

RTPublication  
Recueillie par le programme de transition et de rétablissement  
Assembled by the Recovery Transition Program




G3 ↑  
G2 ↑

To submit work, please contact Massimo at  
rtpzinesubmission@gmail.com

For more information or to support the RTP and this zine, please visit  
recoverytransitionprogram.com and click on the DONATE link.

Thank you.

 [www.facebook.com/RTPprogram](http://www.facebook.com/RTPprogram)



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# Take 2

SECOND EDITION  
February 2018

Allan Memorial Institute and Griffith Edwards Centre

An addict fell into a hole  
and couldn't get out.

A businessman went by and the addict called out for help.  
The businessman threw him some money  
and told him to buy himself a ladder.  
But the addict could not buy a ladder  
in the hole he was in.

A doctor walked by.  
The addict said "Help! I can't get out!"  
The doctor gave him some drugs and said,  
"Take these. They will relieve the pain."  
The addict said thanks, but when the pills  
ran out, he was still in the hole.

A well-known psychiatrist rode by and heard  
the addict's cries for help.  
She stopped and asked,  
"How did you get there?  
Were you born there?  
Did your parents put you there?  
Tell me about yourself, it will alleviate your sense of loneliness."  
So the addict talked with her for an hour,  
then the psychiatrist had to leave, but she said she'd come back next week.  
The addict thanked her, but he was still in the hole.

A priest came by.  
The addict called for help.  
The priest gave him a bible and said, "I'll say a prayer for you."  
He got down on his knees and prayed for the addict, then he left.  
The addict was very grateful; he read the bible, but he was still stuck in the hole.

A recovering addict happened to be passing by.  
The addict cried out, "Hey, Help me. I'm stuck in this hole!"  
Right away the recovering addict jumped down into the hole with him.  
The addict said, "What are you doing? Now we're both stuck here!!"  
But the recovering addict said,  
"Calm down. It's okay.  
I've been here before.  
I know how to get out."

— Author Unknown

The RTPublication team wishes to acknowledge the generosity  
of Les impressions et graphiques BiMax in providing us with  
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L'équipe de RTPublication souhaite reconnaître la générosité  
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Lundi au vendredi  
9h00 - 17h00

Graphiques, livres, calendriers, campagnes  
électorales, cartes d'affaires, bannières, et plus...

**We would like to hear from you!**

**To submit work (photos, articles, poems,  
information on resources, original artwork,  
etc...), please contact Massimo at**

**rtpzinesubmission@gmail.com**

**before APRIL 15th, 2018  
(for the third edition)**


**CUSM Centre de bien-être pour la santé mentale**

**FAITES L'EXERCICE  
EN ATTENDANT**

**N'attendez plus votre prochain rendez-vous sans rien faire. venez bouger et faire de l'exercice avec nous au 3<sup>e</sup> étage (AMI)!**

**Horaire : Mardi et Jeudi de 13h00 à 14h30**

Rhona Solomon se fera un plaisir de vous y accueillir. Le but est de faire bouger les employés et les patients et aussi de se côtoyer dans la bonne humeur. Si vous êtes plus zen, le cours de yoga offert par Lynn est pour vous. Tous les mercredis à midi dans la salle d'ergothérapie au 2<sup>e</sup> étage.



**MUHC Mental Health Wellness Program**

**EXERCISE WHILE WAITING**

Are you reading this because you are waiting for your appointment?  
Then come and join us in the 3rd floor waiting room (AMI)!

**Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:00-2:30 PM**

If you want a fitness break, Rhona Solomon will be facilitating exercises for people waiting for their appointments, and it is open to everyone. The goal is to have staff exercising alongside the patients, as an icebreaker to get everyone up and moving. If you'd like a more Zen-like experience, check out Lynn's yoga class on Wednesdays at noon in the OT Room.

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# Welcome to the Second Edition of the RTPublication!

It is a privilege to work with the talented team of volunteers from the Recovery Transition Program (RTP) to produce the second edition of the RTPublication. Their commitment to creating a space for patients at the Allan Memorial Institute and the Griffith Edwards Centre (GEC) to share their experience in recovery from mental illness and addiction through poetry, art, articles, and stories is remarkable.

The first edition introduced the Recovery Transition Program and included an interview with its co-lead, Ronna Schwartz. Her belief in the value of integrating patients' experience into the system of care is at the root of the RTP peer mentorship program and the RTPublication.

This second edition is focused on the experiences of those who have received care at the Griffith Edwards Centre Addictions Unit. An interview with Peer Mentor Supervisor Bernie St. Laurent and articles written by participants in the RTP highlight the services offered at the GEC and the benefits of peer mentoring. You will also get a glimpse of some of the activities organized by the Peer Mentors and the special events planned for the new year.

Future editions of the RTPublication will feature the people and programs at the Allan Memorial Institute as well as continue to showcase the amazing talent of all those involved in the MUHC's Mental Health Mission. If you would like to submit material to the RTPublication, please contact Massimo for more information:

**rtpzinesubmission@gmail.com**

Thank you for your continued interest and support of the Recovery Transition Program.

Patricia Lucas (RTP Coordinator)

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Find the RTPublication online at [recoverytransitionprogram.com/rtpublication](http://recoverytransitionprogram.com/rtpublication)



sandwiches, lemon bars, fruit tarts, and a wide assortment of hot and iced teas—including matcha served in the Japanese tradition. We also had delicious fresh homemade lemonade that nobody could get enough of. With an eclectic selection of music playing softly in the background, people mingled and chatted about everything—from recovery, to art, to the food, to the crazy amount of butterflies we'd all been seeing in Montreal that week, to home renovating, to family... I think you get it by now: We talked about everything under the sun, but in the shade.



Cynthia "Cindy" Kitts  
Cecelia Vanier



# Garden Tea Party

## at the Griffith Edwards Centre



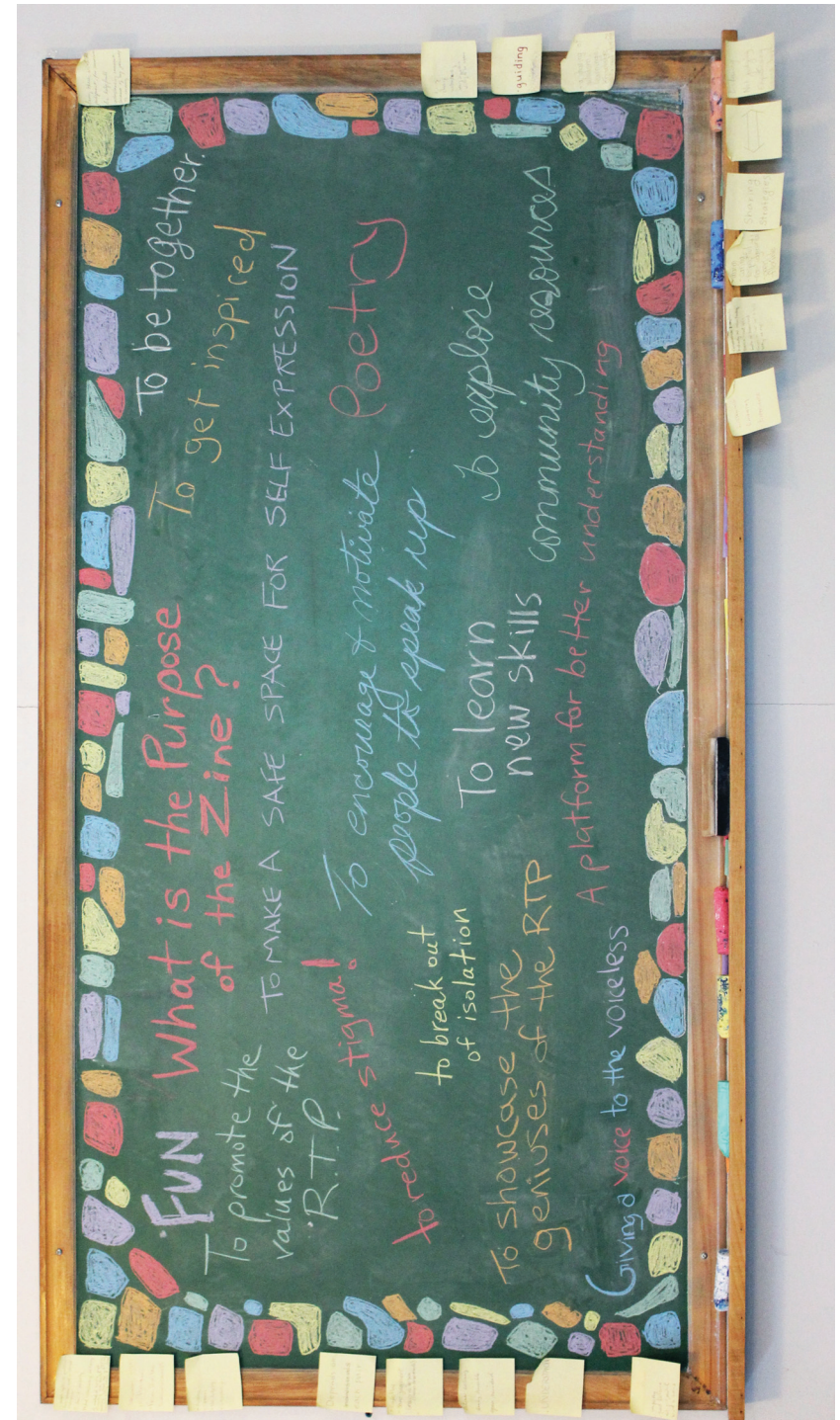
In an effort to spread the word about the RTP, we hosted an outdoor tea party at the Griffith Edwards Centre on September 19, 2017. We brought together Peer Mentors and staff members from the Griffith Edwards and the Allan for an informal break at the end of a hot Tuesday afternoon. The unseasonable heat and humidity made late September feel like mid July! Luckily, the property's side garden has at least a dozen large shade trees and was probably the coolest place to be sitting outside that day.

