

The VOICE

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The Le
Royal
Mental Health - Care & Research
Santé mentale - Soins et recherche



The Client's Voice
at The Royal

My name is Marlene and this is my story

Mental illness makes a lonely life at least it has for me. No one has asked me to tell my story so it was a challenge for me to put it all together. It has many chapters as I'm 71 now and I've had mental illness all my life. I will give you the Coles notes version.

When I think back to my teens and early 20's I would have times of excitement and be full of plans. Then I would drop into a depressive state and not follow through on most of them. I never understood why this happened.

My first diagnosis was for depression which occurred before my manic episodes started. In my early 30's I had a bout of deep depression. I was living alone in Toronto and literally stayed in bed all summer. I wasn't eating much so I became a skeleton. One day I decided I had enough of this and would end my life so I went out and bought a bottle of Aspirin and starting swallowing pills. I didn't really take that many and the only result was a ringing in my ears. Subsequently I returned home to live with my parents and saw my first psychiatrist.

Bipolar disorder was eventually diagnosed in my 30's. I had about five years or more between the extremes so it was easy to ignore the fact that I had a mental illness as I carried on with my life. Then things would explode and I had to constantly rebuild my life including my work, my friends and relationships with my family.

For some reason in my manic episodes I'd revert to thinking that I worked for CSIS and that they are not treating me well. I think I must have read too many Jason Bourne novels or perhaps the fact that my uncle was in the RCMP and later CSIS influenced me. I had a great dislike for the RCMP but respected blue collar cops.

During one of my early manic episodes I was living alone again in Toronto. My family

tried to help but didn't know what to do or what was wrong with me. They were angry with me and telling me how I had to stop acting this way. One night in desperation I



Marlene McEwen

left my aunt in my apartment and walked to a phone booth. I called 911 and reported a death – a woman in a pink jumpsuit laying on the ground. I laid down on the grass and waited. In short order an ambulance, a

fire truck and a police car showed up. The policemen were very kind and brought me back to my apartment and talked to my aunt on my behalf. Before they left one officer said to me "I'm so glad to have met you." It touched my heart that someone was on my side when I felt like my family was against me. My aunt, however, was still angry and said, "look what happened. You had to be taken home by the police." She didn't see that they were there because of LIFTING her actions toward me.

During another manic episode I was again angry with the RCMP, in fact, so angry that I was going to tell them what I thought of them. I drove past the gate at the main Ottawa headquarters at Riverside. I remember being surprised that the building is actually a U shape and not a square. It was very quiet for a long time and I sat in my car and waited. Eventually two officers appeared and after questioning me they asked me to leave. I remember thinking what a mistake I had made as they could have killed me and no one would know where I was.

I did a lot of driving and talking to strangers, resulting in a more interesting life than normal. I would wake with lots of plans in my mind and I would quickly put them on paper but never follow through. I sent hundreds of emails to family and friends

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Stay informed, stay safe

It's important to speak with your doctor or psychiatrist before making any changes to your medication, even if you're experiencing side effects. Sudden changes can cause relapses or new symptoms, so it's best to communicate openly with your care provider. Thanks to research at The Royal and around the world, new treatments emerge and evolve over time, offering improved effectiveness and fewer side effects. Even if you've been on medication for a while, your care provider may suggest updates or alternatives to ensure you receive the best possible treatment for your mental health. If you're not sure, just ask.

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which annoyed them greatly. Mania has lots of excitement and escape but I feel that a piece of me died with each episode.

My family tried to tell me I needed help and tried to connect me with doctors. They seemed to live in fear of another manic episode. I refused to believe that I had a mental illness and didn't talk to anyone about it. When things were going well no one wanted to discuss it except my sister Mary and her husband Roger. They let me live with them and supported me while I recovered from manic and then depression episodes.

In an attempt to learn more about bipolar disorder they attended the workshops for families offered at The Royal as did my parents and my aunt several years later. I have a small circle of family and friends but only a very small number that I refer to as allies. Losing my sister and soulmate when she passed away 10 years ago was a great loss to me as she engineered my original referral to The Royal so many years ago and supported me entirely throughout my extremes. Her passing will always leave a hole in my heart.

