Newsletter

Victoria Branch, B.C. Schizophrenia Society
VOL. 26, No. 3 October, 2010

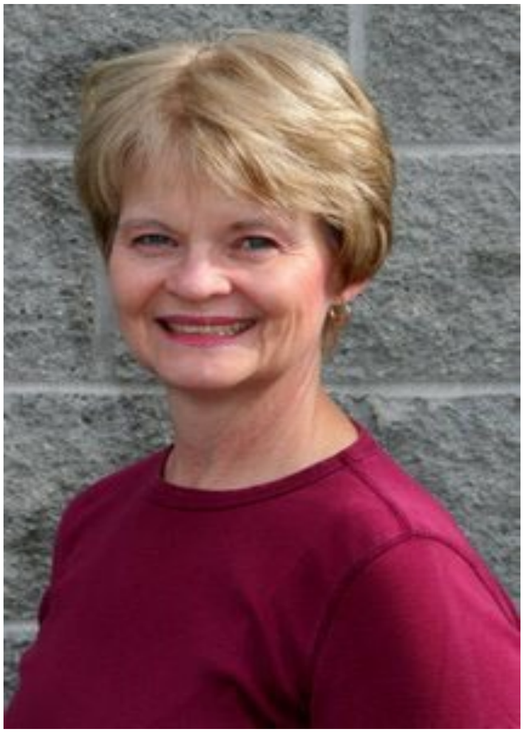
President's Message

At the annual meeting on June 12, I was elected as president of our Victoria branch. As I begin my third year on the Board, I wish to thank all of you who were present at that meeting for this opportunity to further serve BCSS Victoria. I will be writing a President's Message for each upcoming edition of the Newsletter but thought that this first one would be a good chance to introduce myself to those of you that I do not yet know. For future newsletters, I intend to write about the issues that the Board is considering, as well as provide short discussions of timely issues facing all of us who care about what happens for people living with and recovering from serious mental illnesses.

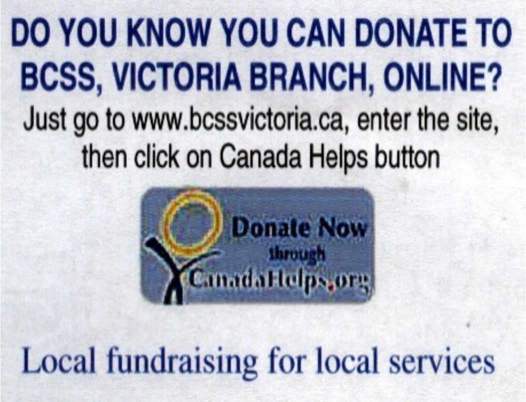
I first joined BCSS Victoria in 1996 quite soon after moving to Victoria and while conducting research on parents caring for a family member with schizophrenia. A copy of my dissertation and several articles about that study are available in the library at the BCSS office. I have also volunteered with the Partnership Program since 1999. In my professional life, I teach nursing at the University of Victoria, where I am currently the Associate Director for Undergraduate Education.

On a more personal note, some of you know that I am married to a psychiatrist and we have four children and three grandchildren. The most exciting thing that has happened to me recently (even more exciting than my election as your president) is that our daughter and her family have just moved from Alberta to Victoria. Now I can be a much more "hands-on" grandma to two little grandsons, one five years old and one just born in July.

I look forward to meeting more BCSS members in my new role. Please don't be shy about approaching me and introducing yourselves when I am in the BCSS office on King Street or at any of our upcoming events. I need to know about your concerns and interests, so that the Board can represent your needs to the health care system and keep our programs and services up-to-date and helpful to families and their loved ones, who are living with schizophrenia and other serious mental health challenges.– By Jane Milliken



Thank you to various Starbucks locations in Victoria BC for donating coffee to our events and in-office meetings.



