

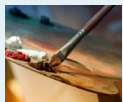
**SPRING
2022**



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How Peer Support SAVED MY LIFE: **TWICE**



Kathleen Conibear with her wife, Agne and their dog Pickles.

by Kathleen Conibear

In 2016 my wife had an extended and violent psychotic episode. As I tried to keep us from becoming evicted I struggled with suicidal thoughts. Once I survived my attempts to end my pain and sorrow, I decided something had to change. I decided that I had to live, but that I had to find better ways to do that. I had been involved with the Psychiatric Survivors of Ottawa's (PSO) social activities intermittently for

a few years and was aware they had Family Peer Support so I signed on.

Peer support is like group therapy, except that it is not led by a professional, but by a colleague. The session is facilitated by someone like the participants, someone with similar lived experiences.

Family Peer Support helped me through the crisis and lifted enough despair from my heart

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Peer Support continued...

that I began to shape a vision for my life. I wanted to help others through similar crises so they didn't have to face them alone. Of course, at that time I didn't know how I was going to do that.

As I got more familiar with PSO activities I became aware that they offered free training in Peer Support facilitation. I felt that this could be the first step in building a future where I could assist people so I signed up.

The course was useful in many ways. The listening, communication and supportive skills I learned have made me a better spouse. I have more confidence when I advocate for myself and others. I felt less helpless and alone when handling my depression and I have a purpose in life again.

Saved Again....

In 2019 I found I had polyps in my colon. After 4 colonoscopies to remove them it was determined I had colon cancer and would need a bowel resection. I felt that fending off cancer was going to be difficult and not something I wanted to do alone. I contacted PSO and asked for one on one peer support to help me. Many healthcare professionals told me my quick recovery from surgery was remarkable. I attribute that observation to the outstanding peer support I got which helped me navigate a turbulent sea of emotional hazards without becoming shipwrecked.

Without peer support I don't know if I would've survived this most difficult year of Covid, let alone thrive. In Sept., 2019 my wife had another psychotic episode. In their efforts to return her to me the psychiatric professionals tried a different medication to which my wife

had an adverse reaction. As a result, my beloved nearly died and was catatonic for a time. In those darkest days I couldn't be by her bedside because of the Covid restrictions. I don't know how I would've kept from slipping back into deep depression had I not been in touch with the several peers on which I leaned during that time. I went to several groups a week all of whom came through for me and I was never suicidal.

The different emotional landscapes I experienced in 2016 and 2019 were like as night and day. I was never suicidal in 2019 as I had been in 2016, I never felt alone, and when my mood darkened I was able to bring myself back. The biggest difference between the 2 years was my use of peer support.

P.S. My wife and I are still together and in love after 27 years. We are both well and safe at home.

DIVERSE DELIVERY IS KEY

It has been important to me to have a range of peer support experiences available. The Family Peer Support I received in 2016 from the PSO was a good entry point. It was a large group so if my courage failed me I need not say anything, but could just listen.

Later in 2019, being more comfortable with needing help, I asked for one-on-one peer support from PSO which kept me going during the hard times ahead. However, the smaller, more intimate groups of the MDO (Mood Disorders Ottawa) and the RO (Women's Wellness check-in) allowed me to grow.

Peer groups feel like community. I saw familiar faces who, again and again, supported me despite my having the same concerns day in and day out as they listened to the moment by moment saga of what was happening to me and my wife. Moreover, when my wife and I recovered it was celebrated by my peers.

The MDO was where I practiced the peer skills I'd had for years, but didn't have the confidence to use. I am currently a regular peer support facilitator for the MDO, and have moved on to co-facilitate an MDO recovery program and co-creating another one. In fact, maybe peer

support has saved me a third time as I'm now living the life I'd once envisioned.

The legacy I will take into the post-pandemic future is not the dread burden of social anxiety, but an excited eagerness to hug, thank and celebrate in person the many others who've been peers and who've come to mean so much to me. "Thank you, thank you and evermore thank you", to paraphrase Shakespeare's 12th Night, except words are not enough to express all that I feel about the benefits of peer support.