I felt obligated to leave something behind during my manic adventures. When I left a box of books at a DND site I had two police officers at my door to take me to the Civic Hospital. They were rough with me and put me in handcuffs. I asked to be sent to The Royal and eventually was transferred there but I had bruises on my arms from the way

Light will prevail

by John Brammel

If there's light "in this darkness"
Than perhaps I see with blinders
Because I see only the void
absent of "this light"
It forces its way absent of my "will"
There's no light that that cuts through
This darkness, only this pain, guilt and
shame I'm reminded of every day
Like a veil blocking my vision
Once removed light will "prevail".

**Do I have hope for a happy future?
I'm certainly going to give it my best effort.**

they had handled me. No one seemed to care about that – not even the social worker I told. She said it was their protocol and shrugged it off. I wanted someone to jump up and down and say I couldn't be treated that way but no one did. My psychiatrist at The Royal was very kind and respectful but he kept referring to me as a "high profile" case. Evidently there was some coverage on the news about the parcel at DND. To this day I don't really know what happened as no one wanted to talk about it.

When I was transferred from the Civic Hospital it was to The Royal as we know it now. It was the new building and the client-centred model had come into effect. I welcomed it. No more three to a hot stuffy room. Staff treated me with respect and kindness. I'd had my share of "nurse Ratcheds" over the years so was grateful for this change in culture. I had a single room, use of the Zen garden, weekly outings chosen by the patients, and a smoking area. Cigarettes were like gold and good for trading favours. There was a calm and peaceful atmosphere in the unit, which was conducive to healing. I was an inpatient for three weeks instead of three months as I had been in a previous manic episode. I agreed to meds and enrolled in WRAP for follow-up.

I was resistant to drugs for a long time and that was all that was offered as a solution over the years. I had many psychiatrists and until I was referred to The Royal I had very little care. Over the years I had a tour of psych wards in Cornwall, Ottawa and Ogdensburg. At that time I rated Ogdensburg as the best care as they had adopted the client-centred model. I was feeling alone and fighting a losing battle against the institutions and my family.

I regret that under the Mental Health Act a person with a mental illness can be treated like a criminal and to some extent that's still true. Being locked into a treatment unit can be like a prison. Patients with other types of illness are not treated this way. It makes you feel even less valued when you are forced to wear gowns that say "Property of Cornwall General Hospital" or pick used clothing out

of a cardboard box. If you haven't been there it's difficult to understand how it feels.

I have been an outpatient of The Royal for about 40 years, with three inpatient stays to control mania. While I was grateful to have care from The Royal in whatever form it took, I do have a sad tale to tell. I was prescribed lithium for an exceedingly long period of time and as a result, cysts have formed on my kidneys. They are declining in function and I have been told I will likely need dialysis by the time I'm in my 80's. I wish that my psychiatrist had been more mindful of the damage that could be done by long term lithium use. She removed me from lithium at the request of my nephrologist but didn't replace it with another drug. She said she didn't think anything would happen but I was frightened for the future. I went into a manic episode despite taking an anti-psychotic drug and antidepressant.

I was angry with her and asked for a new psychiatrist. It's such a relief to have exceptional care with my current psychiatrist, Dr. Habib. He provides amazing care, interest in me and respect like I have never known. He referred me to therapists and with their help I created an Early Intervention Action Plan. For the first time I feel like I have control over this mental illness rather than it controlling me. I have circulated my Early Intervention Action Plan to selected friends and family. I hope I never have to use it but it's a huge relief to have it in place. Even so I still need to constantly be on guard for mood changes and take responsibility for my own mental and physical health.

My family is still reluctant to discuss mental illness and I've come to accept that. Being a caregiver is a monumental task and I appreciate anything that a friend or family member does to support me but I do feel somewhat alone. I'm not confident that anyone in my circle of family and friends really understands bipolar but I've come to accept that reality.

I was academically strong but with bouts of depression and mania I had many

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Champion for the FAC

by Cynthia Clark

In the three and half years that Juliet Haynes was the family engagement and experience coordinator, she demonstrated a keen understanding of goals of the FAC and assisted us in a variety of ways in reaching those goals. Juliet was deeply understanding of the challenges facing the council and the frustrations of working within a system that had yet to fully embrace client and family centred engagement.

