

### Central East LHIN

#### Mental health consumer survivors share their stories

*Aim is to strengthen supports for people with mental health and addiction issues*

Sharing a personal story can be a freeing experience but for those suffering with a mental health issue it takes a special kind of courage.

For Jewel, a wife and mother, her breakdown a couple of years ago was just one episode in a life-long battle with mental health issues.

"I had a breakdown, I was manic, I wasn't sleeping, was very agitated and I did not know what was happening to me," Jewel said.

Originally diagnosed with mental health issues when she turned thirty, Jewell can recall having depression as early as 11 years old. She has accessed crisis intervention in the past, has been treated with Electro-Compulsive Therapy (ECT) and has had a number of hospitalizations and medication changes.



Today she says she is in a better place and she credits a large part of her recovery to programming provided through [Durham Mental Health Services \(DMHS\)](#), a community-based health service provider funded by the [Central East Local Health Integration Network \(Central East LHIN\)](#).

In particular, Jewel has found volunteering for [V.A.S.E. \(Voices Against Stigma Everywhere\)](#), a mental health advocacy group she discovered through DMHS, a whole new experience.

V.A.S.E. is a team of individuals who have experienced mental health issues and who are now educating the public and the health care system about mental health and recovery.

Jewell has found that being courageous and sharing her story is truly liberating and is pleasantly surprised at how willing others are to learn about her experiences.

Jewell is also an active participant in [New Leaf](#), a social recreational program designed to provide opportunities for individuals who are socially isolated and/or living with mental health issues in West Durham.

Jewell has been attending the program faithfully for two years and it was there that one of the peer support specialists first asked her to participate in V.A.S.E.

Jewell didn't say yes right away but is glad she later decided to volunteer.

As a V.A.S.E. volunteer and New Leaf participant, Jewell has found a sharing, supportive environment where she has been able to build up her self-confidence.

- Click [HERE](#) to hear Jewel speak about the impact of being part of New Leaf and V.A.S.E.

"This is where I first felt free to say to people, 'Oh, I have bipolar'," Jewel said. "You can also give advice to others. You're acting as a support to others and yourself."

Renee is also a volunteer with V.A.S.E. A move from Uxbridge to the west Durham area in 2008 coincided with her experiencing a mental health issue and needing to access both Durham Mental Health Services' [court support program](#) as well as their [residential program](#).

Renee now has her own apartment and credits DMHS with helping her on the road to independence. "They helped me through all the obstacles," Renee said. "I am independent, I am getting my own job, I am almost finished school, I've got a car, they have really helped me every step of the way."

But her greatest pleasure has been in telling her story as a V.A.S.E. volunteer.

“V.A.S.E. has been extremely helpful, breaking down stigma, and just going around and speaking to people,” Renee said. “People have been very open to my message.”

***Learn more about Mental Health Services in the Central East LHIN***

The Central East LHIN is continuing to implement its third Integrated Health Service Plan (IHSP) setting out a shared goal for local health care system to help Central East LHIN residents spend more time in their homes or communities.

***Improving Health care for Mental Health and Addictions is a top priority for of the Central East LHIN.***

With the guidance of the Central East LHIN’s Mental Health and Addictions Strategic Aim Coordinating Council and Dr. Ian Dawe, the LHIN’s Mental Health and Addictions Physician Lead, hospitals, community mental health and addictions agencies, community health centres, consumers/survivors and many more are working together to strengthen the system of supports for people with Mental Health and Addictions issues so they spend 15,000 more days at home in their communities by 2016.

For a list of services in your area, please visit Connex Ontario at [www.connexontario.ca](http://www.connexontario.ca).

For more information on the Central East LHIN’s “Community First – Mental Health and Addictions” aim, please visit the Central East LHIN website and click on [“Goals and Achievements – Mental Health and Addictions Strategic Aim.”](#)