What is MINDFULNESS

by Peter Winfield



Perhaps you've heard of mindfulness, maybe you've even tried it. Maybe you're not sure if it's for you or if it even works.

I've learned through a lot of practice that it's not nearly as straightforward as it seems. It is complicated by misperceptions about what it is and what it's supposed to do. Most of all I've learned that it does work, I've learned to practice mindfulness and I can't imagine healing without it.

The most common misperception is that you're supposed to clear your mind of all your thoughts. Not only is this not how it works, it's actually impossible to stop your thoughts and trying to will only cause frustration. Thinking is a natural process your brain has evolved to engage in. The key is not to stop thinking, instead it is to notice your thoughts and notice when you get engaged in a thought. One of the key aspects of the practice of mindfulness is observe a thought and to avoid engaging in that thought, and when you do, which is normal and will happen, to realize that you have been absorbed in a thought and return to the practice of mindfulness.

So what do you do then? Thinking is normal, you can't stop it. The process of thinking can also be detrimental when it becomes rumination or overly self-referential (when all of your thinking becomes about you, when you think about everything as me and mine).

Mindfulness is both a practice and a state we aim to practice where we develop our attention and awareness and in so doing, we find a calm reserve of peaceful awareness that we all naturally have.

Here's a short practice you can try on your own. The first thing to consider is the state of mind you want to cultivate for any mindfulness or meditation practice. Dr Daniel Siegel offers us a succinct acronym for this purpose, **COAL**.

C stands for curiosity which reminds us to be inquiring without being judgmental.

O is for openness having the willingness to experience what is happening as simply the truth, without judgment.

A for acceptance is recognizing the reality of a situation so that you can take appropriate action.

L reminds us that love is important, which is really about being kind, compassionate, and empathetic to others as well as to yourself.

The practice can be remembered with the acronym **CALM**, which stands for Chest Arms, Legs and Mind

We begin by finding a quiet comfortable place where you won't be interrupted, though with practice you will be able to do this anywhere, anytime.

- 1. Prepare.** It is very difficult for most people to jump right into a mindfulness practice, we have to prepare ourselves and a great way to do that is to take three to five slow easy deep breaths with your eyes closed or lowered and unfocused with your attention focused on the sensation of breathing in and out. You might start to notice a tiny bit of relaxation begin.

...continued on page 4

Mindfulness continued...

2. **Chest.** When you're ready continue breathing in a relaxed fashion with deep slow breaths, making sure to breath into your belly. Now shift your attention to your chest area and just notice any sensations here, perhaps you notice tightness and simply breath gently with your attention gently focused on this area. Take three to five breaths – or more of you feel like it.
3. **Arms.** Now shift your attentions to your arms. Often tension can be felt here with tightened hands or forearms. Again, breath into the sensations you notice. See them start to relax.
4. **Legs.** Now shift your attention to your legs. Take three to five slow breaths and notice how your legs feel, really notice inside and out how they feel from your toes to you knees to your hips and everything in between.
5. **Mind.** Finally place your attention on your mind. Remember there's no need to do anything, don't judge, just notice your thoughts and feelings as something you can choose to engage in or choose to observe and allow to pass through your field of awareness.
6. As you finish notice how you are feeling, take your time to continue feeling calm.

Peter Winfield is the vice-chair of the Client Advisory Council. He is a former client of the OSI Clinic and is trained in Mindfulness through the Centre for Mindfulness Studies, The Compassion Institute and the University of Toronto.

EngageCaregivers.ca

In 2020, The Royal embarked on a strategy to Co-create access, hope and new possibilities. The strategy, developed in partnership with clients and caregivers, is leading a transformation at The Royal starting with deeper, more meaningful engagement with clients and their loved ones. It is with that frame in mind that The Royal is thrilled to share Building a framework for supporting meaningful family caregiver engagement: Survey findings and research process. This research, spearheaded by Cynthia Clark, a longstanding member of The Royal's Family Advisory Council, expands upon the robust body of research on caregiver advisor engagement and takes it one step further by providing health organizations with a novel suite of resources to support more meaningful integration and empowerment of caregiver advisors. The resources are

available at [EngageCaregivers.ca](https://www.engagecaregivers.ca), a new website that offers templates and tools such as work plans, application and interview guides, orientation checklists, expertise sharing guides, and retention tips.

