

Mental health activist gets to keep sign ? for now



By Brock Weir

She vowed to fight on in her quest to raise awareness of mental health after hitting a speed bump from Aurora's Bylaw Department; but now local activist and fundraiser Judy Brunton is once again firing on all cylinders in her quest to erase stigma surrounding mental illness.

Last week, she and her family joyfully resurrected a lawn sign promoting Ms. Brunton's efforts for the Canadian Mental Health Association after receiving a notice from the Town earlier this month that it had to be taken down.

During Child and Youth Mental Health Awareness Week at the start of May, the Town of Aurora received a complaint over the long-standing sign and issued a notice to Ms. Brunton that the sign had to be taken down. While Aurora's existing sign bylaw does indeed require a permit be retained for signs on properties, she said she was unaware that such a provision was in place and, after having it up for so long, being ordered to take it down left her "very upset."

It also left her somewhat confused that a sign promoting mental health could generate a complaint, but that was the situation and, in the process, Ms. Brunton received an overwhelming outpouring of support from friends, neighbours, and from across social media. Among those picking up on the story was Councillor John Abel, who Ms. Brunton says was instrumental in helping her get the sign back up on her Glass Drive home.

"John Abel messaged me on Facebook and asked me to give him a call," she says. "We spoke for about 20 minutes after hours and asked me all about what went on and why this cause was close to me. The next thing I knew I got an email saying I had to fill in the application for a permit and I got to put the sign back up that Tuesday."

"It means a lot because John has always been supportive of what I do. I can only have the sign up until the day of Ride, Don't Hide next month but, still, that's awesome. I am just ecstatic the Town allowed me to do this because I didn't think it would happen. I am shy when it comes to calling people and asking them for what I want done, so I am glad John reached out to me and was able to assist me in getting it back up."

Ride Don't Hide is a biking event set to take place in Newmarket on June 25. Benefiting the CMHA, it is intended to raise money for youth mental health programs, particularly MOBYSS (Mobile York South Simcoe) Bus, which travels to malls, sports facilities, and other youth hang-outs to give them the opportunity to ask mental health questions and/or seek health on their own time and their own terms.

MOBYSS provides information not only on mental health, but also information on birth control, STDs, drugs and alcohol, and even something as run-of-the-mill as a sore throat.

All services are free and geared towards youth between the ages of 12 and 25.

With each MOBYSS visit costing the organization \$250, even the smallest fundraising effort goes a long way and, through her social media and, yes, her sign, Ms. Brunton is encouraging everyone to support her or pick up the gauntlet and join her.

Ms. Brunton was inspired to join the fight against the stigmas surrounding mental illness by her sister, who lives daily with a variety of mental health struggles. Through the Ride, Don't Hide, she instills this drive into the next generation, participating with her elder

son Charlie.

While she says Charlie is not yet of an age to fully understand all the aspects of mental health, she explains what she can at an 'age 10-level' to keep the momentum going.

Throughout the battle to get the sign back up, Ms. Brunton says she wanted her sons to know the importance of 'never giving up on what you believe in.'

'Yesterday, my boys were playing ball and I was standing on the porch watching them and this couple walked by, high-fived my younger son Jacob, looked over to me and said, 'Congratulations!'' says Ms. Brunton on the sign's return. 'Another lady stopped me and said, 'Congratulations! I am surprised it came down in the first place.' I've even gotten congratulations from people I don't know personally who are happy it is back up again.'

With her permit in place, Ms. Brunton says the sign will come down after the Ride but notes she plans to go back to the Town next year asking for permission to put it up two months before the 2018 Ride to build awareness and to help raise funds for kids to seek the help they need.