



## Together Strong! By Holly McNea

WOW! That's all I can start with – WOW! It was amazing!! It was an amazing weekend at the Together Strong conference! I was overwhelmed with valuable information – overwhelmed in a good way. I wasn't sure what I was expecting, something boring; professionals lecturing and using \$10 words; sad, mopey parents telling of their heartbreaking journeys with their children...but that's not what I got.

What I did get was a mountain of information and techniques that would help me better parent my children. I met wonderful people who have empowered themselves, their children and their communities to acknowledge and accept the truth about **children's mental health issues**. These amazing parents, educators and mental health professionals are committed to changing the face of **mental health**, both **children's mental health** and adult's mental health – how it's perceived, how it's treated and how it's shunned.

The Together Strong Conference was sponsored by Parents for Children's Mental Health and the Ontario Association for Suicide Prevention. The conference opened on Friday morning at University of Western Ontario's Engineering Department facilities with Sarah Cannon's keynote presentation "Suicide the "S" Word". Sarah spoke candidly about her husband's battle with **bi-polar disorder** and her daughter's **bi-polar** diagnosis at age 5. Sarah bared her heart as she described the time leading up to her husband's suicide eight years ago and the guilt she feels over that loss.

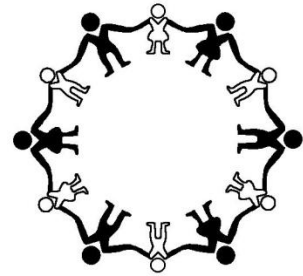
A variety of sessions were presented throughout the weekend with keynote presentations that included the Gala dinner on Friday night featuring Elizabeth Manley, "Canada's Sweetheart", who shared her personal journey with mental health.

Saturday morning we were greeted with the sound styling of Saidat and KZ of Music, Movement and Motivation. Music, Movement and Motivation is a very successful motivational program that Saidat and her crew present to students of all ages throughout Ontario. Some of the audience became emotional as Saidat told about her own struggles parenting a child with autism. The audience listened attentively while Saidat encouraged us to continue our mission to implement change for the benefit of all children and youth.

Finally, the conference closed with a lively talk by CPRI's Dr. B. Duncan McKinlay. Dr. McKinlay was diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome at age 19 but knew by the age of 7 that he had "a secret". His lecture was entitled "Living in Disorder" and he explained that he would use his presentation in an attempt to mimic the often chaotic thought processes of a child with mental health issues.

**PCMH thanks Holly for her summary of the conference and we also wish to thank our many sponsors including: Cornerstone Financial Management; Family and Children's Services St. Thomas and Elgin; Wass Family – St. Thomas; Gayle Comeau – In memory of Eddie Comeau; AGF Financial; TD Bank; and Child Development Institute.**

**A HUGE thank you to our co-presenter the Ontario Association of Suicide Prevention.**



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## Fundraising and Awareness IDEAS

**No Go Gala:** Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada decided to hold its annual gala online and call it the "No Go Gala." Organizers created personal fundraising pages to raise funds for the online event. The result: the average funds raised per committee member was \$11,129.83 and the top three committee fundraisers raised \$109,252. More than \$375,000 was raised in total. Email [admin@pcmh.ca](mailto:admin@pcmh.ca) for more information or to get started on your own PCMH Fundraiser.

**Chocolate Race:** Imagine being outside in the sunshine, walking by the water, eating chocolate along the way and all for a good cause!! Sunday August 28 walk or run in support of the Anxiety Disorder Association of Canada. Visit the [website](#) for more details.

**Great Idea from Hamilton Chapter!** As part of trying to get awareness out there we as the Hamilton chapter are doing it one lap at a time. We were able to get a children's mental health matters ribbon on a late model car that races three Saturdays a month at Flamboro Speedway. The race track is located in Millgrove and has many drivers and spectators coming from different locations that surround the area.

## PCMH has launched our Pledge for Child and Youth Mental Health!

In consultation with many of you, and families across the Province, PCMH has developed the Pledge for Child and Youth Mental Health, which outlines what we require to meaningfully transform mental health services in a manner that will truly benefit us and our children. The upcoming election on October 6 is our chance to raise our voices, to increase public awareness and build political support for comprehensive reform of mental health services for children, youth and their families.

