

## **26<sup>th</sup> Annual *Peace of Minds Walk* Returns to Toronto!**

*Did you know that more than 140,000 Ontarians have schizophrenia, and more than 1 million Canadians experience psychosis? Today we walk to support them and their families*

**Toronto, ON - September 11, 2019** - On Saturday, September 21, 2019, join friends, families and supporters of the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (SSO) at David Pecaut Square as they kick off SSO's annual *Peace of Minds Walk* to raise awareness, spread a message of hope and raise funds for vital programs and services helping families in our community who are impacted by mental illness.

Started in a church basement in Oakville 40 years ago, SSO has evolved into one of the leading provincial mental health charities, touching the lives of thousands of Canadians affected by schizophrenia and psychosis each and every year through services and programs such as its free "Ask the Expert" counselling helpline, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) workshops for psychosis, recovery and support groups in the community and provincial Speakers Bureau.

More importantly, SSO has created supportive communities for caregivers and those living with schizophrenia, making an invaluable positive difference and bringing HOPE to thousands. Since 1993, SSO has also contributed over \$1 million to research on schizophrenia and psychotic illnesses by funding over 20 projects and new and established scientists. While the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario has grown tremendously since its humble beginnings, they continue relying on support from the community to help light up the lives of those living with or affected by schizophrenia and psychosis.

"We are excited to bring the Peace of Minds Walk to Toronto once again this year; we know that people with mental illness are best supported in communities in which they live – that's what recovery is truly about," says Ania Jones, Communications Manager, SSO. "People living with mental illness need to be recognized and included as members of our communities. We all need to look beyond the label of mental illness, to see the person and their potential. There are often many misconceptions about schizophrenia and psychosis, but with the right treatment and support, people affected by schizophrenia can have every chance to live a healthy, full life."

The 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Peace of Minds Walk is open to the public and free to attend with family friendly activities focused on health, wellness and better mental health. With keynote speeches from local MPPs, members of the SSO Speakers Bureau, and TEDx Speaker Asante Haughton and special violin performance by Nathan Roder, the event is expected to draw a diverse and enthusiastic audience all in support of SSO and its programs and services.

While the event is free to attend, we encourage those interested in joining to register [here](#).

**Who:** Schizophrenia Society of Ontario

**What:** ***2019 Peace of Minds Walk for mental health in Toronto***

**Why:** To raise mental health awareness, spread a message of hope and support vital mental health programs & services for anyone impacted by schizophrenia and psychosis.



**Where:** David Pecaut Square, 215 King Street West, Toronto, ON

**When:** September 21, 2019  
Registration: 11:00 am  
Walk: 12:00 pm

**Keynote Speakers (Presentations from 1pm to 1:20pm):**

- Master of Ceremony Mike Stroh, Founder and Director, *Starts with Me* at **1:00 pm**
- Opening remarks by Mary Alberti, CEO, Schizophrenia Society of Ontario
- Chris Glover, MPP
- Jesse Bigelow, SSO Speakers Bureau
- Chris Whittaker, SSO Speakers Bureau
- Marie Roder, SSO Speakers Bureau, with special violin performance by husband Nathan Roder
- Keynote speech by **Asante Haughton**, Award winning mental health advocate and TEDx speaker at **1:20 pm**<sup>[AB1]</sup>

**Featuring:**

- Yoga in the Park by Espe Yoga Barn Canada at 11:15 am
- Brain fitness FUNDamentals with Paul Hyman, Wellness and Lifestyle Consultant at 11:45 am
- Mindfulness Chi Gong Chinese Yoga by Master Teresa Yeung at 12:45 pm
- Hip-hop sensation performance by Unity at 1:30 pm
- Dance, sing and make music with Sky's Music World at 1:45 pm
- Yoga in the Park with Master Teresa Yeung at 2:15 pm
- All day Kids Zone featuring circus castle, craft station, face painting
- All day interactive painting art mural by Art Factory

After 40 years as a forward-thinking community organization, the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario continues its focus on the future and on change for the better. As we look to the future and what it means to stay relevant as a community mental health organization today, we stay rooted in our commitment to improving the lives of others. Our next step in embracing our future includes [the Institute of Advancements in Mental Health](#) (IAM). With 40 years of making history behind us, we remain nimble and creative while staying rooted in our commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of people and communities affected by mental illness.

