

*Attention: Jennifer Sweeney
Provincial Coordinator SFYV Project
Canadian Mental Health Association*

*From: Liza Stappler
Parent Coordinator S.P.O.C.K. Cranbrook*

March 3/2007

Dear Jennifer,

First of all thank you for allowing us the opportunity to contribute to your newsletter. I hope when it is finished we will all receive a copy so that we can glean from others experiences throughout the 2 days. When Melissa forwarded the request on to me I have to say I was extremely grateful for the opportunity to speak to you directly as the 2 days in Vancouver were such a whirlwind I hadn't the chance to talk to you directly while we were there. So again, thank you for this opportunity.

To begin I would first like to congratulate you on your incredible organization of such a large event. I know from my own experience of organizing events with only about 100 attendants that you must have lost a lot of sleep over the details and there were many!! Kudos to you! You did an awesome job! Not to mention the gracious way you handled our needs as parents and I cannot tell you what a difference the accommodations you provided on the second day made for all of us!! It was truly heart warming to be able to connect with other parents in an intimate and safe environment where we could be open and honest and support each other as only we can.

I would next like to say that I tend to speak in novels, so for that I apologize ahead of time as I'm sure it will take you a lot more time to work your way through my letter than most.

You made mention of some categories under which you would like some opinions or some experiences so I will contribute as I feel moved to, beginning with your question about another S.P.O.C.K. in the making. We have not had one start yet, an as a matter of fact I have not had any time to communicate with the Kitimat ladies as yet due to work commitments. However, I have made the time to speak with Ellen Clague and we now have a website and chat line. I am in the process of creating the website as I would like it to be, and being that this is a new skill for me, it is probably going to take longer than normal, but it is in

progress and thanks to the conference I was able to speak to Sabrina Bonfonti, who put me in touch with the right people. So for that, I can't thank you enough as that was a request from all women who attended the second day meeting with us.

As far as S.P.O.C.K. itself goes, since we have returned home we have added another 5 parents to our group and we are stronger than ever, and for that I thank God who gave us our gifted children and whom is the backbone behind it all!

Also, I am currently checking out how to have the S.P.O.C.K. name and idea copyrighted so that I can feel free to spread us around without the threat of misrepresentation as was caused by one of our former members. This is to make sure that I as an individual are protected as well as the parents who attend being represented appropriately to professionals and other organizations. If you have any short cuts or information about how to go about this I would most definitely welcome your input.

Also, since our return to Cranbrook, the Youth Group here has been in contact with my daughter and she has had some good experiences with a few of the girls. Another bonus of the conference as we got the wrong info from our people here in Cranbrook and found it impossible to connect with the group. So again, thank you for making this possible.

The food at the conference was awesome, however, with as busy as I seemed to become, I didn't get an opportunity to partake in the meals much. It seemed I only had time to grab something quick so that I could talk to those who wanted more information about what we were doing here in Cranbrook. I wasn't sure how we would be received but because of some "by word of mouth" advertising prior to the conference I was very pleasantly surprised to find out that a lot of people knew about S.P.O.C.K. Thank you Jennifer if you had anything to do with that.

As for Kathryn Gretsinger, what a wonderful lady!! She was a perfect choice for the MC! A compassionate, professional, funny, yet very human figure whom we all could relate to, young or old! I especially appreciated seeing her at breaks getting to know some of the youth and the parents, finding out their personal stories and I was especially honored to have her offer to visit us here in Cranbrook and do a story on S.P.O.C.K. However, I have not heard from her and she made mention that she would have some ideas around our funding once the CMHA support ends at the end of March. If you are in contact with her or have

the ability to do so, please pass on my e-mail address to her and let her know the group was very excited about talking with her!

Catharine Hume is in a class all by herself! If only all professionals that our families have to be in contact with were as wonderful as she is! What a knack for finding out the concern and getting it dealt with! She was in her element and did a fantastic job of supporting all those involved with the conference. Personally, I felt she is very in touch with the emotions surrounding the issues of mental health and what is helpful and what is not. I found her to be very easy to talk to although again I didn't have enough time to do so on a one to one basis!!

What could I possibly say in words to describe Teya!!!! What a beautiful soul!! Young, and as our parents would say, "wet behind the ears" when it comes to parenting and relationships, but her old soul and compassionate heart shines right through and enables her to connect on such a deep and personal level with anyone she meets! She is such a treasure and you are so lucky to work with someone who is so committed to her job and the people she works with. I felt sorry that I couldn't spend more time just talking to her as she is so learned for being so very young. A true treat it was to meet her and have her work with our parent group!!! To end this paragraph I would like to extend a hand of friendship to Teya and would appreciate you passing on my e-mail to her and adding that I would be happy to communicate with her on a personal level if she chooses.

You were not on our list of people but I would like to extend a warm and heart felt thank you for putting together the team you did for the 2 days. Your insight into what kind of person should be there was tremendous! You invited all the right people for what was needed in order to accomplish great things and accomplish them you did!! You are a very talented lady Jennifer and I wish you God's blessings whatever you do and wherever you go in life!!