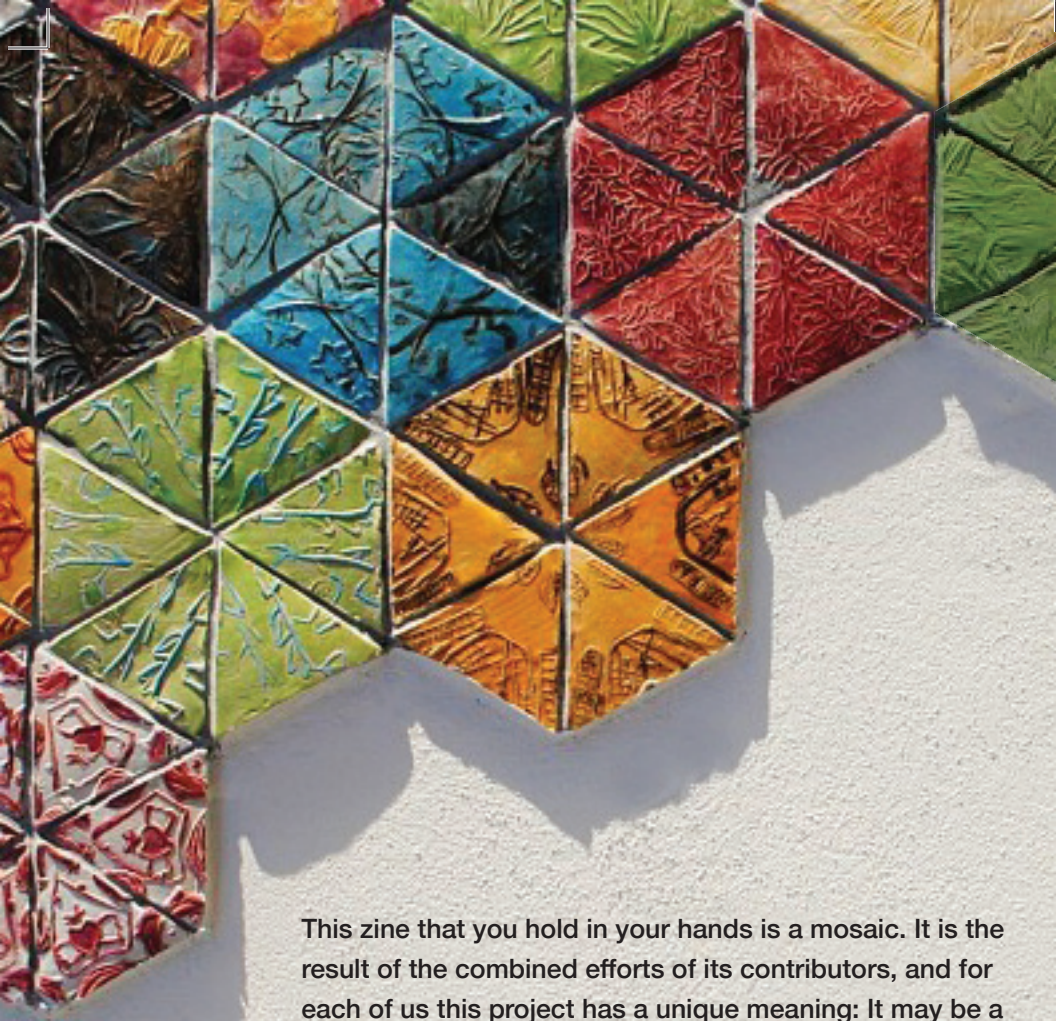


The RTP volunteers made short work of decorating the space with strips of colourful fabric and a rainbow of balloons fastened to low-hanging branches in order to complement the beauty of the garden that staff member Stephanie Tremblay and a group of patient-volunteers from the Griffith Edwards Centre had coaxed out of the formerly neglected front yard. When a light breeze began stirring the air, the transformation was complete. We had created a perfect garden atmosphere.



As our guests trickled in, they were greeted and treated to a wide assortment of refreshments designed to ward off the effects of the sweltering heat. The goodies included cucumber





This zine that you hold in your hands is a mosaic. It is the result of the combined efforts of its contributors, and for each of us this project has a unique meaning: It may be a way to express one's inner self, to overcome a personal obstacle, or simply to create something beautiful.

Recovery is uneven and messy. It leaves rough edges, sharp points, and unforeseen cracks. When taken in isolation, these marks can evoke an absent wholeness. But we do not have to stay isolated. These unplanned ruptures in our lives are also points of contact. They are what allow us to come together to create a composite that is more than the sum of its parts. And from the beauty latent in the personal geometry of our fractures and scars, this mosaic.




Jeff Miles was born in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada in 1963. Over the past 35 years, he has worked at everything imaginable. Throughout that time, alcohol addiction was a daily part of his life. In 2015, he sought help to leave that world behind. Since then, he has turned all the time and energy used to maintain his habit into painting and carving wood sculptures.

Clean and sober for over a year now, he has channelled that energy into producing many sculptures and close to 50 paintings! He also volunteers at the Recovery Transition Program and has taken an intensive peer mentoring course to be able to support others in their own recovery from mental illness and addiction.

Find out more about his art works at [jeffmiles.ca](http://jeffmiles.ca)

"Recovering Addict" by Jeff Miles



**WANTED**  
 PEOPLE WITH TALENT

---

**LAST TRY OUTS**

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THE RECOVERY TRANSITION PROGRAM  
 NEEDS YOU  
 FOR THE RTP APRIL 27TH TALENT SHOW

**SING-DANCE-STRUM  
 JUGGLE-TELL A JOKE**

LAST TRY OUTS WILL BE HELD  
 IN THE LARGE O.T. ROOM ON THE 2ND FLOOR  
 AT THE ALLAN MEMORIAL INSTITUTE  
 FEBRUARY 22, 2018 FROM 4:00 PM- 6:00 PM  
 FOR APPOINTMENT CALL RACHEL ABUGOV X35683





Griffith Edwards Centre on Pine Avenue



RTP office in the Griffith Edwards Centre

## About the Recovery Transition Program

The Recovery Transition Program (RTP) is a unique mental health initiative designed to improve the experiences of patients within the Mental Health Mission of the McGill University Health Centre. Our goal is to integrate a patient-based mentoring program into the system of care, in which Peer Mentors and health care providers collaborate to provide support to patients during their recovery.

## The Peer Mentor–Peer Mentee Relationship

We believe that experiential knowledge is an invaluable asset which allows those who live with mental illness and addiction to give hope and encouragement to others. The dynamic is different from that of a doctor–patient relationship: There is no diagnosis made and no obligation to disclose any previous diagnoses. We listen, but we are not therapists. The meetings are an occasion for contact that benefits the mentee and the mentor.

The mentor and mentee work together as equals to determine how the relationship can be most useful. The sessions can provide emotional support from someone who can relate to your struggles, who has been where you are now, and who knows what it's like to feel like an outsider to society. The sessions can also provide a space to solve problems, set goals, establish new routines, and find connections to outside communities.

## How to Become a Peer Mentee

Anyone interested in accessing the services of the RTP must be referred by their health care provider. For more information about the RTP, the referral process, or how to get involved, please see our website: [recoverytransitionprogram.com](http://recoverytransitionprogram.com) and/or contact the RTP Coordinator at: [Patricia.Lucas@muhc.mcgill.ca](mailto:Patricia.Lucas@muhc.mcgill.ca).



Painting by Julia Bene



Bernie's life took an unexpected yet pleasant turn in 2015, when his doctor encouraged him to speak to Antonis Paraherakis and Dr. Kathryn Gill (both from the Griffith Edwards Centre) about a client-based project that was in the works. This project came to be what we now know as the Recovery Transition Program. After completing the 40-hour mentoring course, Bernie went on to mentor for over a year. Smiling proudly, he adds, "Although challenging, it was very, very rewarding." The individual contact with mentees helped in Bernie's recovery. Realizing that others were going through something he has gone through normalized the ups and downs of his own life and has broken some of the isolation. "We are all human; we are the same in so many ways," he sighs. Leaning forward, Bernie touches his heart and says, "It's humbling to have been asked to be the co-instructor and supervisor of the new cohort of mentors. I didn't expect it, but I'm up to the challenge." He believes that an important benefit of the supervision meetings is how they allow the mentors to learn so much from each other. He continues, "The work we do is useful, productive, and important – not only for the mentee receiving help but for the mentor providing it. They are both helped. It's just an overall good program."

