

Victoria Offers Support at Two Local MDA Groups

We have two MDA support groups in Victoria, BC. The original group, started by Ken Beattie 23 years ago, meets in the Capital Mental Health Associations building in Victoria West. Ken facilitates



Our Parliament Buildings in lovely Victoria, BC

the Vic West group on his own and I don't believe he has missed a meeting in 23 years! The Begbie Mood Support group, which rotates facilitators, formed about 3 years ago and serves members in a more downtown location at the Begbie Building of the Royal Jubilee Hospital. This group is also very close to the Eric Martin Pavilion where people on the psych wards can walk over to attend peer support meetings.

My name is Stewart Ludtke and I'm the phone contact person for the Begbie Mood Support Group. My number is 250.474.3065. I also check the email at begbiemoodsupport@hotmail.com. I have bipolar and joined the group about 10 years ago. For those of you who may think that the responsibilities of running a group are a lot to take on, I must tell you the opposite is true. This is a huge part of my recovery, helping others in trouble couldn't make me happier. And it really works well to share the responsibilities.

We have about 90 people on our email list. I would have to guess that we have about 200 people that we see; some regulars, some from time to time. Almost every meeting, the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of every month, we have a new person join us. I would say that half the group have bipolar, a quarter have a mix of illnesses such as anxiety, depression, or borderline personality disorder. We have quite a few spouses, partners and other care givers, as well as many parents that attend on a regular basis. We average 13-18 people a meeting but can pack the room if we have a special guest speaker. Most people, I would say, are over 30 years old and reflect the general population as to gender. Many in our group are doing very well managing the illnesses and are able to encourage, by example, those who are beginning their recovery path. The atmosphere of the group is usually very buoyant and positive. We promote being proactive in one's own recovery.

Often we hear about frustration with the formal health system which has left people at their wits end. Medications and their side effects are also a common theme. Many people come to the group looking for education and coping strategies as well as having someone to talk with that has a personal understanding of where they're coming from.

We've had special guest speakers, such as the head of the Affective Disorders Clinic and the Archie Courtall Centre (our psychiatric emergency), the director and counsellor of BC Schizophrenia Society (they provide services for mood disorders too), as well as a psychiatrist. We encourage our members to make a list of questions a few weeks before the speaker comes and we have them ready when the guest appears.

Even with the amazing growth Victoria has had we still live in one of the most desirable locations in the world. Our group steadily grows by one or two people a month. As I'm sure you all know the need for our groups is huge. We all carry on the good work, and every group member helps more people than they may realize.

Stewart Ludtke