

Winter 2021

## Adapt, Persevere and Grow – A Pandemic Tale of Resilience and Courage

Reflections from our CEO Dr. Valerie Grdisa

On the day the Canadian Mental Health Association, Simcoe County Board announced Feb. 4, 2020, that Valerie Grdisa would become its new chief executive officer; there were three confirmed cases in Canada of what was then called the “novel coronavirus.” By the time Dr. Grdisa officially assumed her post on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, the Government of Ontario had declared a state of emergency, the worst pandemic in a century was shutting down economies, threatening health care systems and COVID-19 was well on its way to infecting more than 120 million people and causing more than 2.6 million deaths worldwide. [Read more](#)



### Virtual Gala Helps Youth Shine

A mother's story shared by Natalie Conlon, Mental Health Ambassador

In 2015, Natalie Conlon's son Mitchell was only 17-years-old when he died of suicide, his loss delivering waves of grief and shock that continue to this day: Mitchell had been outwardly successful in everything he did, playing AAA hockey, excelling in school, having lots of friends and planning a trip to the Dominican Republic with his girlfriend. He was the sort of kid who always had a smile on his face and a shoulder for others to lean on, a quality that perhaps made him uncomfortable disclosing inner struggles he kept well hidden. [Read more](#)

### Crisis Services Find Home in Hotel

Interview with Kerry Dault, Manager of Crisis Services CMHA SC

When the pandemic struck, those who manage crisis services for CMHA reacted decisively. “It was like a whirlwind in March. The Agency has to make quick adjustments,” said Kerry Dault, the program manager of crisis services. The first priority was to find a new and safe home for those in crisis beds because CARAH house did not allow for proper physical distancing to meet public health measures. [Read more](#)



### Virtual Volunteers, Real Success

Our CMHA SC volunteer's experience and Marg Gow, Co-ordinator of Volunteer Resources CMHA SC

Megan Nahuis, 28, moved in January 2020 to be with family northeast of Wasaga Beach in Tiny Township after a stint working overseas in London, UK. “I was planning to stay a few months. Then, the pandemic hit,” said Nahuis, who studied

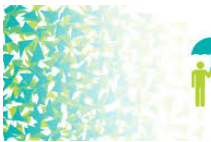
psychology and social development at the University of Waterloo before working in human resources. In November 2020, she volunteered through CMHA's RSVP program, phoning weekly a client who is socially isolated. [Read more](#)



## Paramedic Partnership Breaks Barriers

Highlighting an innovative model of care with Aleta Armstrong, Director of Community Engagement, Inclusivity and Fundraising at CMHA and Paul Wuergler, Community Paramedicine Coordinator for Simcoe County

It was May that the Ministry expressed interest in CMHA partnering with paramedics to do a ride-along much as the agency already does with police, said Aleta Armstrong, Director of Community Engagement, Inclusivity and Fundraising at CMHA. By June, all partners agreed it was feasible and worth pursuing, but with the provincial government having to adapt in so many ways to the pandemic, the Ministry approved the funding for a pilot partnership just before the December 2020 holiday break. [Read more](#)



## SELF HELP & PEER SUPPORT

## Pandemic Sparks Growth of Peer Support

A conversation with Ryan McPhail, Peer Support Counsellor, CMHA SC

Ryan McPhail was still in high school and working installing pools when he noticed the rest of the crew, all adults, used something to cope with the pain that came with a lot of heavy lifting – opioids. None of them suggested he take them too, but even unintended peer pressure has its consequences, especially for a teenager who had no clue about that drug or its addictive properties. "I had no idea about opioids," McPhail recalls. "After two weeks I couldn't function without them." [Read more](#)



## Local Leadership Saves Lives and Guides Provincial Response

A visionary perspective from our ACT Team Leaders; Dr. Maher, Shelbie Barrer and John Henderson

Assertive Community Treatment Teams (ACT) are no strangers to crisis: Their work caring for the most vulnerable of those with mental illness has been called the community equivalent of a critical care unit. So when the pandemic struck in March, Dr. John Maher, the broader team and senior management knew they had to act quickly – and they did, adapting how they provided care and creating a template for change that spread to ACT teams in CMHA branches across Ontario.

[Read more](#)

## Partnership with Shelters Creates Safe Havens

Community collaborative experience with Sara Peddle, Executive Director David Busby Street Centre and Aleta Armstrong, Director of Community Engagement, Inclusivity and Fundraising at CMHA.

The Executive Director of the David Busby Street Centre since 2010, Sara Peddle is a veteran looking after the needs of those who seek out safety and a room over their heads at the shelter on Mulcaster Street, but the pandemic created challenges on a scale she had never seen.

Before the arrival of the novel coronavirus in March 2020, the shelter had never turned anyone away, with enough cots, along with a shelter for women run by the Elizabeth Fry



Society, to shelter nearly 80 people, and room enough to add another 20. [Read more](#)

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