

New National Program Guides Families Navigating Early Psychosis and Schizophrenia

September 21st, 2020 (Winnipeg, MB) – This month the Schizophrenia Society of Canada (SSC) is launching a national educational program, “Family Recovery Journey,” to assist families who have a member living with early psychosis or schizophrenia.

The program is designed to be a responsive, impartial, and flexible program for Canadians. It is written from a recovery focus as SSC believes that it is possible for an individual to live beyond the limitations of a mental illness with a sense of hope, purpose, meaning, and social inclusion. The program is intended to be distributed by individual facilitators (any person with lived experience as a family member and an understanding of recovery), peer support workers and mental health professionals.

"Family members are on their own recovery journey as they recover from the traumatic aspects of a loved one receiving a diagnosis of a mental illness: the traumatic disruption to family life, feelings of guilt, navigating a confusing mental health system, fear of relapse, and the traumatic aspect of not being meaningfully engaged by mental health practitioners in 'shared decision making' concerning their loved ones treatment and recovery plans," said Chris Summerville, CEO of SSC.

Educating families of persons with schizophrenia has been found to reduce the impact of illness on the family and to reduce individual relapse rates by up to 20 per cent.

Family Recovery Journey is based on the Strengthening Families Together (SFT) program which was created in 2003 and was the first Canadian-based family psychoeducation program for schizophrenia. Since that time, changes in knowledge and in the mental health system have been abundant, leading to the need for an updated program.

"This course will be so helpful for families to gain knowledge and hope while mobilizing their own strengths and collective wisdom. We are so pleased to offer this unique course to build a community where families do not have to feel alone. We are pleased to offer a course that will be helpful for those families experiencing first episode psychosis or experience with related mental illness with or without substance use issues," said Hazel Meredith, President of the SSC Board.

"One of the important elements of the program provides guidance on developing a relapse prevention plan for families, and emphasizing that a relapse is not the end of the road – there is always hope for recovery," added Florence Budden, Past President of Canadian Federation of Mental Health Nurses and Co-Chair of the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH).

Information on the unique impacts of COVID-19 has been incorporated into the program. During this pandemic, people living with severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia and psychosis, and their care providers, can be faced with additional issues and problems. It is important to stay educated, to stay vigilant, and to implement strategies that will keep us to be healthy and hopeful.

To register for the program and to receive program material please email Chris Summerville, CEO of SSC, at chris@schizophrenia.ca. More information is available at schizophrenia.ca.

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Schizophrenia Society of Canada

The Schizophrenia Society of Canada (SSC) exists to "Build a Canada where people living with early psychosis and schizophrenia achieve their potential." This is possible with early intervention and recovery focused mental health services. The heart and soul of SSC is the conviction that things can be better for those experiencing early psychosis and schizophrenia. Hope changes everything.

Contact:

Rita Rahmati

Cell: 647-289-9774 | Email: Rita@impactcanada.com