She respected the work of the FAC and took every opportunity to promote the role of advisors within the organization. She used her skills and knowledge of family-centred care to promote family engagement via reports and educational materials (ie: Progress reports on FAC initiatives, report on FAC recruitment needs and engagement strategy, summary report of a survey of past/present advisors). She kept us on track and used her exceptional organizational skills to ensure that all loose ends were neatly tied up and not forgotten. Juliet played a key role the development of our governance model, workplan, recruitment strategy, orientation manual and onboarding modules.

Juliet celebrated our efforts and demonstrated the value of our contribution in many ways. For example, she worked diligently to preserve the legacy of the council, ensuring that past records of projects, reports, minutes, accomplishments, events and miscellaneous materials of historical significance were catalogued and stored on The Royal's G drive. This gave the council a sense of permanency and pride.

She gave one hundred and ten percent to her job. Supporting the FAC was not her only role within the organization. She also led a very successful program called the family information and support group. The service provided 14 sessions from Sept 6, 2022-Jan 17, 2023 with a total of 575 participants. Juliet relied on the surveys that were conducted in earlier sessions as a guide to which topics were of interest to the families that had attended earlier sessions. She always endeavoured to find appropriate guest speakers, relevant resources and research to support the topics that were delivered. Juliet also



Juliet Haynes

made herself available to answer the many emails that she received from participants. This program was strongly supported by senior leadership who wanted The Royal to live up to its vision of a hospital with walls and one that was ready to employ zoom to reach out broadly to families.

Juliet was our gem and working in partnership with her was truly an honour.

“ All the best to her in her new position. ”

My name is Marlene continued...

jobs but never the career in social work or teaching that I had hoped for. Looking back it's hard not to feel that I've been a failure. Now I try to look forward to the next chapter in my life and try to feel good about it. It's a hard sell.

I have painful memories of a life of disappointment. No career, no husband or children. I was fortunate to work for 20 years at Canadian Medical Protective Association but I was afraid of the stigma. I thought that if I told people I had bipolar disorder they would judge me and my credibility would be questioned so I tried to hide it even to the extent of hiding Royal parking tags in my car when I returned to the office from noon hour

appointments. Maybe I was wrong not to trust them. I always had excellent reviews for my work and was considered the person to go to when things got really stressful which they often did, as I was considered to be a calm and stable voice. How ironic is that?

Since I retired I have asked CMPA if I could go back to do a "Lunch and Learn" about mental illness in the workplace and how to manage staff with mental illness. I would have coordinated this with a speaker from The Royal. That offer was rejected.

I now have a different attitude and I'm OK with most people knowing I have bipolar disorder. Becoming a member

of the CAC is taking a big step. I want to give back to an institution that gave me so much. I know I'm fortunate to have had care over the years when so many seek help and can't find it. It is my hope that my extreme bouts of bipolar are behind me but I'll always be on guard. I must say it's been quite an experience to put some of my life story in writing. I've hidden so much of the painful and degrading experiences from others and more importantly, from myself. It's a bittersweet experience to remember and relate the effect of mental illness on my life. Do I have hope for a happy future? I'm certainly going to give it my best effort.

Happy retirement Jackie

by Glenda O'Hara

If you were to look up client and family centred care, Jackie Desrochers' picture should be there. She retired on September 29, 2023 after over a decade as client and family relations manager at The Royal.

I first met Jackie when I joined the Client Advisory Council, she was involved in changing the council, which of course was a bumpy road – change is hard. A strong group of advisors emerged with the purpose of including the client voice in as many areas of The Royal as possible. We were not that loud at first, but with Jackie's guidance we came out of the shadows and gained confidence that our opinions mattered. Most of us on the council had a life-changing experience at The Royal and wanted to give back. Over the years, we became involved more and more with Jackie helping put the spotlight on clients while walking along side us with encouragement.

As a social worker, Jackie had the perfect skill set to help guide us in our journey. She was instrumental in developing our client and family centred care framework and was a leader in planning our Engaging for Impact conferences. She was with us every step of the way as client and families vision of adding more peer support and a resource hub came to fruition this past spring. During COVID she advocated and developed the Essential Care Partners Policy to support clients and families in their recovery.

