either, the process becomes a meditation on the page. It is sacred. It is special. Answers are revealed to me without having to strive for them.

This is when the work is no longer work. With committed dedication to staying healthy, eventually the tools that I once felt were impossible to put into practice have simply become part of daily life. When I fall off the wagon, I do my best not to beat myself up about it. I reach out for help when necessary, I get my sleep hygiene back on the right track, eat healthy foods and remember to count my blessings.

One thing I count my blessings for on a regular basis is working as a peer support worker and W.R.A.P. facilitator with BCSS. Within these walls, we all get to be real. No needing to pretend. If every business adopted the tenets and culture of BCSS where you can come to work and be supported just as you are, there would be a lot of happy employees. No-one has to say they are fine when they aren’t. There is always someone ready to give us a hug and hold a space for us to share if we care to. Oh, if businesses could adopt just that one policy alone, wow, what a wonderful world it would be!

You can check out Junie’s website at www.junieswadron.com

5th Annual Iris Luncheon a Great Success!



This year at the Iris Luncheon on May 20th we celebrated 5 years of working with the Investors Group Downtown. Over the last 5 years together with our wonderful sponsors, donors, and Investors Group Downtown as the the lead, we have raised over \$100, 000 in funds for our programs. Not to mention the awareness and community this event creates. There were 80 people in attendance at the luncheon and local businessman and philanthropist Rob Reid was the keynote speaker along with our inspirational speaker John Lamont. The lunch at the Union Club was fabulous and the silent auction was a great success.

Thanks to all of our generous sponsors and donors we raised over \$11,000.00 this year, which will go a long way towards providing programs and services at BCSS for people living with mental illness and their families. A big thank you to the Iris organizing committee members Barb Sutherland, Michael Hemmings, Paul de Gagne, Marion Gibson, MJ Tiller, Lorna Hillman and Kate Mansell. Thanks for all of your hard work and dedication!

Many thanks to our Sponsors: Investors Group Downtown, Medicine Shoppe, O'Bara, Poppies

Many thanks to our donors for the silent auction: Boston Pizza, SilverCity, Butchart Gardens, Chateau Victoria, Fireweed Designs, Front Runners, Saanich Parks & Recreation, Highland Pacific Golf, Hotel Grand Pacific, Il Terrazzo, The Keg, Noodle Bos, Olive the Senses, Pharmasave, Thrifty Foods, VI Fitness, The Vitamin Shop, Zambri's, Victoria Operatic Society, Chris Caleb, Kate Mansell, Marion Gibson, Patrick Hamilton, Wendy Wingerter, Barb Sutherland.



BCSS Victoria Welcomes new staff member Rebecca Biffard!!!!

We would like to welcome Rebecca to the BCSS Victoria team as the new Administrative Coordinator who will be doing a job share with Paula. We first had the pleasure of meeting Rebecca in January of this year when she completed a practicum for her social work degree at our office. We are thrilled to have her as part of our team and we look forward to working with her.

Rebecca will be working mornings from 9-12 and Paula will continue to work in the afternoons from 12-4.

Save the Date!!!

BCSS Victoria Annual General Meeting will take place

on Wednesday, September 14th at 6pm.

Location: 950 Kings rd. (CDI College)

Details to be announced!!!

It is always a good time to start or renew a BCSS Membership. Your membership supports the work that we do 😊

A Salute to Elena



Best wishes
on your new adventure!

About four years ago Elena Ovetchkina walked into BCSS Victoria to meet with our Executive Director (Hazel Meredith), to request that she do a practicum here for her degree in counseling. Hazel and all the staff and volunteers here at BCSS enjoyed immensely Elena's keen intelligence, enthusiastic work ethic, and her bright spirit as she successfully completed her practicum. Along with Hazel and Susanne Dannenberg (our family counselor of that time), I supervised Elena throughout her sessions counselling clients as a requirement of her degree program. Following that I supervised her in her counselling sessions needed to meet requirements to receive registration as a counselor in BC. During that time Elena had been successful in her application to be a peer supporter. She has proven to be as capable in that regard as she has been in every other role she played at BCSS Victoria. She is highly regarded by the many peers whose lives and hearts she has touched. Now Elena is on the cusp of her next great adventure in serving the health community.

In September, Elena begins the nursing program at UBC. We couldn't be prouder of her and wish her continued success and happiness as she starts this next chapter in her life.

~Don Palmer. MSW. RSW.

Report on May 28th BCSS Board Retreat

By Jordan Sandwith

In November 2014, the BCSS Victoria board of directors adopted a 2015-2018 Strategic Plan, which was informed by several focus groups, each representing a particular stakeholder identity. The Strategic Plan timeline follows a 12-month fiscal year that begins in April of each year; we are now in our second year.

On May 28th 2016, the Board marked the conclusion of the first year's work with a full-day workshop. The focus of the day was to review recommendations from a detailed committee report resulting from a 6-month review of 16 services and operations. The board decided on 28 specific actions to implement over a 12-month period. These 28 recommendations were then circulated to staff for feedback before being approved at the June 8th board meeting. The staff unanimously supported all 28 recommendations, which were then approved for implementation between June 2016 and May 2017. These changes are intended to make current operations stronger and more efficient, to better serve the needs of clients without negatively impacting any current services.

In addition to the review, the board made progress on a Fundraising Plan that will provide long-term direction for how BCSS Victoria meets its funding requirements. The board thanks those who have contributed to the excellent work done in the first year, and looks forward to many opportunities in the year ahead.