



May 7, 2019

Schizophrenia Society of Ontario celebrates 40 years of lighting up the lives of those living with and affected by schizophrenia and psychosis

### [Watch SSO 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Video](#)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** So much can change in 40 years, and that story of evolution and growth is one the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (SSO) is looking to share this **National Schizophrenia and Psychosis Awareness Day** (NSPAD) as the society marks their 40th anniversary.

Started 40 years ago by Bill and Dorothy Jefferies, the (then) 'Ontario Friends of Schizophrenics' was launched in the basement of a church in Oakville because as caregivers, they found the level of support in their community was not enough. While additional support for caregivers and those living with serious mental illnesses is still something that can be improved in today's health care system – more than 1 million Canadians live with psychosis and 140,000 Ontarians have schizophrenia – SSO has made major strides in bringing hope and improving lives since their inception in 1979.

"I often wonder how my life would be different if I got the help I needed at 17 instead of in my thirties," says SSO Speakers Bureau Member Linda Monteith, an artist and advocate living with mental illness. "I want to start the conversation about psychosis and bring it into the mainstream to educate people."

From supporting nearly **10,000 Ontarians annually** through programs, services and events to helping thousands more through their province-wide counselling helpline, SSO touches the lives of **tens of thousands of Ontarians** each year. More importantly, SSO has created more supportive communities for caregivers and those living with schizophrenia, making an invaluable positive difference in their lives.

SSO has engaged in important psychosocial and biomedical research initiatives supported by the research fund established in honour of Bill Jefferies, leading to health and policy reform and better programs and services for those living with schizophrenia. While this type of system level change is key, the charity stresses the importance of community now more than ever. "**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. "**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.**"



This is why SSO has four regional offices, including Toronto, nearly 20 staff and a network of more than 100 volunteers to help their community of support span across Ontario.

In an ever-changing mental health landscape, SSO CEO Mary Alberti, together with its Board, recognized the need for the evolution of the charity, launching its new innovation platform, the [Institute for Advancements in Mental Health \(IAM\)](#) in 2018. IAM is focused on redesigning society for better mental health. **“Our vision is to collaborate both within and outside of the mental health system to inspire and lead the development of new ideas, solutions and services to better support people living with mental illness, and the possibilities are endless,”** says Alberti.

SSO looks forward this May 24<sup>th</sup>, marking their first 40 years as just the beginning of their work of what they hope will lead to a brighter, more inclusive future for those living with serious mental illness, including improved support systems for both those living with schizophrenia and psychosis and for their caregivers as well.

Please join SSO in celebrating National Schizophrenia and Psychosis Awareness Day on May 24<sup>th</sup>.

- Who:** Schizophrenia Society of Ontario
- What:** *Media and influencer day* to spread the word and raise awareness in support of National Schizophrenia and Psychosis Awareness Day
- Where:** The Richmond, 477 Richmond St W #104
- Time:** 11am to 2pm
- Why:** Help shine the light on schizophrenia and psychosis! Join us to help raise the profile of this serious yet often under-talked about illness **with a media and influencer event** featuring interviews and talks with SSO **guest speakers** ranging from **SSO staff and leaders, to CEOs and entrepreneurs, to medical professionals.**

In addition to this event, the Toronto Sign, The CN Tower, and Niagara Falls will all be lit purple and green as a sign of support for SSO, and a way to pay respect to all the bright lives and stories of those SSO has worked with over the past 40 years.

Earlier this year, SSO celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a fundraiser in March at CSI Lounge in Toronto, featuring local artists Carmen Elle and KASHKA and supported by partners such as Kobo, Lyft and TruLocal.

**We invite members of the media to schedule or preschedule interview with our speakers (more details below) and attend our event on May 24<sup>th</sup> at the Richmond in the heart of Toronto’s fashion district from 11-2pm EST.**

*For more information, contact:*



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**About the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (SSO)** 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/>

**About Speakers Available for Interviews**

**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.

**Diane Milton, Board Member, SSO**

Diane Milton has obtained her Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology and is currently employed as a clinical mental health counsellor at the Canadian Mental Health Association of Niagara. Diane's focus is on supporting families and their loved ones with mental health issues as a support group facilitator with the Family Support Network of Niagara and the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario.

**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 for Addiction and Mental Health's Clinical Volunteer Program.

**Glen Grunwald, CEO, Canada Basketball**

Glen is an attorney and basketball executive who currently serves as President and CEO of Canada Basketball. He previously served as director of athletics for McMaster University. In addition, he previously served as general manager of the Toronto Raptors and New York Knicks. Glen is an advocate for mental health, recently having lost his brother Gary, who lived with schizophrenia. Grunwald is willing to share his story to help families of those affected by mental illness, hoping that sharing his story and promoting a better understanding serves to benefit others.