**You can support the PCMH campaign in the following ways:**

1. **Take a moment to pledge your support by clicking the Take the Pledge button!** By signing the Pledge, you are adding your voice to thousands of others who are calling on government to promote family-centred child and youth mental health care in Ontario.
2. **Forward this message to all your networks.** Share it via Facebook, Twitter or email by clicking on the icons on this page. Ask others to sign the Pledge and support the campaign to show that *children's mental health is everybody's business*.
3. **Ask all your local candidates to sign the Pledge.** Visit each candidate or contact them by email, letter, or phone and ask them to sign the Pledge online. Urge every candidate to make a commitment to improve services and supports to families dealing with mental illness.
4. **Join the Pledge Campaign!** Contact us at [admin@pcmh.ca](mailto:admin@pcmh.ca) to request your campaign package, which will include Tools, Tips and Strategies on how to advocate and promote the Pledge. Working together we can make a difference for our kids!

**Thank you for your support!**

## PCMH Welcomes new Board Chair

PCMH would like to take this opportunity to thank Sylvia Naumovski for her past three years of leadership as the President. It was under her guidance and direction, that PCMH found new footing and is emerging to be a recognized source of expertise and parent voice. Sylvia's three-year term has been completed, and we are thrilled that she has agreed to renew her term for another three years as the Past President.

We welcome **Ryan Sims as our New President**. Ryan comes to PCMH as an entrepreneur in Finance Management. He brings with him a keen sense of fiscal responsibility as well as commitment to the issue of children and youth mental health. His leadership style will build on the infrastructure and capacity currently in place, and he is looking forward to being part of the movement of not only PCMH as an organization, but the movement of the cause PCMH and its membership have created.

## Golf Tournament in Support of PCMH

Out of the blue, PCMH was contacted by Locke's Parent Volunteer Association who are hosting a Golf Tournament in support of PCMH. If you are interested in participating, it takes place at Kettle Creek Golf & Country Club on June 18th, 2011. For information, please e-mail: [lockespva@gmail.com](mailto:lockespva@gmail.com)

## Upcoming Events and Opportunities

The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario is pleased to present our **'Investing in the Future' Scholarship program**. This year's program consists of three different scholarship components.

For more information, please go to the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario's website  
[www.schizophrenia.on.ca](http://www.schizophrenia.on.ca)

### Summer Programs

Firefly Therapy Services offers Therapy Services to School-Aged Children in Waterloo and Cambridge!\* Various summer programs available, visit:  
[www.kidsability.ca/en/firefly](http://www.kidsability.ca/en/firefly)

### "How to Survive the Summer"

Please forward ideas (tried, tested and true) that PCMH families have found useful and we'll publish them in the next newsletter (or maybe send out a special edition!). Email ideas to [admin@pcmh.ca](mailto:admin@pcmh.ca)

Check out **@Random**, a multimedia awareness-raising documentary project has involved dozens of families affected by Tourette Syndrome, filmmakers, and other production industry partners to create an online viewing experience that is different every time you watch it. Visit the [OTV website](#) for a story and more

## Summit on Children and Youth Mental Health

(Submitted by a member of PCMH who attended)

I am grateful to have recently been sponsored by PCMH to attend the Summit on Children & Youth Mental Health last week in Toronto. I always look forward to these events because of the camaraderie shared amongst all walks of life and their dedication to children's mental health, this was no exception.

With 500 people in attendance the room was electric. The keynote speakers were informative, inspiring and energized and although I have been hearing the buzz that we are at the "tipping point" of creating a system that reflects the needs of our children, I now truly believe that we sit on this cusp.

I was particularly impressed by the courage and passion displayed by the Youth-Family Panel portion and the disclosure of their personal journey. The panel discussed mental illness from the family perspective and I immediately felt a connection and relatability to their stories. They bravely spoke of the depth and degree of their families' battle with depression, the stigma that continues to surround them and the difficulties endured while seeking treatment. They also told of not being heard, understood or legitimated, but what really resonated with me was the heartfelt impression they left on the importance of family. Not only of the unconditional love, but the dedication and relentless support of one another and how it has been (in many instances) a life line. These families seemed to have stopped at nothing and no one to make sure they received what they needed not only in times of crisis, but in the long term management of their illness as well.