The report, Building a framework for supporting meaningful family caregiver engagement: Survey findings and research process, built upon the robust research that already exists around caregiver engagement. More specifically, the study identified that caregivers want to be heard and respected, and for their input to result in improved experiences. While those surveyed showed a keen interest in engaging with their loved one's care provider, they noted that work, family and volunteering demands and the prevailing stigma around mental health serve as barriers for deeper caregiver engagement. The study also identified the need for more modern and intentional recruitment,

onboarding and resource allocation efforts for caregiver advisors to ensure organizations are positioning this vital group to have the greatest impact. All of these insights and more are available at [EngageCaregivers.ca](https://www.engagecaregivers.ca).

The project was funded by the Canadian Institute for Health Research under the Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research to engage patients, researchers and stakeholders in release, answer questions that are important to patients and improve health and health care systems. Additional funding was provided by the Royal Ottawa Foundation for Mental Health with the University of Ottawa's Institute of Mental Health Research at The Royal.

Meaningful engagement. Enhanced care.



Is your organization meaningfully engaging caregiver advisors?

How do you know?

- Are you providing orientation to new advisors?
- Are you offering continuous training?
- Are you consistent in co-designing with your advisors?
- Are your advisors given opportunities to shape decisions?
- Are you being intentional in your recruitment?

97%

of caregivers and service providers believe orientation is essential to setting caregiver advisors up to be successful.

53%

of caregiver advisors reported receiving an orientation from their organization.

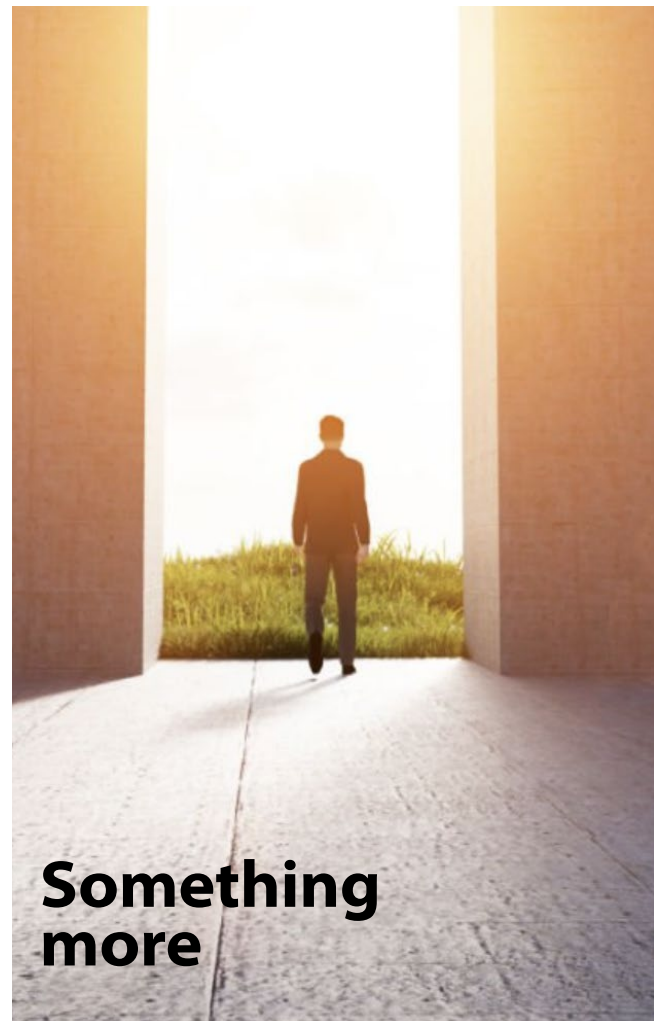
91%

of service providers believe engagement skill training is important.