**All media members are invited to attend.**



**We invite members of the media to schedule or pre-schedule interview with our speakers (more details below) and attend our event on September 21<sup>st</sup> at David Pecaut Square from 11 – 3 pm EST.**

**Media Contact:** *For more information and to request an interview, contact:*

**Ania Jones**, Manager, Communications, Public Relations & Marketing, [ajones@schizophrenia.on.ca](mailto:ajones@schizophrenia.on.ca) or 416-819-8542 (mobile) AND; **Jack Harding**, Co-Founder, Diner Agency, [Jack@DinerAgency.com](mailto:Jack@DinerAgency.com) or 416-801-4423 (mobile)

Serving communities across the province for the past 40 years, the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario is dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of people, families and communities affected by schizophrenia and psychotic illnesses. For more information, please visit:

<http://www.schizophrenia.on.ca/>. **Watch SSO's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary video here.**

### **About Speakers Available for Interviews During The Event**

#### **Mary Alberti, CEO, SSO**

Mary Alberti is a leader with 30+ years of experience in the health and community sectors. She has a passion to build a more responsive health care system that improves the quality of life for the people who use it. Under her leadership, SSO became a dynamic organization serving people living with schizophrenia and psychosis and their families. Her extensive experience in direct service provision at the executive level and her tireless advocacy to improve health policy led to an interest in broader system transformation and infusing innovation into the work of SSO.

#### **Erin Boudreau, Lead, Policy, Government and Community Relations, SSO**

Erin Boudreau is the head of policy, government relations and community engagement at the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario. A long-time mental health advocate, Erin has worked in the government, child and youth mental health and youth homelessness sectors. Erin has a BA in political science and diploma in HR management from McMaster University and serves as vice chair of Griffin Centre Mental Health Services' board of directors. Erin is the recipient of an Ontario Volunteer Service Award for five years' service in the Centre of Addiction and Mental Health's Clinical Volunteer Program.

#### **Asante Haughton**

Passionate about social justice and equity, Asante Haughton is a national award winning mental health advocate dedicated to endeavours aimed at building stronger communities. He is a peer worker, poet, thinker and speaker who believes in people, global interconnectivity, and positive personal change. Asante's peer work has brought him across Canada, to the United States, Colombia and most recently, Ireland. Asante has also made noise as a two-time TEDx speaker and he was recognized by CAMH as one of the top 150 Difference Makers in mental health in Canada. Finally, Asante was featured in the most recent Bell Let's Talk prime time documentary special.

### **Chris Whittaker, Lived Experience Speaker**

When Chris was 23, his parents became concerned about his behaviour. His calls home became filled with delusional thoughts about people – even his family – conspiring against him. Fearing for his health and well-being, Chris’ parents took him to the hospital. Today, Chris obtained his library technician diploma from Seneca College, and hired as a cataloguer at the Consumer/Survivor Information Resource Centre, working his way up to coordinator and then executive director – a position he held for three years. As an SSO spokesperson on their Speakers Bureau, Chris wants to share his story to educate others about recovery, support, and overall well-being.

### **Jesse Bigelow, Lived Experience Speaker**

Jesse Bigelow leads peer support groups and has become an outspoken advocate for people who face stigma and discrimination because of mental illness. Jesse’s drive and passion for the work he does comes from first-hand experience. Today Jesse takes his experiences, and uses them to help families and individuals cope with mental health issues. Whether he’s just socializing with friends, giving talks about his experiences, or doing his weekly yoga class, Jesse is there to help, to educate, and make people aware about mental illness. Jesse and his family are grateful to SSO for the help they provided, and for the help they provide to other families across Ontario.

### **Marie Roder, Lived Experience Speaker**

Just before she turned 16, Marie Asuncion began feeling that things weren’t quite right. She was experiencing paranoia, feeling anxious and hearing voices. Not sure what was happening, she just tried to ignore it. After several weeks of ongoing symptoms, Marie had a full-blown episode of psychosis. Today, Marie is a language teacher, an accomplished musician, and mental health advocate. As an SSO spokesperson on their Speakers Bureau, Marie shares her story so that young people are aware of the illness and don’t wait to seek help.

### **Michael Stroh, Advocate**

Mike Stroh is a mental health & well-being advocate, speaker, and educator. He lived with many mental health challenges before entering recovery. Drawing from unique personal and family experiences, he shares a message of courage, hope, resilience, and joy. Mike founded Starts With Me as a platform to share his message. Working with schools, community service providers, hospitals, and businesses, Starts With Me launched the ‘State Of Mind’ Festival to support gaps in education and services along with empowering families and individuals to increase their capacity for well-being. Mike’s inspiration to improve system services comes from his experience as a family caregiver to his brother who lives with schizophrenia. Currently, Starts With Me is partnered with the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board to deliver mental health talks, presentations, and workshops.