It was at this time when I looked around the room, made up predominantly of educators, front-line workers, executives, healthcare personnel, trustees, lawyers, agency directors, representatives of the Ministry of Health & Education, as well as other "like" professionals who were emphatically applauding this "family panel" that I felt and understood the importance of the parent/caregiver role and the significance and impact of the family perspective. Not only to promote our individual familial healing, but on the process of building a national healthcare system designed to help all Canadians to effectively cope and manage with children's mental health issues as a whole.

There was a vast professional representation at the table to which I was seated including a journalist, special needs teacher, a child & youth advocacy lawyer, persons from the Ministry of Education, the CAS and myself...a parent.

Our task was to identify (with our newly formed partnership) what a child and youth mental health system would look like if "they" got everything right and what would be the first steps in the action plan to get there. There were many different ideas offered by the professional diversity of our table, but even my input with its' self-proclaimed mentality of being "just a parent" was validated, valued and received with the same integrity and credibility (if not more) than the "professionals" seated with me.

The commonality that we could all agree on is that we need to get back to the fundamentals and develop a "universal dialogue" that spans time zones, cultures,

generations and genders in order to alleviate the misconceptions that surround child and youth mental health therefore dispelling the stigma that prevents our country from participating in its own mentally healthy progression.

What we did conclude was that we need to keep this conversation going. We need to take it with us to our kitchen tables, boardroom tables and parliamentary tables so that this conversation doesn't end with another heartbroken parent at the coroner's table.

I greatly appreciate being given the opportunity to be part of this experience. It has empowered me as a parent, inspired me as a human being and propelled me to do more and be more for the mental well being of *all* children and youth.

Just a Parent.

## Chapter News!

Chapter Leader **Krystal Barrett** is a true inspiration in her community! Only one month in operation and we have received letters of thanks from four community agencies in her area for the work she is doing. Most recently a family approached PCMH-Renfrew requesting help in funding for a psycho-educational assessment. Unfortunately PCMH does not have the capacity for such funding and Krystal did some private fundraising to raise the money for this family! Krystal is in the midst of (in collaboration with CFB-Petawawa) a Baseball tournament in September; in turn using the proceeds of this fundraising event to support of childrens mental health programs and services offered in the Ottawa Valley. ie. Camps, educational exercises for families etc for which there is no funding! Thank you Krystal for your amazing efforts!

Kudos to **Tanya Alfieri** Barrie Chapter Leader. Tanya recently contacted our provincial office asking if we had a presentation on "How to Survive the Summer". We did not have such a presentation prepared and Tanya has now created and presented this resource for families! If you would like to connect with Tanya in regards to this resource email us at [admin@pcmh.ca](mailto:admin@pcmh.ca).

Top fundraisers for the conference silent auction **Julie Broomer** (Chapter Leader Etobicoke) and **Donna Massell** (Chapter Leader York). Great job ladies we know this is not easy work and appreciate your tremendous efforts and fruitful labors!

Leave no stone unturned...hats off to **Carleana De Kelder** who became the St Thomas Chapter Leader in May. Carleana has created a template letter that can be shared with EAP Coordinators telling them about PCMH and the resources that we can offer parents on a local and or provincial level. Won't you please consider sending a similar letter to your EAP Coordinator? For a copy of this letter please email [admin@pcmh.ca](mailto:admin@pcmh.ca).

Ingenuity at its finest from our **London Chapter** as they brainstormed and came up with the idea of a "phone tree" and "Putting the Pieces Together" session to help families navigating the children's mental health system. They are hoping to pilot this project and have been meeting with local agencies to discuss filling this much needed void. Stay tuned on how this project develops and if you want further information to initiate a similar service in your area, please email us at [admin@pcmh.ca](mailto:admin@pcmh.ca).

