

WILL YOU KNOW HOW TO HELP?

Sometimes when we least expect it...or feel prepared for it...life has a way of presenting opportunities. If I told you that one in three people will be affected by something in their life, most of us would acknowledge that is a lot of people, and it would be highly likely we would cross paths with many of them.

Let me give you a few examples of what I mean:

- Your best friend was physically assaulted a few years ago and has struggled with feelings of anxiety ever since. You are with her at the mall when she breaks into a sweat and starts to hyperventilate. What would you do?
- Your teenage son's behavior has changed. He seems to be anxious and irritable most of the time, and he hasn't slept much in over a week. What would you do?
- You're at home watching a movie and your good friend calls. He sounds very depressed and starts talking about feeling hopeless and "wondering if life is even worth living". What would you do?
- You have had a great relationship with your neighbour, but lately her mood swings and love of partying is starting to get tiring. Sometimes she is the life of the party, at other times she barely bothers to say hello. What would you do?

You may be starting to think about times in your life when you were concerned about someone. That 'someone' could be a family member, a neighbour, a co-worker, a friend, or even yourself. That one-in-three statistic I mentioned earlier is the number of Canadians who will experience a mental health problem in their lifetime. It would be understandable that many of you may be thinking, "I don't know what I would do to help". We have come to recognize that 'not knowing', can in fact promote misunderstandings and stigma toward people who may need help. It can stop people from providing appropriate support to their friends, co-workers, family members and acquaintances.

What we can do is to become better prepared by learning about mental health problems and available supports. There are a number of ways to do that. One of them is to attend a community workshop called *Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)*. This two day training is based on the model of community members learning medical first aid. *MHFA* teaches participants: how to recognize early signs of mental health problems; identify when someone may be in mental health distress or crisis; feel more confident in providing comfort to a person experiencing mental health problems; learn how to support them in their recovery and most importantly, *MHFA* helps you to guide a person toward appropriate help.

Anyone can benefit from attending. Just as with taking a First Aid / CPR course, gaining a basic knowledge can have a life saving impact. Check out the website www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca for more information about the workshop. To find out more about Mental Health First Aid training offered in our region, contact wosrkshops@cmhagrb.on.ca or 1-866-448-1603 ext. 385.

This article was written by Sandra Parkinson, community educator with Canadian Mental Health Association and a Mental Health First Aid trainer.

The "Open Mind" column is sponsored by individuals and organizations concerned with mental health issues in rural Wellington and Dufferin counties. Contact Canadian Mental Health Association at 519-766-4450 ext. 231 or parkinsons@cmhagrb.on.ca. For access to all Open Mind columns and local mental health resources/ information, visit www.cmhagrb.on.ca or www.communitytorchlight.com