Amber Wood was a great choice for the youth, as she is truly passionate about them! Unfortunately, the get up and go she has, has got up and went out of us as parents long ago, so if I had anything negative to say about day 1 it would be that as adults we didn't get too much out of the pre-forum day of team building. However, if I was to choose a youth worker who stood out, it would definitely be Amber and I commend her for the fantastic job she did with the youth!

Minister Christensen's remarks were prepared. There is not much I can add to that, however I was thankful he had made room in his busy schedule to attend what he could and was grateful for the opportunity to speak to him directly when he left the building and made a point of saying goodbye to the smoker's who were outside during the break. I was also grateful for Christine Lewis, his assistant, who readily gave me her card without my request and suggested I contact her at anytime should I want Minister Christensen to attend the "Parent Forum" I hope to be putting in the works as well as to discuss funding for such an event. I could really use your experience and expertise for this also when I have cleared some time in my already overflowing calendar. Let me know if you would be interested in such an endeavor when the dust has settled.

The best way to discuss Stan Williams is "Praise God"!! This man was an honor to listen to and I am so pleased that his position in government provides such a powerful message to those who can definitely influence change. He is a force to be reckoned with but such a gentle spirit!! I will be watching him in the future and know we can expect big things from this compassionate human being.

I actually didn't attend any break out sessions but I must not neglect my gratefulness in how Keli Anderson and Donna Murphy were so supportive of the small session we provided and were more than ready to allow me to announce the change at their break out session. These women are mentors to anyone who has a passion and is willing to do the work required to evoke any kind of change be it in your own situation or on a more global level! They are to be commended for their hard work and dedication as it is truly valuable to such a large demographic.

The Youth Presentation as a whole was simply inspiring. Knowing from a personal experience what these kids must endure on a day to day basis, I was truly encouraged to see even the small group that was represented so dedicated and passionate about changing their environments. These are kids who will go places and I pray that more of these groups grow in each and every community in our province so that other youth may be blessed with the courage, motivation and support to live a healthier and happier life which all Canadian Citizens have a right to.

Our session was such a blessing, it is hard to describe! However, I must say that out of it all we were affirmed in our assumption that our feelings, struggles and joys are universal throughout the races, economical status and any other way you could divide us. We are all united in our hearts and minds no matter what the difference in our

daily existences. I am convinced that in time we will have a stronger voice and changes will happen thanks to the support of people like you and everyone else who joined us during those 2 glorious but overwhelming days!!

As for our coordinators here in Cranbrook, I have so much to say! However, I will try to keep it to a minimum being that we are now on Page 5! (I did apologize before hand. Ha Ha!)

Melissa Bax, how can I begin. Talk about an asset to the profession! This is a lady who was placed into a difficult position earlier on in the project as she had to deal with all the surface baggage that our parents were so eager to provide. She held her position gracefully and provided an honest and open communication that allowed for the creation and sustainability of S.P.O.C.K. to date. Personally, we have connected in a great way and I hold her acquaintance and friendship in high regard. She is truly an inspiration to me and I am honored to know her and to have been able to share such a special project with her. May I also add that although none of our coordinators here in Cranbrook had much to do with the creation or execution of how the S.P.O.C.K. group is run, they were all instrumental in spurring me on to continue when the waters got rough and when we encountered struggles and challenges! Without their confidence in me, I wouldn't be where I am today, and the parents in our group wouldn't be in the improved lives they now lead! What more can I say, God bless the staff members of CMHA who have made this project so successful in our community.

Amber and Julie are included in this sentiment as well! From the beginning of the project they were very supportive and incredibly insightful as to the need and vision of S.P.O.C.K. Although following the initial meeting with me and handing me the reigns, actually free reign with the creation of S.P.O.C.K., these ladies didn't have much input into the group itself, they did however lend us all the support we would need. They facilitated the many meetings we had at different locations to develop the ideas and to hear from other parents what they would like to see. As well, they were awesome about encouraging me personally through e-mail and in person to continue along the way I was going with the project as it was very encouraging for them to see it take off! Amber was particularly good at letting me know about events coming to Cranbrook that we as a group might be interested in attending and she and Julie both have a knack for making us feel heard, validated, and loved. I will always have a special place in my heart for Julie as she was my daughter's youth worker for about 18 months and during that time

provided her with a genuine friendship to nurture as our daughter endured some very rough times.

I love all these ladies and want anyone in CMHA to know that although they are quite shy and humble, the work they do for their community deserves recognition, respect and reward!!

In closing Jennifer, I want to once again thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences with you. You may choose to use a bit or a bite or none of my info for the newsletter, but just being heard is enough for me. I also wanted to apologize for not turning in the review sheet that was enclosed in our packets, but as you can now appreciate, I had way too much to say for one sheet.

What you provided in Vancouver was an opportunity for people to get to know others of the same situation and to feel a genuine sense of unity among the masses! Your ability to invite the right people and make so many resources available and attainable was also a great gift for those of us who look forward to making a difference in the future of mentally ill youth and their families. You have definitely succeeded in "Strengthening Youth and Family Voices"!

*Sincerely,
Liza Stappler*