Bernie is encouraged by the continual flow of referrals that come to the RTP even as the relatively young program establishes itself. All the hard work is finally paying off. The first cohort of mentors had a tremendous amount of work to do to get the RTP up and running. Everything had to be created from scratch: procedures, policies, a code of conduct. Playing active roles in this process has empowered mentors in their own recoveries. Bernie hopes the RTP will continue to grow and secure itself within the structure of standard care in the Mental Health Mission.

It just goes to show how a person can unknowingly plant a seed that will take root and grow in wonderful, unexpected ways. The power of kindness, giving time, and genuinely listening to others can impact generations to come. Bernie travels regularly to Vermont and Toronto to stay connected with his young grandchildren. He continues to pay it forward in his role as the RTP's Peer Mentor Supervisor. With a leadership style that inspires confidence in others, he creates a safe environment for mentors to share, learn, and teach one another. He has the ability to make people feel good about themselves and feel special. He creates a space to speak authentically by giving everyone respect. Bernie has inspired others not only as a Peer Mentor but also as a true role model for leadership. A sincere thank you from all of us, Bernie.

Interview by Julia Bene



Allan Memorial Institute



RTP office in the Allan Memorial Institute

## RTP Group Activities

In addition to one-on-one mentoring, the RTP organizes group activities to help mentors and mentees alike connect with other RTP participants. Past and current activities include:

- A monthly reading group
- Group visits to outside resources such as the Art Hive
- The RTPublication workshop
- The annual RTP Talent Show

## How I see the RTP

*"The RTP provides a special and unique sense of **community**. For people looking to transition into a healthier life, a solid community is essential. From a psychological and anthropological perspective, social interaction and a strong sense of community are essential human needs. For people struggling with mental health, having a community is even more important."*

— Cami E. (Peer Mentor)

*"Through my involvement in various RTP projects, such as fundraising or the zine, I have pushed myself to learn and develop computer skills that I always thought were beyond my ability."*

— Cecelia V. (Peer Mentor)

*"We know what it feels like to be asking ourselves 'why me?' over and over. We know how hard it is to get out of bed. We know what it's like to wonder how long this struggle will continue. You are not alone."*

—saya (Peer Mentor)

*"The support I've found in so many wonderful people at the RTP has helped me feel more like a human being with human problems and less like a loosely bound collection of symptoms."*

—Gregory (Peer Mentee)

# Livin' Many Lives in One Life

Lived Experience by Massimo Venturino

Growing up in a world you do not understand can be manageable. Growing up in a world that doesn't understand you can be paralyzing.

I came to the realization at an early age that my feelings were different than other people's. I felt a deep empathy for everything and everyone. I felt sadness blended with nostalgia towards people, places, and things. I felt that I hadn't been granted the skills to cope with these intense emotions. I was blessed with other skills, insights, and characteristics; however, the skill of coping with intense emotions or mental and emotional imbalances was something that I had to work much harder at.

There was no place, not with my family, not with my friends, that I was able to express my thoughts and share these issues. And when I attempted to, I was met with responses such as "toughen up," "you are too sensitive-quit being a baby," or the most common, the one used to avoid talking about anything, "everything is fine."

Naturally, feeling this way at a young age, the fear of my own emotions paired with feelings of being ostracized for being different developed into excessive introspection, shyness, and incredibly low self-esteem, to put it simply.

Somehow, somewhere inside of me, I knew that no one wanted to be around a sad kid. "What could possibly be wrong? How could it be? I'm so young. This must be an act for attention or sympathy." These were the thoughts consistently circling and swirling in my mind. And truth be told, they were right. I was in fact acting. I was playing the part of a boy undisturbed. I was playing the role of Massimo Venturino, the boy who was doing just fine. I performed in all the ways I was told and taught to from a young age. Despite following the rules as my stage character, I always had an uncompromising stubborn relationship with any form of authority. That, paired with being of strong independent mind, led me to endless struggles both at school and at home.

My high school years were mostly made up of long days with headphones. I spent my time taking countless walks, riding bikes through forests, skateboarding with friends, and simply being a teenage boy. I am grateful to have lived in a time when being a kid and a teen meant spending most of my time outdoors.

the old guys now, and you guys are the big shots. Look at the little kids running around," he said, "They look up to you." And when the principal asked, "How were you treated by the seniors when you were here?" Bernie thought to himself, "Not particularly well, or badly, it was like we didn't exist." Then Mr. Allen added, "Maybe you could do things a little differently with them. Maybe you can make them feel good." It was a simple suggestion that would have a profound impact on Bernie's life. "I never forgot that," he remembers, "I did much more as a result of that... I became aware. It was like he planted a seed."

That seed would continue to be nurtured when Bernie went to university. "My first-year university philosophy professor had a huge impact on my life as well. Professor Phillips broke a class of 75 students into groups, which multiplied his workload by 8 lectures. It was quite remarkable that someone would be that generous with his time. He was absolutely passionate about his work and loved and appreciated his students." Bernie recalls the time with enthusiasm, "When somebody you look up to validates you, takes an interest in you, and is willing to spend that amount of time with you – it makes you feel good. The sense of being heard, that you could say something and it wouldn't be dismissed as being ridiculous or outrageous, was so important." The positive influence of teachers in his life inspired Bernie to take his good fortune and pay it forward. He taught journalism at Concordia and spent considerable time mentoring younger journalists at the CBC. About this experience he remarks, "Although demanding, it was very satisfying and rewarding when I saw their progress and their evolution."

In the 1970s Bernie was on his way to becoming a lawyer, but because of a teacher strike he took a job in journalism instead. "It's difficult for me to single out what work in journalism I'm most proud of," he explains, "In addition to enjoying hosting the afternoon shows, the program 'C'est La Vie' was very important. Running for 17 years, it helped influence English Canada's attitudes towards [Quebec] in a positive way." He is also proud of the 14 years he spent as a journalist at the National Assembly. From his front-row seat, he was a witness to history in the making, and he hopes that through his questions he kept the politicians accountable.

Although retired from a 40-year career in the profession, Bernie's passion for journalism continues. He expresses proudly, "I was touched when I was asked to come back and take part in a short radio column for CBC Daybreak on Thursday mornings at 7:40 a.m." A number of listeners shared that they were very happy he was back. Bernie has the ability to break through the static and communicate politics in an interesting and understandable way. "Politics are pretty important in society so if I can make the issues relatable, I'm happy to do that."



Photograph by saya

## Bernie St-Laurent, Peer Mentor Supervisor

Bernard “Bernie” St-Laurent, a loving father with five beautiful grandchildren, is a senior Peer Mentor in the Recovery Transition Program. He is also the Peer Mentor Supervisor. He grew up as a single child in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, and nowadays enjoys listening to the blues and classical music – especially Beethoven’s 9th. “It’s a fantastic piece of music,” he proclaims.

Things haven’t always been smooth for Bernie. He fought his own personal battles with alcoholism and severe depression. What keeps him resilient in his recovery is self-care through meditation and introspection, and the support of his family. “They provide an enriching, loving environment,” he adds.

We all have significant people in our lives who have inspired us in a way that has made us who we are today. For Bernie, one was a high school principal. When Bernie was a senior in high school, Principal Harry Allen gave an address to the entire class. “You’re

At first, in my high school years I was surrounded by groups of friends. I experienced the classic story of drug use, from joints to pills. With the drugs I finally found something to numb the worsening feelings of low self-esteem, sadness, depression, and even self-hatred. This came to be my perfect escape, and I convinced myself it worked until years later. Fast feet and weak ankles on pavement are always eventually met with face plants.

As the years went on the circles got smaller, then friends became using buddies. Next thing I knew, I was doing drugs on my own. I figured it was all the same, because even in groups that feeling of being alone always remained. The depression inevitably got worse, as did my addiction. In retrospect, I realize the two were feeding off one another. It was a vicious cycle. I used the drugs as a vice to numb my self-hatred, loneliness, suicidal thoughts, and anxieties; and in response my feelings grew stronger, grew deeper inside of me because my continued and increased use served as a means of running away rather than facing it all. This is something I didn't see then, and only now, years later, fully understand. It seems simple and easy, and it might be for an outsider, but it isn't so simple to acknowledge it when one is so deep into the rabbit hole.

Growing up in a world you do not understand can be manageable. Growing up in a world that doesn't understand you can be paralyzing. But we try.

Finally, after the consistent use and endless running, I fell for the first time. I needed help. This was my first encounter with the Griffith Edwards Centre (GEC).

By the end of 2011, the Griffith Edwards Centre was offering me help, skills, and practical tools as part of my recovery; I am extremely grateful to everyone from Patty at reception to my first therapist at GEC, Dr. J. Palacios-Boix. It is with these tools, as well as individual therapy with a psychologist, self-care, love, and embracing a deeper connection to my spirituality that I have achieved sobriety. I was sober of drugs and alcohol for a year and a day when I decided to try drinking on occasion. My logic at the time was that it wasn't the drinking that brought me to that dark low-point, it was the drugs. Therefore, I felt I could drink on occasion. I would like nothing more than to be able to say that I didn't know this would end badly, but that would be a lie.