DO YOU KNOW YOU CAN DONATE TO BCSS, VICTORIA BRANCH, ONLINE?
Just go to www.bcssvictoria.ca, enter the site, then click on Canada Helps button

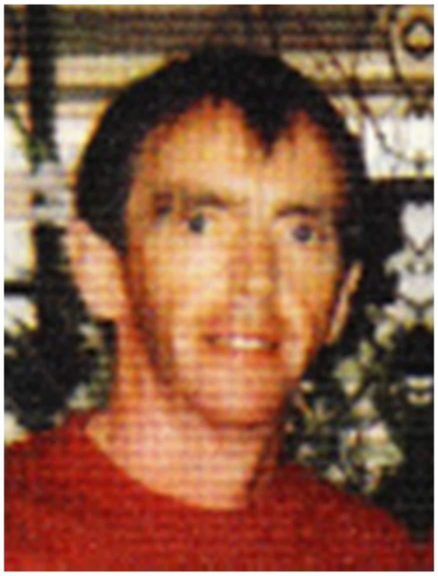
Local fundraising for local services

Family Support

BCSS Victoria has launched a new information and support group for families and friends of people with mental illness at Eric Martin Pavilion. The group meets every Wednesday evening from 6:30 to 8:00 in the main floor board room. Conceived as a way of reaching out to people visiting their loved ones on the inpatient wards, the group is designed to provide information on inpatient and community resources and provide support to caregivers. The group is facilitated by Dana Lewis, MSW, Family Counsellor at BCSS Victoria. Michael Reece, manager of Acute Treatment Services for Mental Health and Addiction Services at VIHA was instrumental in getting the group started. The group has met four times to date. Attendance numbers have been low but participants have expressed appreciation for the meetings.

BCSS Victoria offers support groups to meet the needs of family members. Ongoing monthly support groups are held at our office for partners of people with mental illness, for families of young people with psychotic illness. These groups are offered free of charge on a drop-in basis with no registration required. A support group for children and one for teens and an educational group for adults are offered twice yearly. Registration is required for these groups.—By Dana lewis

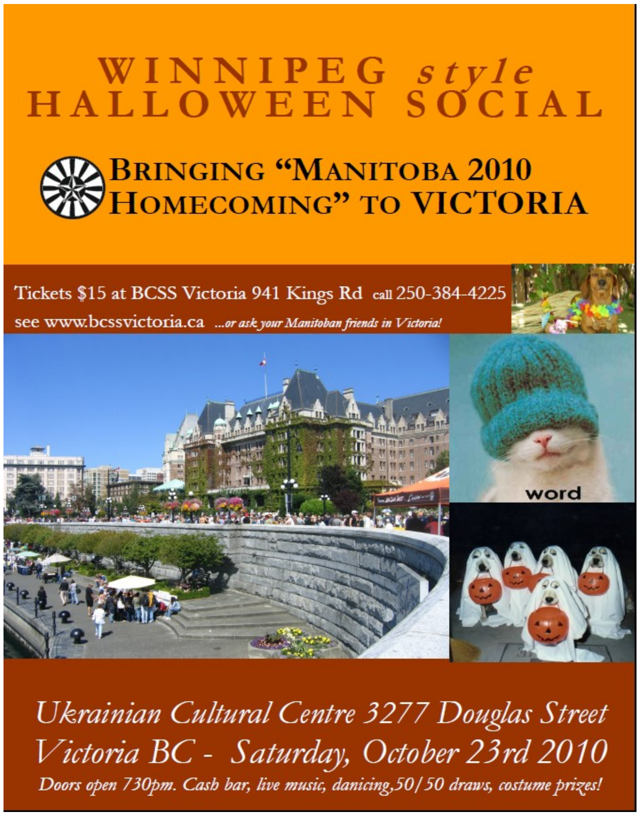
WELCOME TO NEW BOARD MEMBER



Please give warm regards to our newest board member Ian Taggart. Ian has been involved in mental health activities in the Victoria region since 1987. First diagnosed with a Schizo-Effective Disorder 30 years ago, he later managed to complete a B.A. and did some Masters Degree and Law studies in the 1980's.

He served on the BCSS (Victoria Branch) Board twice previously, each time for 4 year stints. In the 1990's he helped direct a consumer clubhouse known as A.C.E. From 1998-2010 he worked with the well known VIHA funded consumer driven agency the R.E.E.S Network. His primary role there in recent years was to organize workshops and help plan large conferences.

We are so honored to have Ian join us once again. With his leadership abilities, kind personality, insights and knowledge of mental health he is an asset to our team. Knowing Ian to be strong, resilient and understanding, I am sure his term on our board will bring new perspectives that are much needed for our current direction. - By Tara Timmers



WINNIPEG *style* HALLOWEEN SOCIAL

BRINGING "MANITOBA 2010 HOMECOMING" TO VICTORIA

Tickets $15 at BCSS Victoria 941 Kings Rd call 250-384-4225

see www.bcssvictoria.ca *...or ask your Manitoban friends in Victoria!*

Ukrainian Cultural Centre 3277 Douglas Street

Victoria BC - Saturday, October 23rd 2010

Doors open 730pm. Cash bar, live music, danicing,50/50 draws, costume prizes!

