

# Walk to raise awareness for Eating Disorders

**By Angela Gismondi**

Eating Disorders of York Region's Riverwalk Wellness Centres will be hosting Art in the Park and Remembering Renata ?Walk Across Canada? to raise awareness for eating disorders on Sunday, August 24.

The walk is a show of solidarity from coast to coast. It begins in Newfoundland at 10 a.m. local time, continues in our time zone in York Region and concludes in Victoria on Vancouver Island at 10 a.m. in their time zone. The walk is held in memory of Renata, a young woman who struggled with an eating disorder but did not survive.

?We hope to raise awareness and capture the interest of those who may be struggling and those who support our efforts,? explained Janice Morgante, executive director of Riverwalk, adding this is the sixth annual walk for Renata and the second year Riverwalk has participated. ?I felt this would be a great opportunity to show solidarity if we walked on the same day at the same time.?

The walk will begin with a ribbon cutting ceremony with members of the Faces of Recovery campaign. It will be taking place on the Tom Taylor/Nokiidaa Trail beside the Tannery at 465 Davis Drive in Newmarket from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.. It's an opportunity to enjoy a non-competitive stroll on a wide, paved path, suitable for strollers, bikes, roller blades and sneakers beside the river. Walkers of all ages are welcome to participate.

As part of the event, there will also be an attempt to create the world's largest zentangle, using 600 pieces of chalk. One of the art programs offered by Riverwalk is a zen art known as ?zentangle.? This is a simple, calming and portable art form facilitated by a certified zentangle instructor. The zentangle method is an easy-to-learn, relaxing and fun way to create beautiful images by drawing repeated structured patterns. Everyone is welcome to participate and no prior experience is needed.

?We added Art in the Park to the walk, a new dimension this year, to showcase the new, expressive and therapeutic art programs which are available with a referral from Riverwalk or Addiction Services for York Region,? said Morgante. ?The art programs are a complement to support programs which are available for disordered eating, anxiety, depression or addictions.?

Eating disorders are prevalent but are often hidden.

?Unfortunately, eating disorders still have the highest mortality rate of any mental health issue,? said Morgante. ?Tens of thousands, of all ages, struggle in York Region yet due to stigma, which in my experience is a lack of understanding, only a few will reach out for support. We as a community must change this. In fact, it is only we as a community who can. It's a tragedy but it doesn't need to be.?

Those who struggle need to understand that there is support and that's what the event is all about.

?Those who are struggling are unaware that they are not alone and that recovery can be a reality for them like it is for others, but support is required,? said Morgante.

Riverwalk offers a variety of supports free of cost for those suffering with eating disorders and for those who support them. Programs include professionally facilitated peer support, emotion focused family therapy (EFFT) support, a special group just for teens and programs specifically for adults, all of which are available through self referral.

?We also provide assessments with a physician's referral which can be the start to self-understanding and self-acceptance,? said Morgante. ?Our telephone help line is staffed by a social worker with specialized knowledge of eating disorders. We offer a variety of strategies so that someone may pick and choose how they want to be supported. We want to help create a circle of care. We are here to help.?

EDOYR is not a government agency and requires support from the community.

?We are not a government agency, rather Eating Disorders of York Region's Riverwalk Wellness Centres is a grass-roots, community based, non-profit organization which was founded with the seeds of a memorial fund of a young woman who did not survive her struggle,? said Morgante. ?We rely on the support of the community in order to keep our doors open.?

The art walk is a free event and fun for the whole family. Register online at [www.edoyr.com](http://www.edoyr.com) or email [info@edoyr.com](mailto:info@edoyr.com).

You may collect pledges for the walk if you would like or, encourage those who wish to support the cause to make a donation online, for instance with a monthly pledge or one-time donation and become a member of the Circle of Friends. Tax receipts will be issued for all donations of \$10 or more. For more information about becoming a sponsor, call 905-886-6632.