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Supporting people with mood disorders

By: Erin Madden / Volunteers

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Executive director Tara Brousseau (left) and director of education Tina Holland of the Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba, which raises awareness about the issues surrounding living with a mood disorder.

Suffering the effects of bipolar disorder, Jane (last name withheld) knew she needed help. Living in Toronto at the time, Jane was surprised at the lack of resources for people battling the mood disorder.

She came across the Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba and found the non-profit agency to be an incredible resource -- so much so, that Jane relocated to Winnipeg to be closer to the organization while working on her recovery.

After getting help, Jane is now at a point where she wants to give back, helping to make sure the agency is there for others who need it. For the past year, she has volunteered with the organization.

Jane is involved with fundraising, helping to plan the In the Mood gala dinner, which will be held on March 6 at the St. Charles Country Club. The event will pay tribute to some key people -- a renowned psychiatrist, a remarkable family and a group of students -- all of whom have helped to raise awareness about mood disorders.

Jane said it was important for her to get involved with such an important event, but also to help raise money for the agency that offers an array of programs and services to those suffering from mood disorders, as well as to their families.

"This is the only organization that I found that understood," said Jane, 50, who has a background in event planning. "When you have a mood disorder, very few people really understand or are empathetic. Here, with peer support, we have groups of people that meet that completely understand depression and mania and how we have difficulty functioning. For me, they've helped me recover and get back into my life."

Jane said that one of the most important functions of the Mood Disorder Association is raising public awareness, which not only helps to reduce the stigma attached to mood disorders, but also lets those battling a disorder know there is help available.

She said that for many battling a mood disorder, knowing that they're not alone is comforting -- a reason why many who have sought help from the organization end up volunteering. Jane said it's ideal for anyone seeking help to be able to talk to others who have a personal experience with a mood disorder.

"The key thing is hope, that it is going to be OK," she said. "When we see people come in who are suffering, they have despair. You can really give other people hope. I've been in serious crisis, so I understand."

Fellow volunteer Angie (last name withheld) agrees. Afflicted with borderline personality disorder, the 34-year-old said she feels safe at the society. She now volunteers on the peer support phone line. Angie listens to callers and recommends resources they can access.

"These guys are wonderful," Angie explained. "Even though I'm doing well, I have my slips and slides, and they push me in the right direction."

If you would like more information, call 786-0987 or go to www.depression.mb.ca.

If you know a special volunteer, please contact Erin Madden at erinmadden@shaw.ca.

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