26th Annual BCSS Victoria Branch

Christmas Dinner & Dance 2010

Saturday Dec. 4th

Doors Open at 5:30pm

First Metropolitan United Church

932 Balmoral

Please bring your invitation

to the door, AND RSVP to let us

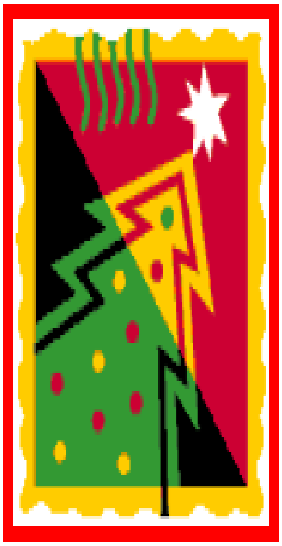
know you are coming by leaving your name

and the names of people who are coming with you.

If you would like to volunteer or donate a food item:

Call 250-384-4225 or email: admin.bcss@shaw.ca

Call us if you can donate a ham, turkey or gift



RAISING THE BAR ON RECOVERY

Throughout my recovery from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, I have always believed in normalization. There is no essential difference between me and anybody else. OCD will not stop me from shooting for the stars. Like everyone else in recovery, I have a right to a normal decent life, good housing, caring friends and a positive future. I refuse to settle for " second best " just because I have a mental health condition. Despite OCD, I bicycled across Canada, raised a beautiful son, travelled extensively around our continent and went back to University when I was 36 - earning my Bachelor of Science Degree.

My mental health issue has never defined me. First and foremost, I am a capable person working hard to change my life. In many ways, OCD is an afterthought.

Life is never dull. There are always curve balls. But I am getting much better at dealing with them. My recovery has opened up a whole new universe. My days are full of interesting adventures like digital photography, meeting new people and lifelong learning. Journalism and writing for the James Bay Beacon really feed my hunger for knowledge and involvement in the world around me. My recovery has given me the confidence to jump in the water and try something new.

This Fall I am teaching two writing courses on the power of writing to change your life. These days, I am more willing to take risks. I decided to enter a writing contest and I won second prize for my creative non-fiction piece. Recently, I entered a photography contest. As they say " Nothing ventured, nothing gained." Blowing away that stigma begins with each one of us. Every time we say " Yes, I can do that", we raise the bar just a little. - By Doreen Marion Gee

Top to Bottom & left to Right: Corey, Tre, Don, Chris, Patty, Hazel, Elizabeth, Eva, Kim, Fabian and Shane.

Our Camping Trip – "A Fun Team Building Experience"

On July 23rd 2010, the BCSS Peer Support Team, volunteers and staff took a three day vacation at Camp Barnard, a scouting facility in Sooke. The picturesque location provided the perfect place for team building and bonding. Complete with cabins to sleep in, our own industrial sized kitchen, a lake for swimming and boating and a fire pit for gathering around, there was lots to do. Although, there was a fire ban on at the time, we set up our barbeque and roasted marshmallows, chatted up a storm and enjoyed great eats. Corey Maruca even caught a few trout, smoked them and let us sample. Thanks Corey. Nothing quite like fresh trout for dinner! Then for dessert we had some of Kim B's famous and delicious homemade pie. YUM! YUM!

The bonding and team building came with having good times sun-tanning by the lake, sharing fishing skills and canoeing together. Once nighttime fell, it was friendly practical jokes time – it was scare the living daylights out of everybody in the woods time!

To make the experience even more interesting, we were not alone on the camp grounds. Whenever we looked across the way to a gigantic field we wondered if we had somehow traveled back in time a few hundred years. It turned out that our friendly neighbors were from the Society for Creative Anachronism which is dedicated to the studying and recreation of Medieval history. As a member explained, "We 'fight'…with sword and shields and we do rapier, archery and sew and knit….We make all our own clothes."

So if you're part of the BCSS team of volunteers, staff members or peer support workers and this experience sounds fun, you are invited next year.

Now, if you want to get a better picture of what the campsite looks like or see what a good time we had in a real motion picture check out our video of the event by asking Tara Timmers (Administrative Coordinator), who has the DVD.