Creativity is in fine form with Hamilton Chapter Leaders **Laura and Philomena**. The chapter recently hosted a tattoo fundraising party raising \$480!!!! So they raised some money but certainly did not stop there...As part of trying to get awareness out there the Hamilton chapter is doing it one lap at a time. They were able to get a children's mental health matters ribbon on a late model car that races three Saturdays a month at Flamboro Speedway.

Photos on this page (top to bottom) from the Together Strong Conference in April: Holly from St. Thomas with Saidat and KZ of Music, Movement and Motivation; Hamilton Chapter Leader, Philomena with "Canada's Sweetheart," figure skater, Elizabeth Manley; the Sold-Out crowd at the Gala Dinner Friday evening; Dr. Duncan McKinlay from CPRI entertained and enlightened on Saturday afternoon.



## From Our Members

*Our members often send us inspiring messages, poetry, and their thoughts about what their family is going through – feel free to submit your own essays, poetry and thoughts by emailing [admin@pcmh.ca](mailto:admin@pcmh.ca) and let us know you want to be in the newsletter!*

**PCMH member, Heather Bishop, saw this recently and wanted to share it with other PCMH members.**

### **Graduation, BpKids Style - Hopeful Realism**

**by Susan Resko, M.M.**, Executive Director, Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation (U.S.)

Late spring is a time of celebration for most parents with a graduating child. For CABF parents, however, this can be a time of angst, sadness and even dread. Transitions are a time when people reflect upon the milestones of the completed journey and look forward towards new pathways.

As with many events, kids with mood disorders don't always follow a typical pathway. Many of our children will not go to a four-year university like their peers; instead, they take alternative paths. At this transition, it's only natural for parents to reflect on ravages, heartache and sadness this horrible illness has caused our children. We grieve for our child's missed opportunities. I had an intensely painful experience over the weekend when my son was inadvertently excluded from a ceremonial rite of passage. I know the oversight was unintentional, but it reopened all my old stigma-laden wounds. Because most people don't understand mood disorders, it makes us feel invisible and forgotten.

But rather than dwell on the sadness left in the wake of this illness, I am choosing to celebrate my son's amazing accomplishments this spring! He turned 18 this month, he gets his driver's license this weekend, and he graduates from high school next month! Like CABF blogger Chrisa H.'s son, my son will be doing a "Gap Year(s)" through the public school district starting next fall. This means that while he has fulfilled all the requirements for graduation, the district will withhold his diploma so that he can continue to receive services. He will take courses at the local community college, and meet regularly with a transition coordinator about employment, transportation and schedule management. He will be connected with other kids from surrounding local districts in the program. He can continue to do this until he turns 21, if he so chooses. He may be ready for a different path in a few years; but for now, it is the right path for him.

I could not be more proud of my son! He has managed to achieve a 3.4 cumulative GPA, even though he attended five different high schools: a mainstream high school, a hospital, a residential treatment center, a therapeutic boarding school and most recently, a therapeutic, self-contained day school.

Depression makes it difficult to get out of bed each morning; it's like dragging yourself through a swimming pool filled with mud. Yet he makes it to school ALMOST every morning. Depression also causes people to isolate themselves and it zaps energy levels. Yet, he joined me on a 5-day mission trip to Haiti last month where he conversed easily with the other group members, became a magnet for the young Haitian children, and jumped in a 10-foot hole to help dig a latrine. He had twice the energy in the 95° Haitian sun than his tired old mom!

I could go on and on like any proud parent. But, that's not my point. Instead, I urge every CABF parent to celebrate YOUR OWN child's unique abilities. Make a list and keep it on your nightstand. Never forget how hard they fight against their illness to accomplish simple, everyday events. Just remember, there is hope. They will get there; it may not be a typical path, but their illness makes the journey like climbing Mt. Everest. Keep remembering the wonderful, unique things (and forget the bad stuff).

We need to be realistic about our children's paths. It may take them longer, and they may have more bumps in the road. Keep cheering them on from the sidelines. Be a hopeful realist.

### **PCMH Camp Day!**

Stay tuned for more information about an exciting way to spend time with other PCMH families:

**Saturday, August 13, 2011**

at Woodland RV Park  
266 Townline Road  
St. Williams, ON

You can spend the day or spend the night and meet other PCMH families.