I knew what I was doing, and it had gotten to the point where I didn't even think about the actions I was taking. This unravelled in the worst ways. And so once again, I began to run. I went back to not knowing how to truly face myself. Despite growing with my spirituality and developing my sense of self-worth, self-love, and self-acceptance, the

fear of my own happiness and my true potential came rushing back. My ego and fear were sweet talkers; after all they were the ones pouring my drinks. Fear and ego got hold of me. This continued, and my self-sabotaging ways grew exponentially. It took control in varying severities until it led to regretfully embarrassing behaviour and foolishly poor decisions.

Thinking back now, as I am getting clean for the second time and at a different stage and age in my life, the question is finally clear, "Are you being honest with yourself?"

It has been my experience that this is one of the golden keys to happiness, or evolution: the capacity to surrender to being honest with yourself. It seems so easy and simple, but we make it tremendously difficult for ourselves. We build these walls, we live with centuries of falsehoods and impure sociological structures. We exist with these mental conditions that bring us further away from ourselves and from each other. This makes it so shamefully and painfully difficult to even look yourself in the eye. In my experience, this very idea can be the hardest thing to do; however, it is the first fundamental step.

Luckily, there are ways to make it easier. Breaking it down serves in making it less daunting. I often think back to the resonating words of Jim Carrey, "Make a decision to choose Love, not fear."

Through spirituality; listening to my body, mind, and soul I choose Love. It will forever boggle my mind how I have always chosen Love yet simultaneously always been so afraid of it, whether it comes from myself or from others. I believe that, to a certain point, you are what you are taught until you stand strong and listen to your heart. I continue to choose Love. I choose to take the time to have an open, non-critical, and non-judgmental conversation with myself. I choose to refocus my energy in times of feeling overwhelmed. It is with these decisions and the continuous help of group therapy and psychology that I focus on one day at a time.

There are, like in any other system, improvements that can be made within the Mental Health Mission. There are changes that can be made in order to support positive recovery and well-being. Truth is, this can be said in possibly every area of health care or academic environments. This is a dialogue that I feel should be had and continued for early prevention. GEC hosts some of the most fun and easy to integrate tools for recovery. The day program at the GEC offers practical steps to the beginning stages of recovery. It taught me how to divide my days up now that I am not filling them with



Illustration by Cecelia Vanier

## THE RTP SUGGESTS COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Countless people recovering from an addiction have found peer support in their community. Listed below are a few programs suggested by members of the RTP that have offered additional support to those who have received care from the Addictions Unit at the Griffith Edwards Centre.

### Refuge Recovery

Those seeking peer support may benefit from Refuge Recovery, a mindfulness-based addiction recovery community that practises Buddhist philosophy as the foundation of the recovery process. Meetings in Montreal begin with a 20-minute guided meditation, followed by a reading and group discussion. For more information, go to: [refugerecovery.org](http://refugerecovery.org)

*“The guided meditation aspect of Refuge Recovery is a great approach for opening up to alternative healing.” —An RTP member*

### 12-Step Programs

12-Step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous believe that recovering from an addiction is a life-long process that requires support from other recovering addicts. It is an abstinence-based model for recovery; its mission is to help members “stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety” without judgment. Please see their website for more information and/or where to find a meeting near you:

[aa-quebec.org/AA\\_Quebec/Templates/LivresEN.htm](http://aa-quebec.org/AA_Quebec/Templates/LivresEN.htm)

*“I felt really accepted at Narcotics Anonymous, and there was a warmth that I really needed at the time.” —An RTP member*

Al-anon is another 12-step program that offers support to family members who have been impacted by a loved one’s addiction. These mutual-support groups provide the opportunity to learn from the experiences of others who have struggled with similar problems. For more information about these peer support groups, go to: [al-anon.org](http://al-anon.org)

### SMART Recovery

SMART Recovery offers help for people recovering from all types of addiction and addictive behaviours. Members learn tools for recovery based on scientific research and also participate in an online community, which includes free, self-empowering, secular, and mutual-help support groups. For more information go to: [smartrecoveryquebec.org](http://smartrecoveryquebec.org)

substance use. The day program helped me get back to my creativity; exploring this in a sober setting allows me to be lighter on myself and reminds me of the childlike wonder of self-expression. It taught me to address my anger, frustration, or even sadness by naming it and putting it aside; for it isn't something that should overtake me.

The GEC program is separated into two phases. In Phase I members embark on a six-week day program where we are in a group setting, and are at varying stages of early recovery. Together, we re-learn skills and coping tools to help in our day-to-day lives. Our days are spent going through everything from stress management to creative expression and learning the psychology of an addict's mind. After this six-week program we graduate to Phase II where we are in a small group therapy facilitated by a therapist. We are in a safe open space to discuss anything and everything related to our recovery. We explore reasons for using or prolonged use, our now new sober lives and how we manage everything in between. Along with group therapy, peer mentoring is offered through the Recovery Transition Program. In my opinion, this has been a great addition to the services offered at the GEC. I am able to have a weekly session with a Peer Mentor who has been in a similar place, and talk about ways in which to deal with certain situations I may feel uncomfortable to bring up in a larger group. To have an opportunity to do this with someone who isn't from a clinical background is both liberating and comforting.

When I was a kid, somewhere deep within me I believed there to be an easier way, a lighter way of living. Despite this, the belief had been buried by excessive substance use. I grew convinced I would end up utterly alone or underground. I am truly grateful and blessed to have woken up in the hospital to a doctor's referral to the Griffith Edwards Centre.

I believe there to be an inner strength within people that is resilient beyond comprehension. I believe if we continue to encourage healthy self-worth and resilience through independence, trusting one's heart, and intuition we'd be closer to a more peaceful positive place to live.

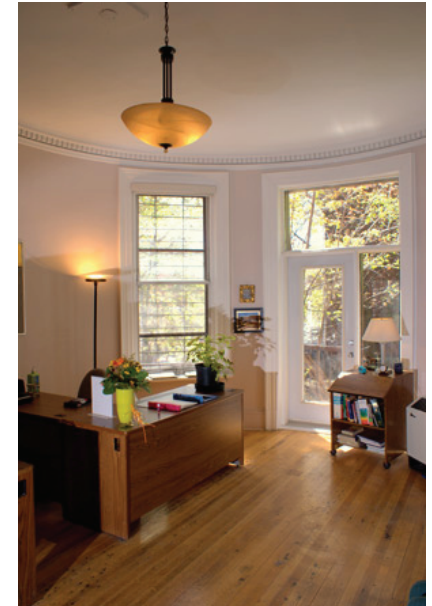
Through my experience, I've seen a lack of confidence in former users from general society; a lack of true confidence in our inner strength, in our resilience, in our own judgments. I believe that we should find better ways of removing these invisible yet powerful barriers. It begins with programs like those offered by the GEC, but it takes shape, it is carried and lives on through you, through me, through us, and through the belief that we can, we deserve to, and we will come to a place where we choose Love.

The resting  
slab of dough  
doesn't see the rolling pin  
when it falls hard  
sinks deep  
and rolllllllllllllllllllllllllllllls  
to puuuuuuuuuush  
and puuuuuuuuuull  
and squeeEEEEEEZE  
my heart  
    d  
    o  
    w  
    n ....through my stomach  
back to my spine  
r e m o v i n g   a i r  
removing all  
My heart is empty  
thin and tired  
the dough rests  
                    ...but then the dough      rises.

by his or her Primary Health Care Provider can apply to receive training to become a Peer Mentor. The relationship is one of mutual sharing and learning. Very often, both sides gain insights into how to stay healthy and how to be more accepting of themselves. Too often we assume that the stigma surrounding addiction comes from outside sources. The truth is, nobody judges recovering addicts more harshly than they judge themselves.

Here are some of the services currently offered by the Griffith Edwards Centre:

- Short-term individual counselling
- Integrated psychiatric treatment and pharmacotherapy
- Hospitalization for detoxification
- Day program
- Group therapy
- 50+ Group
- Dual Diagnosis Group
- Recovery Transition Program



Throughout this period, patients will also have one-on-one appointments with a therapist in offices on the first or second floor, and follow up with a psychiatrist. When a patient has stabilized (this could mean simply accumulating clean time, having meds adjusted, or receiving further diagnoses) and is ready to move on to Phase II, he or she can join a weekly group that meets during the day or in the evening, depending on which is most convenient. In this phase, urine testing is still done and abstinence is required. Here, through group talk, individuals tackle the deeper issues of addiction. They dig a little deeper in order to develop problem-solving skills, to consider relapse prevention, and to search for ways to rebuild relationships. They stay in this group for several months, learning how to live sober. More importantly, they are learning how to keep learning.