By Elizabeth Bogod

Schizophrenia Conference

Nov 26th 2010
8:30am-4pm
Comfort Hotel
3020 Blanshard Street

“Providing Mental Health in the Current Climate” - Topics include: “Risk Assessment and Use of START,” “Growing Employment Services in these tough economic times” and “Early Psychosis Intervention: Changes in a Time of Transition.”

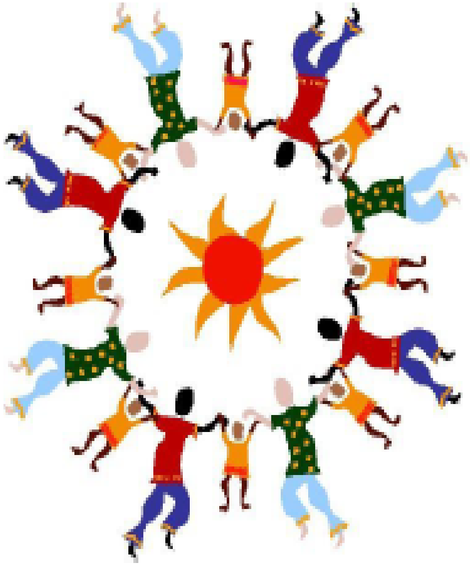
Registration:
$100, Physicians, Clinicians and Health Professionals
$40 Family Members
$25 Consumers

VIHA MHAS Advisory Committee Success-Pajama Issue

Many of you will remember being ordered to wear pajamas while in treatment at the Eric Martin Pavilion. Those pajamas that were old and faded and had seen better days: the ones that were supposed to be unisex but had the open crotch and worn out Velcro strips. Well, at the VIHA Mental Health and Addiction Services Advisory Committee meeting the issue was brought up and the committee decided that these pajamas had to go. The concern, of course, was that many of the women who were ordered to wear these pajamas felt exposed, causing them anxiety with regards to safety. When the issue was brought to the attention of VIHA staff and management it hadn’t occurred to them that there was an issue with the pajamas. These pajamas were supposed to be unisex, but clearly were not. Management listened, and agreed that something needed to be done. So began the process of replacing the old with the new. The new pajamas have an elastic waistband and no open crotch. Yes, change in the mental health system is possible!

“What is the VIHA Mental Health and Addictions Advisory Committee?” you ask. It is a powerful voice for consumers and their family members who use Victoria’s mental health services. All committee members have either used mental health services personally or are family members of someone who has. The committee has a direct link to MHAS management and is a valuable resource of ‘lived experience’ for them. At monthly meetings pertinent issues are discussed and opinions are given. The committee is also a sounding board for upper management’s new ideas, such as hiring peer support workers to work with patients in hospital. Imagine that!
-By Corey Maruca, Committee Chair.

BC Schizophrenia Society, Victoria Branch Presents:



Kids in Control

Does someone you love have a mental illness?

An eight-week program for children whose parent, guardian or sibling suffers from a mental illness:
Ages 8-13.
To register for the next course Sept 25th
11:30-1pm
Call 384-4225

Book Review “After Her Brain Broke”

Helping My Daughter Recover Her Sanity

“After Her Brain Broke” is Vancouver writer Susan Inman’s story of her struggles to get help for her daughter when she began to exhibit increasingly strange behavior. In 2000 fifteen-year-old Molly was being treated for depression and seeing a therapist whom Inman describes as ignorant and dangerous. As Molly’s symptoms became worse her diagnosis changed from depression to bi-polar disorder and it was suggested that her family was “dysfunctional”. Inman describes the turmoil of the next two years when Molly was assessed during a six-week stay at Vancouver Children's’ Hospital and put on a course of lithium; other drugs were tried, and she became psychotic, with a ‘deeply disturbing paranoia.”

While caring for her daughter Inman spent a lot of time researching mental illness and drug therapies and finally, in the fall of 2001, suggested to a psychiatrist that Molly might be suffering from schizophrenia, a diagnosis which was not immediately accepted by mental health professionals. In the following years as Molly struggled with her illness she was prescribed several different drugs, not always appropriate, and encountered psychiatrists with varying views and practices.