A large part of Jackie's job was managing the client and family feedback system – handling complaints skillfully in a timely fashion, being the client and family voice at quality reviews, establishing a good working relationship with Ontario's Patient Ombudsman and managing the client and family surveys annually. In her last days at The Royal, she championed an initiative to collect more real time feedback from clients to replace our annual surveys and provide more useful information to drive changes in care.

We were all sad to hear of her retirement plans but so happy for her personally as

she moves on to more adventures with her family, including travel and spending more time with her grandchildren. When planning a retirement gathering for Jackie, Michèle Langlois, former chair of the Family Advisory Council and I sang our version of "To Sir With Love" to help express our feelings for the support and care that Jackie has shown us. Maya Angelou said, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." We will never forget how Jackie made us feel.



Jackie Desrochers

To Jackie with love

Those early days
Of finding our strong voices are gone
But in our mind
The support you gave us will live on and on
But how do you thank someone
Who has helped take us from shadows to the light
It isn't easy, but we'll try
If you wanted the sky
We would write across the sky in letters
That would soar a thousand feet high
"To Jackie, with love"
The time has come
For closing books and long last looks must end
And as you leave
We know that you are leaving, our best friend
A friend that taught us we belong
And to be strong
That's a lot to learn
What, what can we give you in return?
If you wanted the moon
We would try to make a start
But we would rather you let us give our hearts
"To Jackie, with love"



Meet Leticia!

Hi, my name is Leticia and I'm the family engagement and experience coordinator here at The Royal. I grew up in the Greater Toronto Area and moved to Ottawa to complete my MSW placement at The Royal, and have been here ever since! The Royal has a very special place in my heart as I was provided with numerous opportunities to learn and grow in addition to meeting and working alongside dedicated and caring individuals.

Throughout my roles in child welfare, health and mental health care, client and family centered advocacy and crisis management, I have seen the positive impact of working together as a team with my colleagues, clients and their families in order to ensure that clients and families feel involved in their own plan, care and ultimately, feel heard.

I strive to create relationships that are honest, trusting and open. I enjoy working with clients and families to embrace their strengths and ensure that they have the tools in their toolbox to feel supported. In my work at The Royal, I am excited to connect with clients and families in a meaningful way to create positive change, promote family engagement and to essentially ensure that clients and families are well supported throughout their mental health journey and recovery.

If you have a concern, a suggestion, or any type of feedback regarding how we can improve client and family centred care at The Royal, I'd be happy to hear it.



Leticia Hardowar

You can find me in ROOM 1208 at the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre

Reach me by phone at:

613-722-6521 ext. 6557

or by email at:

leticia.hardowar@theroyal.ca

Meet Jonathan!

Hi, my name is Jonathan and I am the manager of client and family relations at The Royal. I am proudly from Ottawa and excited to be starting in this important role here at the Royal. In my career so far, I have had the privilege of working in multiple different capacities as a social worker, a clinician and as a leader always with a consistent focus on how I can help to improve the lives of others. My focus throughout has been to build relationships and help solve problems.

In my various roles in child welfare, health care, community care, and mental health and substance use, I have developed a passion for communicating, relationship building, teaching and engaging with colleagues, clients, customers and families. My proudest moments are when I am helping clients, colleagues and staff problem solve in challenging situations.

As I get to know my way around The Royal, I am looking forward to supporting clients and families in their desire to become engaged with The Royal and to ensure their voices are heard in meaningful ways.

I welcome your thoughts and feedback. I'm happy to listen and will work to make sure your voice is heard.



Jonathan Vant

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Just one moment by John

Sitting alone and I've got that familiar
feeling to pick up the phone
To just hear your voice once again...
And then I realize that you'll never be home.

I've got to steer away from the hurt and pain
But I'm too late as I begin to cry
It always ends this way – no matter how I try
To hold back, be strong – stay numb and
brush it away

You tried to tell me, your voice just a whisper
I didn't hear you – too wrapped up in my world
Now you'll never know that to me you were
more than just my sister. If I could just have
that one more moment so I could say...

Lights will guide you home

by Glenda O'Hara

I am from a small rural town but I longed for something more. In the city on the outside looking in I always wanted more.