100%

of service providers who had yet to engage caregiver advisors felt that engagement skill training was important, but only 7% thought their organization would provide them with training.

Engagecaregivers.ca supports the meaningful engagement of caregiver advisors by mental health organizations across Canada. Resources available through engagecaregivers.ca include templates and tools such as work plans, application and interview guides, orientation checklists, expertise sharing guides, and retention tips.



Something more

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.

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

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.

I lost everything,
in the quest for something more.

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

Glenda O'Hara

The practice of **MINDFUL ART**

by Peter Winfield

Central to the practice of mindfulness is developing intentional awareness and focused attention. The most common way to do that is to choose a subject to focus on, usually this is a feeling or bodily sensation most commonly the breath. This can be a huge challenge for a wandering mind. Have you tried to focus all of your attention just on your breath? I have and I do every day. Some days it's easy and I can do that for an hour but many days it's minute by minute. I focus on my breath and then a thought reminds me I'm hungry or today is garbage day or I need to exercise or something in the news, or about a book I'm reading the list is endless and focusing on the breath a huge challenge.

There are other ways to practice mindfulness though. Ways you can focus your attention more actively. Ways that seem to distract your wandering mind with a physical activity so that you can focus easily and clearly, practices such as mindful movement as in yoga or walking meditation. As powerful as these practices are they aren't for everybody either, for me art is an amazing mindfulness practice with added benefits.

The act of creating is something we are all meant to do in some form or another and without it we are missing out on something fundamental to the human experience. Cooking, writing, carpentry and pottery are creative pursuits and art is one form of creativity. Creating art is a wide-ranging practice that can include sketching, drawing, painting, and photography.

One of the most important reasons to practice art alongside mindfulness is that most of us also struggle with another inner voice, the inner critic. Mindfulness teaches us to look this inner critic in the eye and say "not now", "this is time for me" and we learn to do this gently, without judgement and with kindness to ourselves.

Something happens when you create. You tap into an inner part of yourself that is waiting to be noticed and heard. This inner part of you is waiting for your mind to be just a little quiet so it can say what it has to say. When you turn to the creative inner self you tend to notice more about the world around you. You begin to notice the subtleties and nuances you normally overlook. Simple things like the colours that make up the world we inhabit. The colours of clouds, water, and trees are not what we normally assume.

Trees are green, yes, but not always. There are so many different shades of green, hundreds of shades and in those trees you might also see blues, reds, oranges, yellows and purples. The same tree will have a different colour at different times of the day, week and years depending on the light and weather.

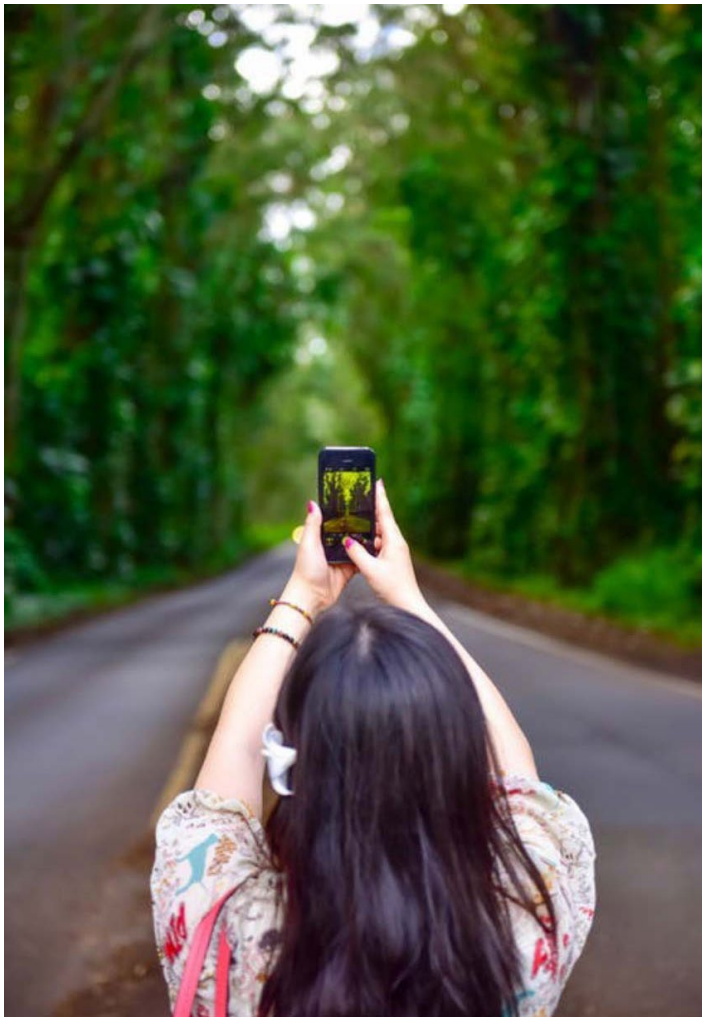
Similarly shadows aren't black. When you take the time to notice, you'll see a wide variety of colour from blue to purple you might see other colours as well, greens and darks reds even.