Inman stresses the importance of learning about medications, the possible negative effect of one drug on another. She discovered that medication for Molly’s depression was inhibiting the effect of her prescribed anti-psychotic. Molly developed tardive dyskinesia and then the anxiety disorder called obsessive compulsive disorder, which can be triggered by high doses of atypical anti-psychotics. As Inman continued her research she realized that she could become her daughter’s case manager and arranged to have her assessed at the Menninger Clinic where the “high quality, sustained examination of Molly’s illness and of our experiences with her does not resemble anything we’ve experienced or heard of in Canada.” She worked to get her accepted into programs and eventually into Vancouver Community College’s GED program. Inman developed strategies to deal with conflicting views on appropriate treatment. Throughout the book she stresses the weaknesses of the mental health system, describing “poorly-informed mental health professionals”, reluctance to provide information, programs which don’t seem to make allowances for the special needs of severely ill people, limited resources and a lack of co-ordinated information about available resources.

However she is quick to name and praise those who have helped her daughter - psychiatrists, occupational therapists, community workers, etc. “Flawed and terribly underfunded as it may be, Vancouver’s mental health system provided the necessary ingredients for Molly’ miraculous recovery,” says Inman. By 2009, nine years after her first psychotic break Molly spoke ‘eloquently and confidently’ at the 4th annual conference on Family Involvement in the Mental Health System. She is currently a student at Langara College in Vancouver. Although many parents don’t have Inman’s skills and resources her book shows how the informed support of family members can be as important as professional therapy in an individual’s recovery. **We have copies of the book for sale at our office!** –By Jean Forrest

A NEW ADVENTURE IN EDUCATION!

By Tara Timmers and June Pryer

After working for four years at BCSS Victoria, the last two full time as the Administrative Coordinator, I am delighted to tell you that I have been formally accepted into Royal Roads University for a Masters Degree in Leadership, with a specialization in health. The program is two years in length but don’t worry, I will not be leaving the Society. I plan on working full- time and taking the university program online by attending the required residencies.

My family is so proud that I have been able to improve myself in the face of schizophrenia and its symptoms. I know deeply that schizophrenia can be managed and that I can do my life justice after so many years of being ill. It has taken years of personal development to achieve full-time work and then continue on in my leadership studies. This is an area I am passionate about and hope to continue with in the future. I have built a strong network of supporters and am up to the challenge. I know I can succeed and will make sure to balance out my workload with self- care and the many interests I have outside my educational activities. Thank you to everyone who has believed in my abilities over the years. Thanks to those who have provided me with enough support to help me see through the stigma and limitation of illness to gain this quality of life. If I can do this I have hope that others can too and I will dedicate my life to helping them realize their dreams and goals.

I am honored to have an employer that encourages my growth and potential. This is what it is all about working in mental health. Schizophrenia is not a road block but an opportunity to see things differently and move into recovery. Recovery is a gateway to learning, insightful commentary and the opportunity to find out who we truly are as individuals. Have your dreams, have your integrity and never give up. Your value exceeds the illness in this world.

I am also working on my business development for my public speaking, poetry workshop facilitation, Reiki Mastery and creative arts which includes poetry books, film shorts and spoken word/music CD’s. You can check out the website I designed at www.taratimmers.com

Our Practicum Student Reflects On Family Stigma

Although more and more public figures are coming forward to talk about their mental illness stigma is still strong in today’s families. I suffer from the discrimination of having a son who is diagnosed with a mental illness. Becoming an advocate for him in making sure he has support, a safe environment and educating him about his medication with the on-going therapy has led me to finding a new kind of family at BCSS.

Hearing stories from others who have climbed their mountain of pain to reach the top of hope and recovery has given me the strength to face stigma from family members. Continuing to educate myself and listen to others who have “been there, done that” helps me to understand what it is like living with someone who has a mental illness and to cope with the negative reactions that follow along with this disorder. I am marked by the shame of my family’s belief that mental illness is made up in ones own head and that mood swings come from wanting attention and from bad parenting skills.

With today’s technology I can search the internet and find information on mental illness. I can invite family members to sit in on a doctor’s appointment and hear a professional dispel the myths that are attached to mental illness. My doctor educates my family members that having a mental illness just means a brain disorder or brain illness.