When I reflect on my life, it all makes sense. The quest for something more. My parents and those before them came from farms. We moved to the “wrong side of the tracks” in the city. I went to school with children of doctors and lawyers, and my mother remarked on the snooty rich ladies in their luxurious fur coats parading up to the front pews of our church. I wanted to grow up to be like them – go to dance classes, take piano lessons, and live in a home with a great address.

A degree, a career and all the trimmings. Did I have something more?

One of the first in my extended family to go to university, I worked as a skillful accountant for over thirty years. The organizations and co-workers I worked with were always like family to me. Given my access to funds, my risky compulsive spending, and always wanting something more, I would eventually defraud these families and be asked to leave. I'd move on to something else, without a backward glance.

I didn't want to have children, but I did and I wanted them to have more.

I have always had someone to love, but I always wanted more.

The end of high school. Engagement ring. Foggy car windows. Exhilarating. Risky. Ring in the dirt. No looking back. Marriage. Seduction. Office desk. Parking garage. Motel room. Moving on. No looking back. Another marriage. Children. Spending. Spending. Spending. Anger. Resentment. No more love. Goodbye.

My over-the-top excesses began as a teenager, spending all the money I earned while working in a store with all the latest fashions. Lavishing my family with a mountain of gifts. Extravagant special cakes on birthdays. In adulthood, it caused great distress to my husband and made my children uncomfortable. They

sensed the tension. Instead of bringing joy at Christmas, my elaborate gift-giving would bring a dark cloud to what should be a festive occasion. I became known outside my family as the best gift giver, the accessory queen, but in the end, this behaviour never brought the “something more.” On my own after the collapse of my second marriage, I planned a lavish birthday celebration for myself. It resembled a wedding reception, complete with party planner, catering and music. I partnered with a women's charity to accept donations in lieu of gifts. I had always hated my birthday, never expecting much from others as they could never match what I thought I needed. My friends and family were alarmed, and just as I was about to put the deposit on the event space, horses trampled my event.

I am a smart, caring person. These behaviours made no sense. The last organizations I worked for decided to press charges. I lived with the fear of what would happen, all alone, like a turtle with its head pulled into the dark interior of its shell. My doctor offered a diagnosis. Finally, perhaps an explanation for some of the dangerous behaviours that had cost me my career and two marriages. Impulsivity had been ruling my life along with a sprinkling of episodes of incredible sadness.

“Enough pills to put down two horses,” the doctor told my daughters. I'm awake but can not talk, looking into the anguished faces of young women I was meant to protect. I often dream of those two horses, they are huge and strong and running for their lives.

My mind wanders to a young girl singing in a country church, my first memory, “God Sees The Little Sparrow Fall.” Moving to the city and memories of my father arriving home, handsome, tanned, strong, silent and tired from working on heavy machinery. A modest multi-generational home where my mother was waiting at lunch hour with gooey grilled cheese sandwiches or my favourite tuna casserole and cartoons to watch. Friends always welcome. The warm



Glenda O'Hara

aromas of homemade bread and freshly baked pies welcoming extended family with jam sessions in the kitchen afterwards. Head cheerleader. Valedictorian. Scholarships. University degree. Why did I always want something more?

“Leopard-clad fraudster,” “thieving,” “manipulative,” and “blubbing,” was how the media described me during my trial. No mention of hypomania and severe depression. I never knew if I'd wake up as Tigger, with rapid speech and excessive laughter, distracted, taking incredible risks and full of my own self-importance, or as Eeyore, filled with incredibly negative thoughts, hiding in that safe spot under the covers, in the dark because sleeping avoids the sadness. Twenty months will give me a lot of time to plant these negative thoughts and let them grow and flourish in the darkness.

I lost everything, in the quest for something more.

Jail. Crowded. Mattresses on the floor. Sleep apnea. Snoring. Books pelted at my head. Murder. Trafficking of drugs and people. “Will you carry drugs for me?” Far from home. Lines for meds. No mental health care. Hoard library books and food. The birth of my grandchild. Polycystic Kidney Disease. Two months. The death of

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Lights will guide you continued...

my first grandchild. Divorce papers arrive. Two attempts. No parole.

Finally back home but still entangled in the sticky web I had spun for myself. I found a psychiatrist quite swiftly upon my return – perhaps one of the perks of being a forensic client – easy access.