You don't have to be an artist – whatever that means. You just have to be curious and interested. You just have to take some time to notice what catches your eye. Is it a tree, a flower, a bird, a river or a cloud. Whatever it is, notice what calls to you and that is where your inspiration begins.

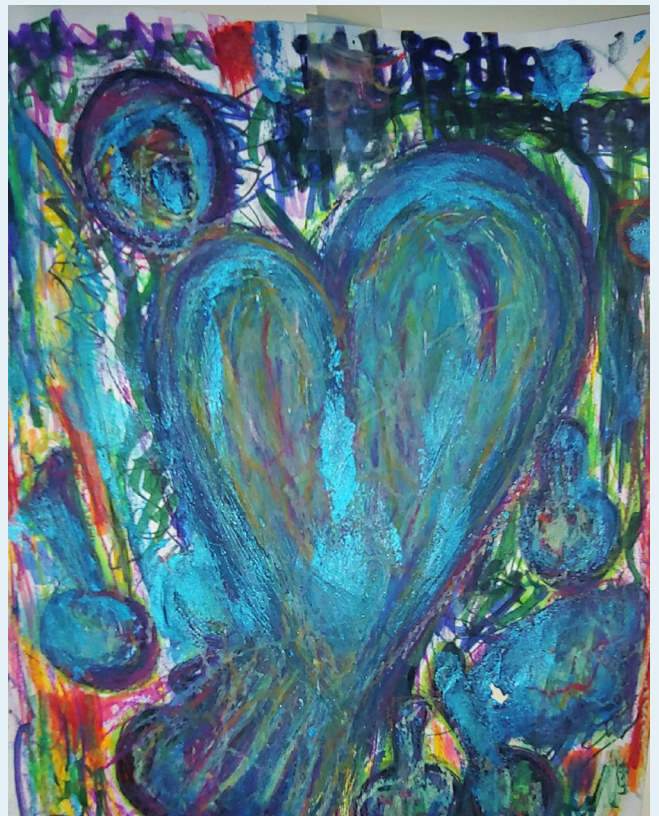
You can just enjoy art by taking the time to look, to see, to rest in the beauty that an artist found. Look at Monet's work, look beyond the waterlilies and notice all the colour he uses to paint water lilies that should be green, or the water that should be blue.

When you do take this time to either create your own art or to appreciate somebody else's work notice how you feel. Notice how your breath slows down and your muscles relax just a





Drawings by **ALEXANDRA**



little. Make this time for yourself every day if you can, or at least two or three times week. If you are just starting with art and feel unsure of your skill begin with the camera on your phone. Take a few photos of nature that called to you and then make sure you look at those photos later in the day and see if you can recall the feeling as well as the picture.

