

## Activist will fight to keep sign promoting mental health



**By Brock Weir**

Speaking up on the issue of mental health is a topic many shy away from.

Certain stigmas surround the concept of mental illness which often prevent people from taking that extra step in getting the help they need.

These are the stigmas Judy Brunton has dedicated her life to breaking down and, for the past year, she has used her lawn to get out the message, maintaining a sign in her yard for fundraising and awareness for the Canadian Mental Health Association and, in particular, youth programs.

That came to an end last Wednesday, the middle of Child and Youth Mental Health Awareness Week, when Ms. Brunton returned home from work to find a bylaw infraction notice on her front door, ordering her to take the sign down.

'I was upset because I knew that meant I would have to take the sign down but I didn't want to do that because I want to raise awareness and funds for youth mental health,' says Ms. Brunton. 'I honestly had no idea there was a law against having signs up. I am not typically a law-breaker, but I just didn't know.'

Indeed, Aurora's sign bylaw, which was approved last year, requires a permit for signs on properties 'from wall signs to ground signs' which is intended to 'regulate signs in relation to business needs, community appearance, safety and the impact on the areas, properties, or buildings identified for their historical significance.'

Speaking to the bylaw officer the day after receiving the infraction notice, Ms. Brunton says she was told someone made a complaint about the sign being up and it would have to be taken down because it was actually on Town Property. When she asked the Town whether it could be placed on her own property she says she was told that wouldn't be appropriate either.

'They said it was not allowed because if everyone does it, it will start looking like an industrial area,' she says. 'I am confused as to why [the complainant had an issue with the sign]. I think mental health for youth is very important, but I am guessing this person didn't think so, or they thought it was a disgrace to the neighbourhood. Some people commented [on social media] that it would lower the property values of the homes, but it is just a temporary sign.'

Mental health has been an important cause for Ms. Brunton from a young age. Her sister, now 40, was first diagnosed with a mental illness at the age of 14, and it has been an ongoing struggle. In addition to her sister's journey, their cousin died three years ago after a battle with depression.

Money she raises for the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) goes directly to youth through their Ride, Don't Hide, the annual fundraising bike ride for the CMHA, as well as MOBYSS, the CMHA's mobile unit which visits area schools, parks, malls, and other youth draws to give teens the chance to seek help privately and on their own terms.

'For youth at that age, everything is difficult for them and to find out they have a mental illness is not easy for them to take or understand,' says Ms. Brunton. 'They have no idea what is going on with themselves. I just want youth to get help.'

With the help of her son, Ms. Brunton removed the sign on Thursday and placed it in their backyard. Now, they are at a loss on what to do next, but she says she is going to seek an exemption from Mayor Geoff Dawe and Council so it can go back up and continue promoting the campaign.

?I will hope for the best,? she says, noting she has received considerable support from her social media following since the incident. ?I would like to thank everyone who is behind me because they know mental health is for everybody, and it is an especially important thing to talk about and to have awareness raised. Youth are so important, so young, and they need the assistance and support.?

NOTE: The headline of an earlier version of this story described the notice Ms. Brunton received on her door as a "ticket," something which the Town of Aurora disputes. "The door knocker is meant as a communications tool - they are not tickets," said Stephanie Mackenzie-Smith, Manager of Corporate Communications for the Town, in an email to The Auroran. "The notice simply informs the resident that they are in contradiction of a Bylaw and they are asked to comply. There are multiple steps that Bylaw will take before issuing a ticket. Our goal is always to work with the resident first."