It would not necessarily be easy to free myself as I returned to the city with no friends, no career, no savings, no dignity and very little hope. I am forever grateful to my mother who took me in but who wasn't confident in my recovery – often asking, "What is it you've got?" or chipping away at my confidence and entangling me further into the web I wished to be free from. My support team held hope for me when I had little, and slowly helped me restore my dignity and pull myself away from this sticky existence.

I embarked on a journey of discovery, venturing outside the tight cocoon I had built for myself. I tiptoed into the artistic world that I thought was not for me and discovered watercolours, photography, journalling and poetry. Music has always been a platform for my emotions – happiness, sadness and anger – and I rediscovered its ability to make my world more vivid and joyful.

I enrolled in a communications program. My younger self, who froze during presentations in university, would be amazed that I was honing my skills to tell my personal story. The story would serve as a thank you to my supporters, a learning experience for many, and help me to become unstuck from my web.

Taking my medication became key, as avoiding the side effects of those in the past

had led to those horses galloping through my story. Wellness groups helped me see the sunlight burst over my horizon. I would take personal responsibility for my past, present, and future. I would educate myself about my diagnosis, it would not define me but I had to learn to live with it, advocate for myself and seek support when I needed it. I was being offered an olive branch and I told myself I had hope – the expectation of fulfillment without something more.

Peer support during my recovery was very powerful. If they could do it, so could I. No power dynamic that exists in a clinical setting. I was taking the reins of those horses. I would journal and write poems to work out my feelings in my journey to become detangled.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." Volunteering became my greatest wellness tool. I would lend my lived expertise as a peer, advisor, and advocate. To satisfy my support of the arts and social issues, I would volunteer at community theatres and election campaign offices and regularly visit residents of long-term care. An unknown author said it so clearly, "Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy... when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in."

Forensic client. Double stigma. Mental illness. Criminal Justice System. Reveal myself. Difficult. Positive responses. Easier. Self-stigma. Inspiration award. Proud. Still shame and fear. Family. Friends. Supporters. Lights will guide you home.

I am more than a woman with mental illnesses and a record... I am a good mother, daughter, sister and friend, a proud Meemaw

to seven grandchildren, a poet, a volunteer, an advocate, a leader, and someone who cares about the world we live in.

When times were bad I built a wall. People left me and I left them. It seemed the safest thing to do was hide. "Don't Google yourself because you won't like what you see," someone said. I realized that the worst stigma was self-stigma and I needed to build a bridge over the wall. I slowly started sharing my story. I began to build my self-worth and found ways I could give back. The hope started to rush in. My story had a purpose. The self-stigma was still there as I was always assessing my audience and determining safety. My goal is to become bold and set my story to full broadcast, reach the end of the bridge over the wall and then tear that wall down.

I have had to let go of what I thought my life should be – successful, married, lots of friends, perfection. Don't leave the house unless you present the perfect package – the right outfit, make-up on, well accessorized, step into a great car, and arrive at the perfect job. Be the best all the time.

But then you find yourself locked in a closet in the dark, retreating from everything. The friends and family disappear and you think they represent your worth. After a long time in the darkness – you find the light. You can be the chubby older woman with the great laugh who doesn't have a lot but gives her time to what she believes in and is loved by a few very important people.

I have found that gratitude, is greater than something more.

About my story by Glenda O'Hara

Several years ago I started attending the Writers Collective of Canada (WCC) workshop with Mood Disorders Ottawa. It is a program for those who wish to explore their creative genius with free, expressive writing, and receive supportive feedback.

The WCC aims to inspire and empower those deprived of a voice in our society. Writing with others in an atmosphere of dignity

and respect, participants discover the value of their own life stories. They support the transformational power of being heard. Feedback is provided in a non-judgemental brave space.

A couple of years ago, I noticed that the WCC was offering workshops that lasted a couple of months with published authors as mentors, so I signed up. Many may have

heard my story but during this workshop, I crafted a literary version of my story that is a combination of prose and poetry and it was published in one of their anthologies called "Front Lines: Resilience – I open my mouth and speak" in 2022.

I never imagined as an old accountant that thought she had no artistic side that I would be making these statements but I have witnessed many others in my recovery journey who discovered their own artistic talents while working on recovery.