This is the important part, it's not just about creating an image it's also about creating a feeling that you can recall later when you might need it. Maybe at some point during your day you feel anxious, worried or stressed. This is a good time to get that picture out, or remember it in your minds eye. Don't just look at the picture take a deep breath, and another, and try to feel what you felt when you first saw the thing you took a picture of.

Remember to breathe, slow and deep, breathe.



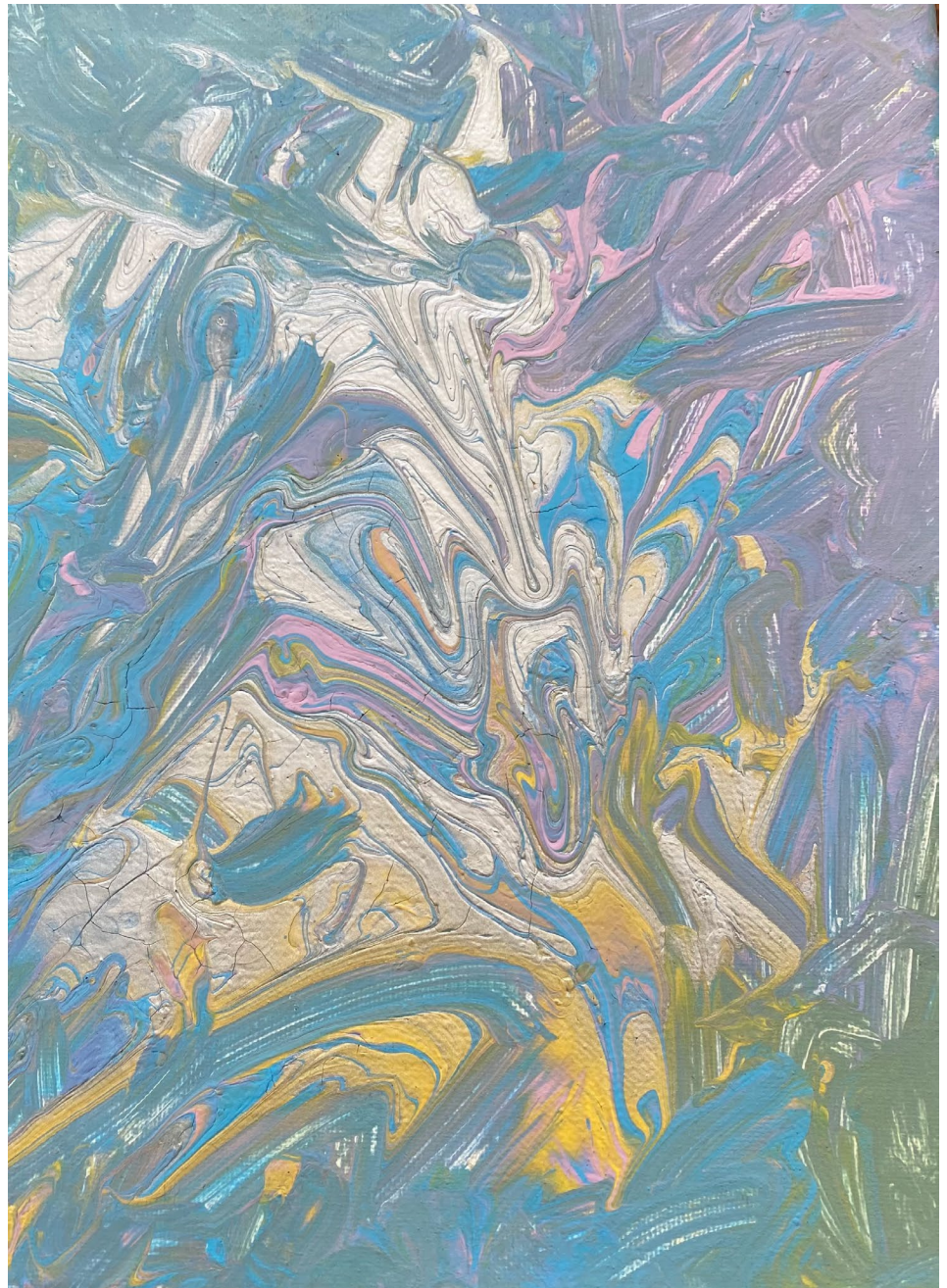
Rest and self-care are so important. When you take time to replenish your spirit, it allows you to serve others from the overflow... Self-care is not selfish. You cannot serve from an empty vessel.