One way to keep learning is to opt for what is now being referred to as Phase III – the Recovery Transition Program. A patient can meet with a Peer Mentor from the RTP for a number of one-on-one sessions (approximately 12) any time before leaving the care of the MUHC. The Peer Mentor is someone who has been through the Griffith Edwards (or the Allan Memorial) system of care and has taken an intensive 30 hour training course led by members of the RTP. Anyone who has received services within the MUHC Mental Health Mission and has been referred



## Rolling Pin

Cecelia Vanier

Photograph by Allison Vanier-Graham



A. Spence



SOMETIMES SESSIONS ARE HELD ONE-ON-ONE



SOMETIMES SESSIONS ARE GIVEN IN A GROUP

Crochet Artist: Veronica



# Griffith Edwards Centre

by Cecelia Vanier

On Pine Avenue just east of Côte-des-Neiges, nestled beneath the Montreal General Hospital, sits a stately house that once belonged to the prominent Birks family. Named after a British psychiatrist who pioneered the scientific treatment of addiction in the mid-20th century, the Griffith Edwards Centre houses the Addictions



Unit of the McGill University Health Centre. It provides therapeutic services to the English-speaking community of the Greater Montreal area. Within its walls you will find a friendly and dedicated host of therapists, psychiatrists, and hard-working administrative staff, as well as helpful volunteers from the Recovery Transition Program. From basement to attic, there is no shortage of smiles and words of encouragement.

A certain warmth and calmness fills this three-storey house. It emanates from the beautiful dark wainscoting in the foyer. It continues up the wide, welcoming spiral staircase that beckons you to the rooms above. You can feel it in the large but cozy basement; with its leather chairs, decorative throw pillows, and a corner kitchen that seems to brew an endless supply of coffee. A lot happens in this room.

People who are in the Phase I Day Program are here from Monday to Friday. The walls and tables are adorned with remnants of workshops and other ongoing activities. Here, patients experience the first weeks of sobriety as they learn coping strategies and skills. Here, they take part in group therapy, sometimes for the first time in their lives. Some may experience slips throughout this 6 week period, but they are encouraged to discuss this within the group and certainly with their therapist. It's much more empowering to say you've had a slip than to have it show up in the scheduled urine sample screens. Depending on the severity of a person's addiction, there is also the possibility of in-patient detoxing at the Montreal General Hospital next door. In such cases, the in-patients can leave the hospital during the day to participate in groups at the Griffith Edwards Centre.

## The Fear of Recovery

by Cami Evans

It's hard to talk about, this fear of recovery, its presence across all sorts of spectrums: depression, addiction, anxiety, psychosis, eating disorders, mood disorders. People experience this fear; they share worries throughout the mental health system without communicating them. Imagine sitting in a room where everyone is thinking the same thing but no one will voice it, and each person thinks they are alone with this fear. The silence is a powerful one, but it's not one of solidarity and closeness; it is one of confusion and self-doubt.

But why would anyone be afraid of getting better? That's the goal. Why avoid it? Where does this fear come from? Why does it seem like no one is talking about it? It's one of our biggest obstacles as people living with mental illness and addiction, but it's invisible. Invisible to others and often to ourselves.

For many of us, it's fear of the unknown. We know how things work in treatment programs, even when we're in the darkness. We know we have a system in place to help us at our weakest times. We're suffering, but safe. A lot of us don't remember how the outside world works, and some of us were never able to do well there in the first place. Many of us have traumatic memories of the outside world, leaving us with a faint sense of danger always looming just around the corner. If we made a recovery, the system of support that we've come to rely on so much would weaken; we would be doing well, but many of us fear we wouldn't be safe. The possibility of relapse is always present—sometimes faint, but still present.

Recovering seems like such a daunting task. The outside world feels foreign to many of us now. The insular nature of living with mental illness and addiction can create a barrier that we have a hard time breaking through. The world outside, while wonderful and enchanting, is also dangerous, and so self-sabotage can seem like such an easy, comforting option. Sometimes self-sabotage is done consciously, sometimes not, and it is usually a product of our own anxieties and doubts.

Maybe we'll tell little white lies to our friends, family, and therapist about how well we're doing and end up struggling alone despite being surrounded by people who are there for us. Maybe we'll push ourselves on a project to the point where we almost break down or

relapse. Maybe we'll go weeks without once leaving the house, telling ourselves we just can't, knowing full well that we have before, and slip back into old habits. Maybe we'll do things we know are unhealthy in order to cope. Maybe we'll put things off over and over until there's a mountain of unfinished tasks still in front of us. This is what self-sabotage can look like. How can we fight against it? How do we talk about it without feeling ashamed?

The weight of responsibility is another frightening aspect of recovery. I think this affects all of us, but is especially difficult for those who have struggled with substance abuse and addiction. The things said and done while abusing drugs and alcohol can leave scars that may never go away. Finally recovering means facing that. For recovering addicts, coming back to family is bittersweet. In recovery, we begin to understand the impact of our behaviour, and fight to forgive ourselves. We fight to humanize ourselves. The people on the outside, though, may have trouble seeing it that way. Having to face that again, now in our sober mind, is heartbreaking and certainly not easy.

Many patients worry that a full recovery means losing their support system entirely. What does it mean to recover? If we are still being supported, are we considered recovered? What do our health care providers mean when they say "recovery?" We know that an aspect of recovery is to gradually weave together and cast out our own safety net, but it can be hard to know how much you can rely on friends and family as opposed to a health care provider. These worries and anxieties pile up and can make us feel as if success is either impossible or too dangerous. What are the steps we can take to feel more confident about these things?

Another challenge we face is how stigma can affect working and personal relationships. When is it appropriate or necessary to disclose our status? How do we deal with pressure to share our stories when we don't feel comfortable? What do we do if we have overshared or confided in the wrong person and it causes problems at work, school, or amongst friends? Some of us are afraid of making a friend only to discover that they think poorly of people who have suffered through mental illness and addiction. Could it cause problems at work if coworkers or managers find out? Transitioning from a place where we can be so open about mental illness and our experiences to a place where we're expected to be quiet can feel suppressive, inauthentic, and isolating.

I strongly feel that stigma can magnify the fear of isolation a lot of us have regarding recovery.

## RTP Reads

*Maybe this is why we read, and why in moments of darkness we return to books: to find words for what we already know.*

—Alberto Manguel

In RTP Reads, those of us who find escape, essential connection to unacknowledged pain, or life-altering truth in literature—and who can't imagine life without it—meet to discuss books.

We meet once a month, on Tuesdays, from 4:00 to 6:00pm, in the RTP Resource Room (P2.036) at the Allan. Everybody is welcome.

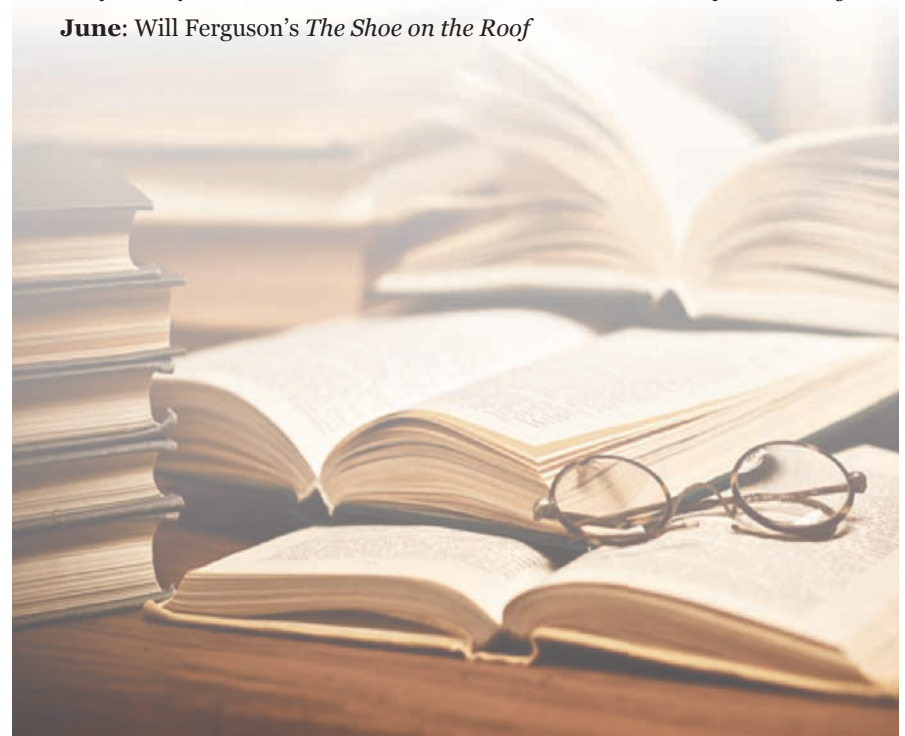
**February 13:** Sherman Alexie's *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*