One of my strengths that has pulled me through my recovery in facing stigma is my ability to set healthy boundaries within my family. I realized that telling me what to do and giving their opinions about how to raise my son is their way of showing they care. I had to change my way of thinking and trust the knowledge that I have obtained through education. I have also realized that blaming my family is not fixing the stigma but feeding fuel to the fire. Giving them the opportunity to hear what other families are going through by attending support groups at BCSS has taught them to open their hearts and see that there are many of us all suffering from the same stigmas. As long as you can forgive others for their fears, misconceptions and rejections encouragement and self-empowerment begins to bloom. My family may not see eye-to-eye about my beliefs but they are offering help in times when I need a shoulder to cry on. I will continue to stand up against stigma and continue to face this ugly dragon that follows mental illness, with no fear of judgments.

My goal is to bring others out of their silence of guilt and embarrassment so they too can stand tall with their families supporting them in this recovery. The journey of recovery is long but stigma will slowly disappear. - Kim Ferko

In Appreciation Of A Long Time Volunteer

Kay Gibson

August 25, 1926 – July 19, 2010. Kay was a founding member of the BC Schizophrenia Society, Victoria Branch. She and her husband Peter joined in the 1980s and were prominent at all events the society put on for a great number of years. Kay was the driving force in fundraising when we were able to have Bake Sales at the Eric Martin Pavilion and she was the first person I spoke to when I wanted to join the family support group, then run by Nancy Davis. Kay became very well known after the video “One in a hundred” was made in 1991. Developed by the Victoria Branch, it was produced by Anne Bowles in co-operation with Rogers Community Television. Those taking part were Kay Gibson, Ian Taggart, Tara Drouin, Maurizio Baldini and Nancy Davis. It won the B.C. Regional Award for Education Programming in a nation-wide competition for television programming, and was used for many years as an educational tool. From 1996-2002 Kay was one of several speakers who travelled as a group or individually to any school or organization that asked for them. The first year they spoke to 20 groups and it was the start of the personal approach in the education about schizophrenia. Partnership was distinct since it came from three different perspectives: the individual with schizophrenia, a family member and a professional. In her spare time Kay was also an office volunteer for the Society.

Kay may now have left us but without people like her the society would not be as strong as it is today. She was a vibrant personality and I am very pleased to have known her, she will be missed. To Kay and her husband Peter we give our heartfelt thanks.

—By June Pryer

This newsletter, which is published four times a year, is a publication of

The Victoria Branch,
B.C. Schizophrenia Society,
941 Kings Rd., Victoria V8T 1W7
Tel: 384-4225; fax: 388-4391
e-mail: admin.bcss@shaw.ca
website: www.bcssvictoria.ca
Canada Post Publication
Agreement Number: 40037466

OUT OF THE DARKNESS AND INTO THE SUNSHINE

It was a sizzling summer day, golden sun against a sapphire sky. The glowing cloudless horizon was the perfect metaphor for all the people sipping lemonade and basking in their own recovery and hope for the future. The annual Victoria BCSS Picnic in the Park on July 10 was a time for celebration and joy. Many people there had serious mental illnesses but were enjoying their own path of recovery with the warm support of allies and friends and family.

There was laughter, jokes and fun all around as everyone socialized over pizza, salads, sweets, coffee and lemonade. Watching people play badminton, taking photos and enjoying games, it is obvious that there is no real separation between those at the picnic and the rest of society. We are all basically the same. There was amazing talent at the picnic with tables full of artistic and creative works to rival any local art show. Gayle showcased her beautiful paintings and home made cards that come from a place of courage and recovery. She says “Each piece of art is tackled as a challenge to be won; each line as a containment for my soul.”

Hazel (Executive Director) was flying around like a butterfly, touching everyone with her kindness and humor. Tara made sure that every person felt welcome with her warm friendly conversation. Don was thrilled about seeing a former client doing well. Eva's eyes lit up as she talked about the personal payback of being a peer support worker. With his “dealer's” hat, Murray was right in his element as the bingo supervisor.

There was an excellent turnout at the event – 130 in all. The spirit of camaraderie was in the air on that mellow July afternoon. You could almost hear the words “We are all in this together “on the summer breeze. Knowing the challenges of recovery, we are all genuinely proud of each other. It is pure sunshine to see the impressive accomplishments of those who walk through those BCSS doors.

Many people worked very hard to make the day special. All the smiles and bursts of laughter were proof that they had done their job well. The food and refreshments were wonderful. It was those extra embellishments that made all the difference. Little goody bags of pizza and leftover Jell-O snack packs were given out at the end of the day. With a large table overflowing with fabulous prizes, the organizers made sure every Bingo player left with a gift. Those dollops of compassion can really light up someone's life.

