



## **FGTA President's Report June 10, 2014**

From Grief to Action: When Addiction Hits Home, the voice of families with loved ones struggling with addictions and mental health issues, has had another impactful year. Our work was recognized by the Canadian Mental Health Association with the prestigious Nancy Hall Public Leadership Award of Merit for our years of family support, advocacy, as well as for "crafting a series of sophisticated policy directions to guide legislators in the area of addiction, mental health and concurrent disorders". Founding FGTA director, Nichola Hall (no relation) proudly accepted the award on our behalf. That we received such an honour in policy work shows our heightened focus on key messages and results.

### **We have three key messages:**

- Addiction is a chronic health, not a moral or criminal issue, and it should be treated within the public health care system.
- More resources need to be dedicated to identifying concurrent disorders and providing the full spectrum of services for both addictions and mental health issues
- Family members should be included in their loved one's treatment as much as possible. And family members need support for themselves also.

I want to highlight our work in three areas: advocacy, support and capacity building.

### **Advocacy**

A key event this year was our forum, "*Addressing Mental Health and Addiction in Canada's Federal Offenders*", at SFU Goldcorp Centre, featuring Howard Sapers, federal prison investigator. He told us about mental health and addictions and how an estimated 80% of the prison population suffer from these illnesses and receive virtually no treatment. Former FGTA director, Rob Ruttan made heart-breaking comments about how his son's mental illness and addiction remain untreated in jail, and the cruelty and isolation his son suffers. I opened the session by explaining that if we followed FGTA's

key messages, far fewer people with addiction and mental health issues would be sent to prison. Howard provided some astonishing figures: \$120,000 a year to keep a male in jail, and \$220,000 for a female. If one adds the cost of a psychiatric bed to that incarceration, the costs soar to \$200,000 or \$300,000. The event was well-attended a diverse audience, and we created alliances with SFU Public Square, SFU's Vancity Office of Community Engagement, the SFU Criminology Department, the Mary Steinhauser Memorial Bursary, and Howard himself. Take a look at the video – it's powerful. [<http://www.sfu.ca/publicsquare/past-events/2014/addressing-mental-health-and-addiction->]

Along with other directors, we presented our work at numerous conferences and meetings. In Vernon, at an event sponsored by the Mental Illness Family Support Centre, I gave a talk called "Addiction and Mental Illness, A Family Perspective". The talk was well received and we made contacts with Interior Health. Chris Richardson and I, along with Jennifer Wide from the Inner City Youth Project, did a workshop at the Family Smart Youth Engagement conference, which marked a first featured presence in this predominantly mental health group on the topic of addictions and mental health. I was on two panels that brought together all mental health and addictions staff in Vancouver Coastal Health. It was an excellent workshop in breaking down the silos between mental health and addictions, and I spoke on the family's experience of dealing with the siloed system. We also had a feature article in Vancouver Coastal Health's community newsletter.

We established contact within the Fraser Health Authority, where I was invited to give a key-note presentation to 240 practitioners, family members, teachers, police and youth participants at the Chilliwack Child and Youth conference. The talk was titled "Every door is the right door: What helped, what hindered". But I said that the talk should be called "Door? There's a door?" After I spoke, a woman came up and said that at her table, half of the people had lost a child to a drug overdose.

We are also bringing the addictions and family support message to numerous committees and partnerships. Anita Haider and I participated in a workshop with the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition on the "War on Drugs", meeting with family members whose children had been murdered in drug wars in Mexico. Anita has followed up with the coalition. Ray Hall meets regularly with the Youth Addictions Drug Agencies (YADA), and Nichola has been advising for the programming for UBC's Summer Institute on Addiction. Nichola also continues with the BC Coalition for Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addictions.

I have represented FGTA on the provincial Task Force on 'Families at the Centre', an important provincially-led initiative encouraging family involvement wherever possible. I have also been involved with the development of Vancouver Coastal Health's Family Inclusion policy. This was connected with the annual Family Involvement Conference

where Anita Haider introduced Dr Evan Woods as a key note speaker. Evan's talk on how addiction affects the brain, and how families can mobilize for change again marked a first time that addictions was a main topic at a predominantly mental health conference.

Another important partnership is with the Community Action initiative (CAI), part of the Ten Year Plan on Mental Health and Addictions) Nichola represents FGTA on that government- appointed Round Table which gives out grants to community organizations working in this field. Also this year, the provincial government has created a substantial fund for an inventory of residential substance use services outside the Health Authority such as the large number of "support Recovery Houses". The Ten-Year Plan Directorate was alerted to some of the issues in this sector by FGTA at a knowledge exchange, and we are grateful that this study is being undertaken.

FGTA is also a partner in two CAI funded projects: the "Here to Help" website, and another with the Canadian Mental Health Association on a "Helping People with Addictive Behaviour" training project.

Director Chris Richardson is our medical research connection with Coastal Health, and he has been working closely with Dr Steve Mathias and his team at the Inner City Youth Project.

Leading addictions-medicine researcher Dr Evan Woods delivered the key note address at our AGM last year, and this year we have developed a deeper relationship with him and his colleagues at St Paul's Hospital, the Goldcorp Addiction Medicine Fellowship and the Urban Research Institute. We are providing significant input into the Addictions Medicine curriculum, and comment and insight to researchers from the Urban Research Institute. I am a lead investigator in a proposal for a Canadian Research Institute on Substance Misuse (CRISM) grant to bring researchers and community practitioners closer in their service delivery. Nichola was featured in the St Paul's Promise Magazine about the Addictions Fellowship.

Stan represented FGTA at the Ministry of Social Development's community consultation, organized by the BC Coalition of Persons with Disabilities, on "What would BC look like if it was the most progressive province for people with disabilities?" And finally, on the advocacy front, we have written letters outlining our key messages to politicians at the provincial and federal levels. We have received some responses and we are building this engagement.

## **Support**

We continue our excellent relationship with Frances Kenny, who continues to facilitate the Parents Forever family group. We have hosted Mark Haden's informative educational series on addictions.

We have updated and re-printed our ever-popular The Coping Kit. The provincial Ministry of Health and Evan Wood provided funding for the cost of printing two thousand copies of the kit, which we are in the process of distributing.

### **Building Capacity**

We are redeveloping our website thanks to a grant from the Ministry of Health, and to Catherine Kerr's great efforts. Not only does Catherine manage our website and field queries, she is an excellent secretary to FGTA, providing monthly minutes and generally keeping track of things. Along with Chris Richardson, Catherine has directed the redevelopment of the website to a Word Press platform with more interactive potential and updated content.

We are also fortunate to have the volunteer guidance of social media expert (soon to be board member) Maia Gibb, to lead us into an interactive social media conversation with our members and followers.

The development of our key messages has enabled us to be more focussed on our policy work this year. Anita Haider has been keeping us on task with tracking our successes, and we look forward to further strategic developments next year.

This year will see four directors leave the board, some because their maximum term is up and others because their workload in other areas of their life demands their time. With great thanks, we say goodbye to Chris Richardson, Barrett Carter, Catherine Kerr and Stan Fraser. At the same time, we welcome Maia Gibb to the board.

We are on the cusp of a huge change in the way people view and treat addicts and their families. We have been thought leaders in that change and we are poised to push the change to a deeper level. We and our families deserve no less.

Thank-you to our members and followers for your support and for being there with us.

**We are not alone.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mae Burrows', written in a cursive style.

Mae Burrows  
President