**March:** Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*

**April:** Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*

**May:** Lesley Nneka Arimah's *What It Means When a Man Falls from the Sky*

**June:** Will Ferguson's *The Shoe on the Roof*



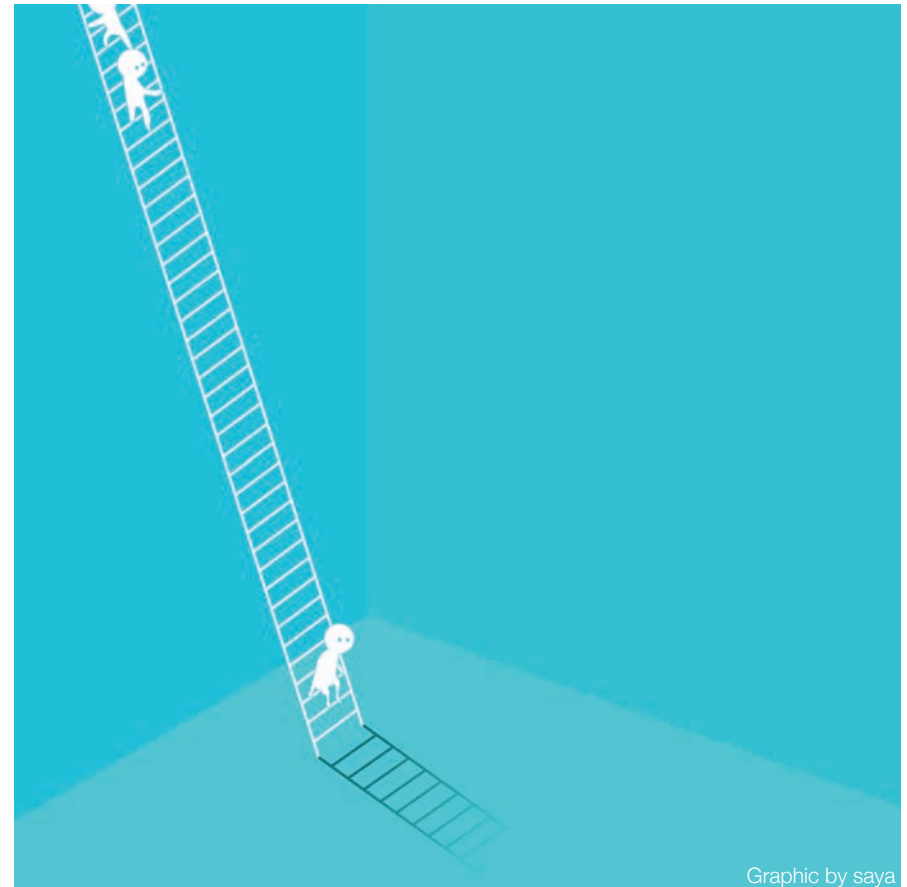
## Positive Thinking

The sun slowly sets in the West  
but in the East  
the stars are shining.

—Vince

When we get help, we begin to break out of our isolation. We are introduced to people who understand, people we share experiences with. Bonds formed by talking about trauma are very powerful and can feel more meaningful than other kinds of bonds. Sometimes we worry that the friendships we make outside of these unique spaces won't feel as deep. We worry that we'll only be able to talk about surface-level things. We worry that we'll be surrounded by friends but still be feeling alone.

It's hard to talk about, this fear of recovery. It's surrounded by all sorts of doubts and anxieties. I hope that by talking about it with each other and with our health care providers, we can find a way to break the endless spirals of worrying. I hope we can start asking questions about recovery that we can actually answer. I want to have a discussion and I hope you want to have one too.



Graphic by saya

# The Hour as it Fades

The faded book covers stand  
by the old magazines  
near where the dogs lie,  
the deck stretches around three sides  
and with nine  
is where we eat, sit, and talk;  
the talk is short, in bursts,  
largely what is needed,  
some that's appreciated,  
but with the ocean just below  
we listen to it lapping  
and watch the sun's trajectory,  
over and between the trees,  
which tells us all we need to know  
of the hour as it fades.



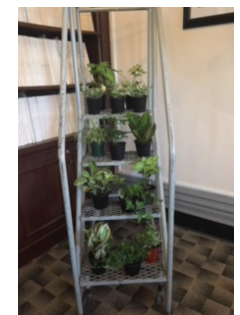
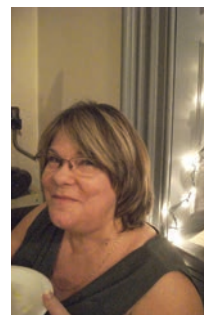
their dedication to providing peer support. A special thank you was extended to Melissa for chairing the Fundraising Committee and to Cecelia for helping to organize the talent show.



Bernie was celebrated for training the second cohort of Peer Mentors and for taking over leadership of the supervision meetings from Orly. Jean was acknowledged for her work as Chair of the Family Committee and for her participation on the Steering Committee. RTP co-leads Ronna and Kathryn were thanked for their leadership; the success of the Recovery Transition Program is rooted in their support.



The celebration ended with Bernie awarding training certificates to the second cohort of RTP Peer Mentors in recognition of their completion of a 30-hour training course followed by a 20-hour practicum. Their commitment is essential to the continued growth of the RTP.



Text by Patricia, Photos by Cecelia and Jean



## THE RTP CELEBRATES ITS SECOND YEAR!

RTP Peer Mentors, volunteers, and staff from the Griffith Edwards Centre and the Allan Memorial Institute celebrated the success of the Recovery Transition Program at the second annual holiday party and Peer Mentor certificate ceremony on the afternoon of December 11, 2017.

A festive and delicious potluck was organized by Cindy to acknowledge those who have contributed to the RTP. The success of the RTP is grounded in our volunteers' commitment to providing support for those receiving care within the MUHC Mental Health Mission.

Cecelia, Julia, Michael, and Orly were recognized for their involvement in the design and implementation of the RTP, their service on the Steering Committee, and



Matthew Peters

# Stories

Many health care professionals are drawn to psychiatry and psychology for the stories. There is nothing more exciting than a story that is unfolding before your very eyes.

Stories inspire us; they help us see the vast range of human emotions and conditions; they pull us into alternate realities; and they allow us connect with ourselves in different ways.

In our current health care system patients are moved between different staff and facilities as their conditions and needs change. As part of the old system, I had the wonderful opportunity to accompany patients for sometimes up to thirty years, and to really immerse myself in their stories. Still, these stories tended to be short stories rather than novels.

This is why it was so satisfying to hear about Kay Parley. At 93 years old she published *Inside the Mental: Silence, Stigma, Psychiatry and LSD*. Despite having suffered from mood episodes every six years until later in life, she managed, largely without medication, to develop a meaningful life. Her recovery process included being hospitalized in a big institution, then becoming a nurse. Instead of being intimidated by stigma, she learned to be an ambassador for educating people about mental illness. She used the skills learned in group therapy to manage her mood episodes. What struck me was that her increased self-knowledge allowed her to see what she wanted, work on her weaker points, and make wise choices for her life.

In those days, patients were all given specific tasks to do as work therapy, which was later misconstrued and falsely framed by some as a kind of slavery. In reality, according to Parley, this work created a sense of belonging and community, which she feels is now lacking. Her job editing a hospital publication gave her wings, and she claims the occupational therapists' involvement in the work therapy program with patients was the most useful aspect of life there.

Another interesting aspect of her story was her relationship with the head psychiatrist. When she wanted to become a nurse, he supported her fully. Eventually she wound up working in the same institution where she had been a patient. This also changed, but did not disrupt, her relationship with the nurses who had worked with her as

# Our Mind

## A Fundraising Event for the Mental Health Mission

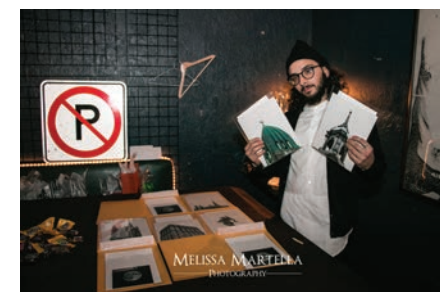
Mend Our Mind is an organization launched by Massimo Venturino that stages fundraising events to promote positive mental health through music and photography. Funds raised by Mend Our Mind will go towards developing programs and workshops for substance-use disorders and suicide prevention.

The first fundraising event, on November 4th, 2017, was a success, bringing together The It's Ok Project ([itsokproject.com](http://itsokproject.com)), Students in Mind ([studentsinmind.strikingly.com](http://studentsinmind.strikingly.com)), Ines Heals ([inesheals.com](http://inesheals.com)); photography by Liana Carbone ([lianacarbone.com](http://lianacarbone.com)) and Perceptions ([perceptions.photography](http://perceptions.photography)); and music by Cinzia ([soundcloud.com/cinziaabbate](http://soundcloud.com/cinziaabbate)), Maple Treeway ([mapletreeway.bandcamp.com](http://mapletreeway.bandcamp.com)), Matty Parker ([facebook.com/MattyParkerBand](http://facebook.com/MattyParkerBand)), and Kurt Chaboyer ([kurtchaboyer.bandcamp.com](http://kurtchaboyer.bandcamp.com)).



For more information on future events or to stay connected, follow Mend Our Mind on Instagram @mendourmind or get in touch by email at [info@mendourmind.com](mailto:info@mendourmind.com).

Text by Massimo Venturino



# Mend



As I was taking this photo of Jean next to the photographs of the Allan family, in the old library, she told me the story of how the Allan family suffered devastating losses in the First World War and how this led them to donate this beautiful estate to a mental health program.