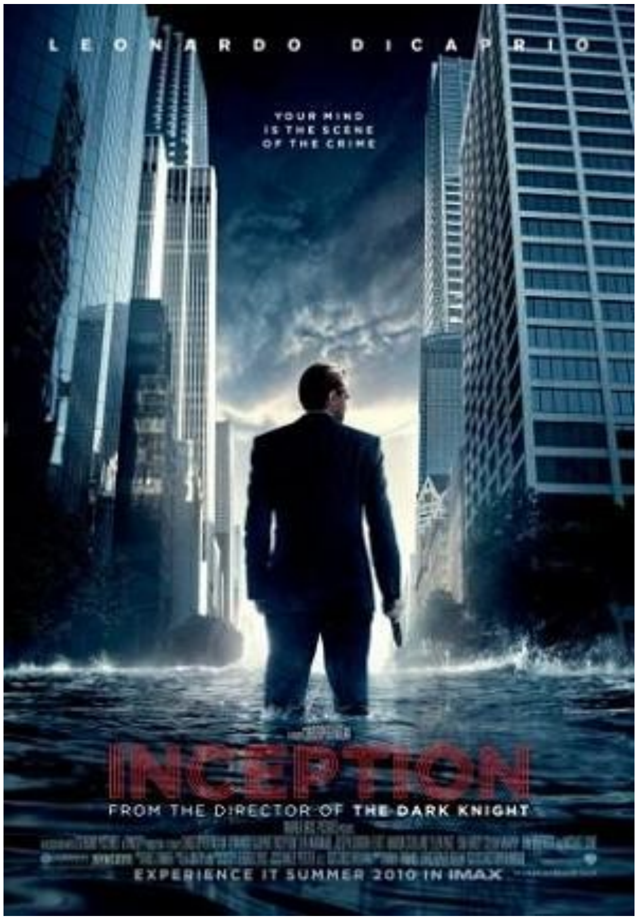
In the year 2010, many people are reaping the rewards of medical progress with new research and treatments. And some are discovering new exciting ways to help themselves and their peers. For many, it is a time to come out of those dark places and into the sun. The picnic on July 10th showed this journey of Hope, Optimism and Recovery.

- By Doreen Marion Gee, In Recovery

Ken’s Benefits of Volunteering

I have 4 volunteer jobs: 1) I Facilitate a Mood Disorders support group 2) I visit at the Veteran’s Hospital 3) I am a tour guide at the BC Aviation Museum 4) I play accordion in a band with “The Friends of Music Society,” an organization that I helped found. (I am also a semi professional Accordionist). Volunteering gives me purpose and a sense of responsibility. I love to meet people, helping those in need when I can. Even though I have gone through terrifying places, from the throes of mental illness I can still help people who have problems, in other sorts of areas in doing so, this helps me to take my mind off my own problems.
As a volunteer, I really have my heart in what I do. –By Ken Beattie

There is a saying that goes like this: “Volunteers aren’t worthless, volunteers are priceless.”



INCEPTION MOVIE REVIEW

by Maurizio Baldini

Starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Ellen Page;
Directed and written by
Christopher Nolan;
149 minutes; opening July 16, 2010

The plot for this science-fiction movie could have been easily written by someone with schizophrenia. The action in the movie takes place in the minds of the characters while they are dreaming.

Essentially, a thief enters a person’s brain during the dream state to steal ideas. (This is a common delusion in schizophrenia of “thought withdrawal”.) Stealing such ideas is done by a team of “extractors” who design the dream sequence, forge identities within the dream and even pharmacologically help several people to share these dreams. (This is the delusion of “thought projection”.) Leonardo DiCaprio plays Dom Cobb, a master extractor. He is offered a great reward by a powerful businessman to do something almost impossible. Instead of stealing an idea, he wants Dom to plant one, an idea that will cause the target, Robert Fischer, to break up his father’s multibillion-dollar corporation for “emotional” reasons. (This would be the delusion of “thought insertion” in schizophrenia.)

One movie reviewer for the Hollywood Reporter in Los Angeles considers this “the most original movie idea in ages”. Yet many people experiencing the symptoms of schizophrenia live the reality of this sci-fi movie plot in their minds daily until they are diagnosed and stabilized on anti-psychotic medication.

Who knows, perhaps the screenplay writer stole this movie plot idea from the mind of someone suffering with schizophrenia?