### **Shane Christensen, Caregiver and Advocate**

Shane is a caregiver to an adult son with schizophrenia and his perspective on mental illness and schizophrenia is based upon a lifetime of experiences with close family members. Shane's core belief to overcoming adversity is to maintain a positive outlook and a healthy lifestyle, and to accept the reality that life can be difficult, yet rewarding. He has experienced the heartbreaking loss of loved ones but has revelled in his son's triumph over mental illness. He sums up the importance of maintaining happiness and quality of life by borrowing from a Bruce Cockburn classic: *You kick at the darkness until it bleeds daylight!* Shane loves to travel, works in civil service and in the past spent more than 10 years volunteering with a local auxiliary police service.

### **Michael Prosserman, Advocate**

Michael Prosserman is a professional speaker, coach and the Founder of Unity Charity ([www.unitycharity.com](http://www.unitycharity.com)), an organization using Hip Hop to improve youth mental health and well-being. He is also a Course Instructor with the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies. Michael is a mental health advocate and has a close relative who lives with schizophrenia.

### **Dr. Suzanne Archie, Scientific Advisor, Schizophrenia Society of Ontario**

Dr. Suzanne Archie, MD, FRCPC, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences at McMaster University and is the Clinical Director of the Cleghorn Early Intervention in Psychosis Program at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton.

### **Dr. Tom Hastings, Lead Psychiatrist, Phoenix Early Intervention in Psychosis Program**

Dr. Hastings is the Lead Psychiatrist for the Region of Halton's Early Intervention in Psychosis Program (Phoenix Program), a recovery-focused clinical program affiliated with the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario, Halton Healthcare Services, Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital, North Halton Mental Health Clinic and ADAPT. The program offers treatment and support to individuals with psychosis, including support for caregivers and families. The early intervention program focuses on maintaining a culture of hope and excitement about the possibilities for the future.

### **Dr. Gary Remington, Scientific Advisor, Schizophrenia Society of Ontario**

Dr. Gary Remington is Senior Scientist in the Campbell Family Mental Health Research Institute and Chief of the Schizophrenia Division at CAMH. He is also Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto. Gary Remington researches the pharmacotherapy of schizophrenia, particularly as it applies to psychosis and treatment response. He is currently part of a working group at the University of Toronto focusing on the different symptom domains and subtypes of schizophrenia.

### **Linda Monteith Gardiner, Lived Experience Speaker**

An artist and photographer living with schizoaffective disorder, Linda is a member of SSO's Speaker's Bureau. When Linda stepped on stage to give her high school valedictorian address, she was experiencing her first manic episode. Linda wants to tell her story to emphasize the importance of early intervention and to help eliminate the stigma around schizophrenia and psychosis.

### **Ilyas Khamis, Lived Experience Speaker**

Ilyas experienced an episode of psychosis while at the University of Ottawa that changed the direction of his life. Member of SSO's Speakers Bureau, Ilyas uses his spare time to advocate for people with lived experience through sharing his story and expertise with the goal of eradicating the barriers faced by



people who have had struggles with their mental health. Ilyas works as a peer support worker at a First Episode Psychosis clinic in the GTA.

### **Marie Asuncion, 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, 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.

### **Adam Grearson, SSO Scholarship Recipient**

Adam has recently completed his Master's degree in sociology at McMaster University with a focus on mental health. He will be beginning his PhD in sociology at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia this September, where his research will continue to focus on university students' mental health experiences. His goal is to help change the way we think about mental health and feels education has helped him move closer to this goal. Adam says, "For me, everything changed when I took a community-based education course where I conducted my first mental health study and realized that I loved and excelled in research. More importantly, this gave me a passion to improve the mental health experiences of all people. I am excited to move so much closer to my goal of achieving significant social change in the area of mental health."

### **Jonathan Marco, SSO Scholarship Recipient**

Jonathan Marco holds an Honors BA in psychology, Primary Care Paramedic diploma, and is currently completing his BSCN in nursing at Ryerson University. He will be graduating in 2020. He is then hoping to pursue additional education for his final goal of working as a Nurse Practitioner. He hopes to eventually work in emergency services, including emergency room and air ambulance service. Through his work as a PSW and his third year of nursing which focused on community practice, Jonathan developed an additional interest in the area of community mental health nursing.