Thank you, Jean, I look forward to hearing your stories again next time...  
by saya

a patient. The new peer mentoring program at the Allan and a renewed emphasis on including patients in their treatment plans remind me of those days, and will hopefully help foster the kinds of rewarding therapeutic relationships I witnessed during my own career.

Read Kay Parley's fascinating story for yourself:

Kay Parley. *Inside the Mental: Silence, Stigma, Psychiatry and LSD*. University of Regina Press. March 2016. IBSD-10 0889774117.

Or listen

- on CBC Radio July 15, 2016. "Encore: 93 year old former psychiatric patient and nurse shares lessons from LSD" on Home/ The Current with Anna Maria Tremonti.
- Leader post.com "At 93, Kay Parley looks back on a psychedelic life of mental illness, writing and LSD." April 15, 2016.

Jean Enright, RTP Volunteer

Jean worked in psychiatric nursing for most of her professional life, including five years in Addictions and several decades in Mood Disorders. Since her retirement several years ago, she became a volunteer on the Patient Committee at the Allan and a member of the Steering Committee in the RTP. A tireless champion of our program since its inception, Jean has also made many a meeting more enjoyable by treating us to her delicious home-baked cookies and loaves.

# Sunshine Moon

Does the sunshine  
Miss the moonlight  
That unattainable  
Pleasure  
An absence  
So intense  
One cannot  
Seem to measure  
Or  
Does the sunshine  
Have an insight  
That unimaginable  
Calm  
A know how  
Way deep down  
“Love the self  
And be your song”

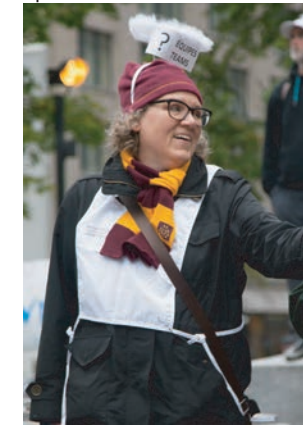
A. Spence



Cecelia Vanier accepts a \$2,500 cheque for the RTP from Suzanne Herscovitch, President of the Montreal Walks for Mental Health Foundation.



Lori Goodhand keeps things upbeat.



Ian Kelly performs a mini-concert





# Recovery Transition Program at Montréal Walks for Mental Health

Montréal Walks for Mental Health is an annual 3K walk organized by the Montréal Walks for Mental Health Foundation. Every fall, walkers take to the streets of downtown Montreal to help increase public awareness about mental health and eliminate stigma and discrimination against people living with mental illness. The walk is also an opportunity to raise funds for organizations providing mental health services.

On October 15, 2017, members and friends of the RTP met at Phillips Square and walked towards a world without stigma. The crowd was substantial and full of energy; the weather was slightly misty and mild. After a short musical performance by Ian Kelly and a few words of encouragement from guest speakers (including the announcement that the RTP had been chosen to receive a \$2,500 grant), we were on our way. The time flew as we marched the distance, running into old friends and meeting new—catching up on what various groups are doing. Of course, the day was capped off with more music and the traditional line dance back at Phillips Square, with Lori Goodhand of Montréal Walks on cowbell!

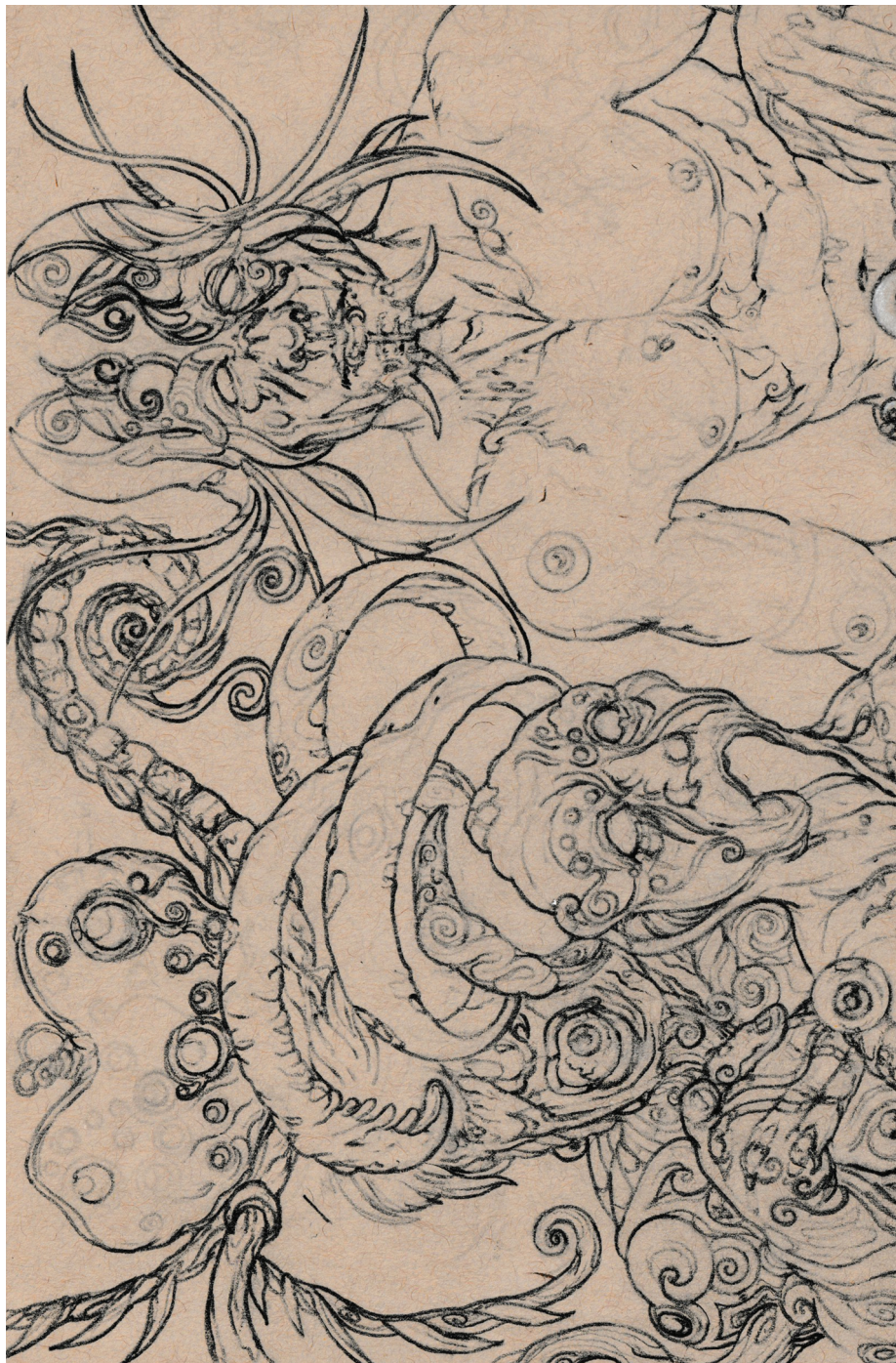
Two weeks later we wrapped up our online donation page for this event, bringing in a total of \$2,160 from supporters near and far. A huge thank you to all who helped out.

Text by Cecelia Vanier





Untitled by Shawn Smith



## A day at a time

One day at a time  
One foot in front of another.  
Afraid and balancing  
to keep from going under.  
Hands reach out  
because though the journey goes on  
no one said  
you must complete it on your own.  
So let each dawn  
set a new attitude.  
You are not alone.  
Reexamine your essence  
until certainty sets in your bones.  
The end goal always on the mind  
but do not obsess  
since even in conflict  
you can make a home.  
So roam...  
In peace...  
There is no deadline.  
One day at a time.  
One foot in front of another.  
Let each step, forward or backward  
carry purpose.  
You only have this one journey.  
It is unique,  
it is yours,  
and it is like... no... other.

A. Spence

## A Forward Motion II: Vancouver to Saskatchewan Gregory

The train starts moving. Soon the nighttime city's regular light fragments into more uneven patterns. I keep watch out the window, determined to take in every millimetre of the route. In the glass, my reflection flies silently over a low tangle of dusty brambles that never leaves the tracks' side. From time to time the dim monotony is broken up by a side road draped perpendicular across our path. But from where I'm sitting I'm always late to the intersection—the guard rail is already lowered, amber lights flashing in warning for cars that aren't there against an oncoming locomotive that has already passed.

I can't look away. There's something out there, and if I keep watching long enough the repetitions will chip away at my expectations until there is nothing left to dull my contact with it. I'm afraid that, if I don't keep watching, the empty distance in front of me will collapse into a series of senseless intermediate arrivals until I blindly reach the end of the line only to find myself still in pieces.

The night uncoils in front of me, stretching out towards the dawn. I don't remember when the scattered lights finally give in to the thickening darkness. The train must still be climbing through the lower Fraser River Valley when I fall asleep. It's a deep simple travel sleep that propels me forward, brings me up to terminal velocity. For now my old thoughts can't reach me without violating the laws of physics. From here to Montreal, as long as I maintain the momentum, I have myself caught.