Fundraising for client care

The Royal Ottawa Hospital Volunteer Association's (ROVA) mission is to improve clients' health and well-being. ROVA generates funds through the operation of the Winter Garden Café, a used clothing shop, a hair salon, vending machines, Christmas tree sales, banking machine (ABM) revenues, and other fundraising activities.

ROVA allocates funds directly to client care projects such as community outings, recreational equipment, arts and crafts supplies, holiday parties, social assistance, and emergency clothing.

Here are some of ROVA's wonderful initiatives this past season:

Shortbread bake sale

The idea for a Scottish shortbread bake sale came from a conversation around a kitchen island one evening as we considered viable options for generating revenue to support the clients at The Royal. We knew our dear friend Anna Foster was a Scottish shortbread master, so we asked her if she would participate in a coffee and shortbread tasting for the staff. We were delighted to learn she would generously offer her time, talent, and famous Scottish shortbread. Anna is known for her kindness. Over the past six years, she had frequently dropped off food and supplies to a friend who was a client at The Royal. Come full circle, Anna was back again, offering her generosity not only to one person but to hundreds of clients who would ultimately benefit from

the sale of her delicious shortbread. She was supported by her marketing team and close friends, Tami Sugarman and Judy Thomas, who are members of the ROVA Board, along with two volunteer clients of The Royal, Helen and Shawna. This fundraising event was immediately supported by Annmarie Nicolson, director of volunteer services and her team, Janet McFall, Winter Café manager, and Michelene Viau-Benn. Volunteer services graciously supported our team to ensure the staff enjoyed a complimentary coffee Scottish shortbread tasting to encourage pre-Christmas shopping for friends and family.

It was a very well-received and successful event for all those who participated.

Holiday cheer raffle

All funds raised by the raffle supported our annual holiday cheer program, which ensures that clients who aren't able to go home over the holidays enjoy a gift bag and some holiday cheer. Helen Platanos, a volunteer with a wonderful entrepreneurial spirit, singlehandedly solicited donations from the community for items to be raffled off and raised 50 per cent of the cost of the gift bags for clients. Helen should be very proud of her efforts. With very little help from others, she made a big dent in the cost of holiday cheer gift bags that brightened the spirits of our inpatients during the festive season.

38th annual Christmas tree sale

The Christmas tree sale is a star fundraiser every year for ROVA. One thousand trees were sold during this year. We sold out in a record seven days with 50 per cent of trees selling on the first day of the sale. This year, our efforts netted \$43,750 – the most we have ever cleared in the years we have done this fundraiser. Many thanks to Ed, Joe, Flo, Leah and Bob of the planning committee, ROVA staff, and the 175 volunteers who made this event happen.

Crisis and distress lines

IT'S OKAY TO ASK FOR SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED IT.

Crisis and distress lines offer immediate assistance during moments of crisis, providing a listening ear, guidance, and referrals to local services. Whether you're feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or in distress, trained professionals are ready to help. Don't hesitate to reach out.

The 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline is available across Canada, 24 hours a day, every day. This three-digit helpline provides urgent, live support by phone and text. 9-8-8 is for anyone thinking about suicide or worried about someone they know. Trained responders answer calls and texts and listen without judgment while providing support.

CALL OR TEXT 9-8-8 TOLL-FREE, anytime for support in English or French.
For more information, visit 988.ca

The Distress Centre has approximately 210 volunteers answering over 60,000 calls a year, providing an important and vital service in our community. Phone lines are open 24/7. Anyone is welcome to call this confidential, non-judgmental, and open-minded telephone line, or reach out by text.

**DISTRESS CENTRE OF OTTAWA AND
REGION MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS LINE**

CRISIS LINE:

DISTRESS LINE:

TEXT:

ONLINE CHAT:

dcottawa.on.ca/i-need-help

613-722-6914

613-238-3311

1-343-306-5550 (10 a.m. - 11 p.m.)

dcottawa.on.ca (10 a.m. - 11 p.m.)



Winter's Turmoil

by Cameron Fairlie

This cold and darkness envelop my mind
As raging silence kills the chance to find
The peace within to grasp yet slips away
And weary numbness clamouring
to stay

To rise again and find a purpose still
Beyond the diagnosis and a pill
To feel emotions warmth in
Winter's night
Will fill my darkened soul with
radiant light