**I AM IN
CHARGE
OF HOW I
FEEL AND
TODAY I AM
CHOOSING
HAPPINESS.**



Winter Sports by Alexis Milne



Two Angels by Karen Lemieux



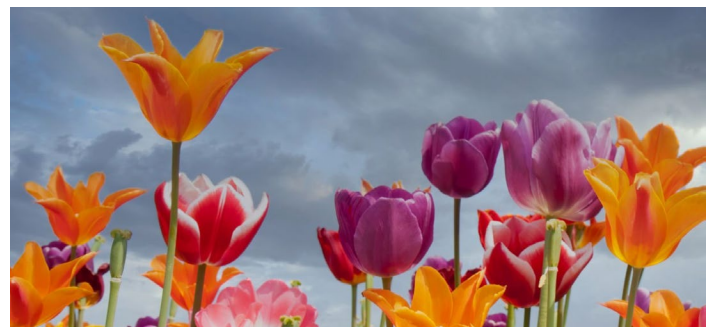
Frozen in Time by Alexis Milne

Client & Family Centred Care

W V U C O D E S I G N R L V U
 H J I C H F H X S E K D F C L
 P I E S S E N T I A L V T L I
 F B C I C E N T R E D F L I S
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Communication	Collaboration	Participation
Information	Essential	Respect
Sharing	Codesign	Partner
Service	Promise	Centred
Portal	Peer	Support
Family	Listen	Client
Care		

Answers are on page 10



The First Step in Disappointment... **HOPE**

by Kathleen Conibear

Was a prompt I'd received in a workshop I'm taking called *Write On* conducted by the *The Writer's Collective of Canada* here are my thoughts.

In order to be disappointed one has to have aspired. Aspiring is the framework on which hope is built. Once the hope-filled structure is created it begins to deteriorate. The decline of the house of hope, both disappoints and re-inspires. One is sad to see the old aspirations fade into dust, but the dust becomes the plaster with which one rebuilds the new ambition. In the process of tearing down and reclaiming an individual can become in tune with the most universal of all energies that of transformation. Once one recognizes change is not only possible, but inevitable one comes to realize that one's that one's apparently static state is malleable and dynamic. Thus, therein lies hope because disappointment can be changed.



Photo by Alexandra



**we want to hear
from you!**

*Show your artwork • Share your poems •
Tell a funny story • Show your photos •
Share your wellness journey • Tell us your
favourite quote*

Contact Us

We would love to hear what you have to say about The Client's Voice or if you would like to become a member of the Client Advisory Council, feel free to call, write or email your questions and comments to:

Client Advisory Council

The Royal,
1145 Carling Avenue, Room 1349
Ottawa ON K1Z 7K4

613.722.6521, ext. 6767
cac@theroyal.ca

Send your submissions to:
Glenda O'Hara
glenda.ohara@theroyal.ca

Client & Family Centred Care

W V U C O D E S I G N R L V U
H J I C H F H X S E K D F C L
P I E S S E N T I A L V T L I
F B C I C E N T R E D F L I S
A R E S P E C T L C V H L E T
M P A R T I C I P A T I O N E
I E X I L D X N P R D W L T N
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Y S H A R I N G J V Y U E P S
C O L L A B O R A T I O N E U
C O M M U N I C A T I O N E P
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I Q P R O M I S E T Q V D A R
P Z B I N F O R M A T I O N T

Communication	Collaboration	Participation	Information
Essential	Respect	Sharing	Codesign
Partner	Service	Promise	Centred
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