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Library's mental health collection successful in putting resources in the hands of the public

A partnership between Western Counties Regional Library and the local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) has been highly successful in putting mental health resources in the hands of the public.

"I have had a number of people indicate that the mental health collection is certainly being used," says Jim Stockman, president of the Yarmouth Digby Shelburne branch of the CMHA.

The library "due date" stamps in the mental health collection books confirm Stockman's statement. Most books have been borrowed at least once and many multiple times.

Eating disorders, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, Tourette's syndrome,

autism, bipolar illness, defiant children, anger, depression, the impact of divorce on children and Alzheimer's disease are just some of the topics covered by the collection.

It is all possible because of the partnership between the local branch of the CMHA, Mental Health Services and the regional library that placed more than \$14,000 worth of mental health books, audio books, CDs and DVDs on the shelves of the library's 10 branches.

"It is just terrific to know that kind of stuff is at my fingertips," says David Cassidy, Clinical Social Worker, MSW.

Cassidy has used the online bibliography on the library's Web site as a resource for him and his patients. For example, he had a patient with a binge eating disorder and he looked to the library's mental health collection for help.

"The first place I turned was the list of acquisitions (at the library)," he says.

From there he could recommend the book that would be most beneficial to his patient and they could work together to tackle the disorder.

The collection was launched at the end of January 2008. During the launch, the scope of the collection left many in the room speechless.

"I was overwhelmed when I walked in," Tony Prime, coordinator of Mental Health Projects for the province, said during a brief speech during the launch. Prime said he has a very tight budget to work with annually and he was very pleased to see how well this project worked.

Such partnerships have a positive impact on the region, says regional library director Trudy Amirault. "The CMHA gave us money (\$14,000) and we gave the CMHA a way to get the resources and information bought with that money into the hands of the public."



It also had an impact on the library because it resulted in training of library staff on mental health issues. The sensitivity to mental health issues resulting from that session was very important, says Amirault.

Stockman has been actively spreading the word about the collection to organizations throughout the Tri-Counties.

“I have spoken at a number of public functions and addressed the collection at length,” he explains.

“Most recently I was at the annual general meeting of Juniper House (women’s shelter) and I left them an indexed and bound copy of the collection for their reference purposes,” he says. “They seemed to really appreciate it.”

He says lists of the collection that he has taken to various presentations are quickly taken.

“I know that parents in our Eating Disorder Parent Support Group have borrowed eating disorder books and all are very pleased to have the resource available.”

Another offshoot of the partnership is a spin-off partnership that has the local CMHA branch working with Burridge Campus, NSCC and Dr. Stan Kucher of Dalhousie University to pilot a Peer Support/Intervention course at Burridge Campus with the hope that it becomes a diploma program.

“This is quite exciting and our project with the regional library has been instrumental in our being asked to be the lead agency to put this course in place and piloted here in Yarmouth,” says Stockman.

Regional library chairman Gary Archibald said such partnerships are vital to the region. They enable organizations to combine their efforts to serve the people of Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth better, he said.

“The regional branch of the CMHA is there to support people dealing with mental health issues, and we are here to provide the material to help people make informed and healthy decisions relating to mental health issues,” Archibald said.

Mental Health Services provided a startup grant of \$40,000 for the regional branch of the CMHA of which \$14,000 went toward the creation of the mental health collection for the regional library to serve the people of the Tri-Counties.

Western Counties Regional Library Deputy Director Joanne Head compiled the collection following input from mental health professionals, advocates and consumers to make it as hands-on and user-friendly as possible while providing the critical information.

“It’s been a real enhancement to our collection,” Head said.

A comprehensive bibliography is available at the library’s 10 branches and online at www.westerncounties.ca.