The late-fall mountains rise in horizontal bands of colour—clumps of dark green pines, yellow grass dried out and gone to seed, pools of clear water collected in the clean-edged cup of a granite basin that reflect the striations of white clouds ploughed into the blue sky—in a landscape held together by its own collective weight. Over the loudspeaker the conductor announces Mount Robson on the left side of the train and with it the continental divide.

Just like that I'm over the pass. Just like that I'm brought to tears here where they no longer have any chance of reaching you. But the crossing stirs the hope that there is a way to keep the two sides of the divide, the damp windward slope and the dry rain shadow, together in



A World of

# Marvels

by Mara Di Staulo, Medical Secretary at the AMI



I admire all that is noble and truthful, and I recognize all that is beautiful around me. Still today, at the age of 51, I am in awe of how the Universe expresses its purest divine form through the beauty with which this world is endowed. I have always felt this vibrational and peaceful energy within and all around me – even more so when at my lowest moments.

Without seeking them, I discover unusual, impressive signs revealed in the sky, on the ground – anywhere and everywhere. With only my cell phone, I’ve captured exceptional images, orbs, and just recently a “fairy” for your eyes to marvel at (see images). Native North Americans believed in fairies. With the Native North Americans being so in tune with nature, why should their beliefs be so different from those of the ancient Celts and other Europeans? Many people, both native and new to this continent, have had encounters with these “little subtle light creatures,” what many call faeries.

Although I’ve always believed that “the world is a mysterious and marvellous place,” seeing examples in my everyday life and recording them over the years is not only mysterious – it’s MAGICAL! Knowing that there’s something more than what ordinarily meets the eye is truly awesome. I believe that all hidden connections are stronger than the obvious ones; coincidences and synchronicities are ALL part of this beautiful form of communication that is based on vibrational frequencies. As long as I’m here on this Earth, I will look forward to being shown many more dazzling surprises.

*The Universe is saying: Allow me to flow through you unrestricted, and you will see the greatest magic you have ever seen.*

— Klaus Joehle, German-Canadian metaphysical author

the same thought. If I could tear up the line of rammed earth that has brought me this far, dive naked into the reservoir gathered between the drowned forest and the hemmed-in sky—there I would hold this moment of breach tight until in the anaerobic closeness my suffocated skin is cured to leather the colour of oil.

The mountain fades from view. Gravity begins to pull the train down towards the prairie. There is no beauty capable of exhausting the paths that lead back to you who are slipping away in the glissando of the train’s steel wheels, faster and faster—my mind passes across the memory like a novice artist passes their pencil across the page again and again in an approximation of the form they know is there somewhere in the accumulation of lines, but which their imagination can’t call up until they recognize it staring back at them from the paper—until the speed alone is enough to create a sense of clean contiguity.

I sit down with my cheeseburger and fries at a concrete picnic table just outside the Jasper train station. The sky is clear in the October afternoon. The sun’s warmth pierces through the wind that intermittently threatens to blow away my stack of paper napkins. They’ve cut our hour-long stop-over in half in order to make up some of the time we’ve lost against our scheduled arrival in Edmonton. Most of the passengers are still out taking advantage of the chance to stretch their legs. There are only a few of us milling around the station, waiting for the train to leave again.

A kid in torn black jeans and a baggy flannel shirt sits down across from me. He’s taking the train as far as Saskatoon. Then he’ll hitch a ride down to Regina where he’s got a place to stay with a friend. He’s vague about what he’ll do there, how long he’ll stay, and who exactly he’s staying with. Not evasive. Just has a way of speaking as though the reasoning behind what he says is so self-evident that it doesn’t even occur to him I might not share the context needed to see the connections. I’m both relieved and a little worried that neither of us have much of a plan for our destination other than the getting there. He tells me a story the specifics of which are no clearer to me than why he’s going to Regina, but it seems that he’s crisscrossed the West a few times already by bus, hitching, or tagging along with friends, and I get the impression that doing this leg by train is something of a present he’s giving himself for

graduating high school and never having to see his dad again.

He reminds me of you. When we used to paint each other's nails black and believed that there were no secrets between us. It was only at the end that I pieced together what you'd avoided saying. Even then I didn't ask why you'd hidden it. Too much time had passed for me to still think that it was the kind of thing you could come out and say. In any case, I could see that you'd been piecing together the gaps in my secrets too, and recrimination would only lend a bitter taste to our already mutually assured destruction.

A man who looks to be somewhere in his early fifties joins us at the table. He's getting off in Saskatoon too. Offers to give the kid a ride down to Moose Jaw where he runs a taxi company. Says he likes it out there. Didn't care for the city life in Saskatoon so he settled down somewhere a little quieter. He just smiles when I say I'm headed to Montreal. "Different strokes for different folks." We're both amused at the banality of the wisdom we've uncovered.

I wake up at around five or six in the morning to the vibrations of the train's movement. Outside the window, the ground flows by covered in a mist with just enough mass to sink down into the hollows, smoothing the pock-marked earth into a perfectly level surface that fades evenly into the sky. In the fields on either side of the tracks flocks of snow geese search for leftover grain among rotting cereal stalks, just insubstantial enough to not collapse under their own weight.

I push back the metaphors that spring to mind. I can feel the emptiness begin to wrap itself around me in an impermeable layer of similarity. When I can't keep a hold on the world as it presents itself, the emptiness goes about creating a new one all soft and airy to insulate me from the singular immediacy of things. It extracts the sensual qualities from my surroundings and stretches them out across the real and imagined alike, weaving a safety net of facile commonality. The geese soft and downy like the fog. The wheat stalks' paper-thin walls fragile like the present moment. The fog blurring the horizon line in the same way my memories of you blur into me. But it keeps on compulsively adding more material. Every morning presses down with the weight of every other identical morning. Every night keeps me awake staring into the depth of every other identical night. The spaces in the weave get smaller and smaller,



Painting by Julia Bene



## Why am I a Peer Mentor?

### To Listen — To Share — To Motivate

Because I am grateful for how my recovery has progressed so far, I feel obligated to give whatever I can to other people who are going through what I went through, in the hope that it can help them to succeed.

If having an extra ear to listen to you while you talk your way through a problem is what you need.... then you can have my ear. If you ask for advice.... then I'm willing to share with you what works for me. If you need help setting goals and realizing them.... I'll help you push yourself.

So on the one hand, I believe in volunteering and in helping others, because it's a big part of honouring the spirit of gratitude for what I myself have received. Yet on the other hand, I also believe in self-preservation. Knowing that I have a better life because I am sober means never taking my sobriety for granted. It will always be a work in progress. Working with peers reminds me of how my life was in the earlier stages of sobriety. It gives me a renewed perspective of where I've been, where I am, and where I'm going. In other words, by trying to help others, I also help myself. Together, we strengthen each other's ability to succeed. That's how and why peer mentoring works, and it explains our motto:

*"Peers healing through helping"*

Cecelia Vanier  
RTP Peer Mentor  
Griffith Edwards Centre

disappear altogether, and before I know it I'm in a cocoon, the solid edges of my body liquefying in preparation for a metamorphosis that evolution hasn't prepared me to complete.

I resolve to watch the snow geese as they are, to take note of what they look like then and there, rising out of the dew-damp fields when the noise of the oncoming train passes the threshold that signals danger.

With my cheek resting against the window I listen to the hum of the train's progress vibrate across my skull. The sky is mottled with pastel blues and pinks above a morning that offers the possibility of an encounter with the day so sincere that finally I'll want nothing else than to watch the sun rise. But the sun only gets higher, the fog evaporates, and all the while the train keeps moving forward, splitting a line through fields of broken stalks, muck, and goose shit. I strain to push back the metaphors that spring to mind.

The evening sun falls in warm parallelograms through the glass-and-aluminum-bubble roof of the observation car's empty second floor. The man from Moose Jaw takes me by surprise when he appears at the top of the stairway. He notices that I'm writing but does me the courtesy of asking what I'm doing, giving me the choice of plausible deniability if I don't want to talk about it. I tell him that I'm writing a story but I'm not sure if it'll turn out. It's the first time I've told anyone. He smiles and sits down across the aisle from me. It's the same smile as when I told him I was going to Montreal, the same one as when I told him my favourite song by the Ramones was "Sheena is a Punk Rocker" but couldn't say why. I get the feeling it wouldn't have mattered if I said that I was writing a suicide note for a self I wasn't sure would last long enough to use it, or that I was balancing my chequebook—he would have reacted the same way.

I feel obliged to offer up a couple of tentative opinions by way of conversation—the relative merits of the city and the country, that the speed of train travel is the one most suited to the speed of human perception—but it soon becomes clear that, though we both enjoy the company, neither of us is particularly interested in anything the other has to say. We instead watch in silence as the light dims to the easy rhythm of the car rumbling over the rails.



**Pretend Land**

As your body melts  
Let your kite fly far away  
Into a land that you've spent so long to create  
Swirl and Twirl  
In the frosty light  
Get tangled and mangled  
In tender caresses  
Not meant for the roused to see  
Get left behind  
Behind where the claws come out to play  
Entertain their malice  
It's better than going back anyways  
As the sun rises  
Your kite makes its way back to its shell  
The familiar sound of the passing airplane  
Lie still  
And it might go away  
Wake up  
It's time for another day