

Bouncing Back can be just a phone call away, says Canadian Mental Health Association



By Brock Weir

This Wednesday, January 30, thousands of people from across Canada will band together to help erase the stigma surrounding mental health on Bell Let's Talk Day.

But, as much as this initiative from the Canadian telecommunications giant has helped spark a very valuable conversation, the York Region and South Simcoe branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is urging you to pick up the phone and ?Bounce Back.?

BounceBack: Reclaim Your Health is a free skill-building program facilitated by the local CMHA designed to help adults and youth aged 15 and over manage symptoms of depression and anxiety.

?BounceBack is really important because it is a free, telephone-based cognitive behaviour therapy coaching problem,? explains Rebecca Shields, Executive Director of the CMHA of York Region and South Simcoe. ?It is for anyone with mild to moderate depression and anxiety. They can just call, what we refer to as ?self referral', and it is an evidence-based program to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, and it is all over the phone.

?It is for anybody who is dealing with mild to moderate depression and anxiety, if you're feeling down, if you're feeling anxious, and you want to get immediate access to support.?

BounceBack is cognitive behavioural therapy, which Ms. Shields says is a ?modality of helping people deal with that unwanted thinking, or, what we call ?unhelpful' thinking? and the over-the-phone service helps callers manage that ? what the CMHA likes to call ?good mental hygiene.?

?Everybody is hearing about ? and thinking about ? mental health and maybe feeling like you want to get some support,? she continues. ?This is one modality that makes it really easy for people to get that support ? and there's no wait list!?

The CMHA is currently in the middle of ramping up the BounceBack program across Ontario. They currently have about 35 coaches available with a total of 42 just around the corner. Their goal is to have a full complement of 90 coaches across the Province that could potentially serve up to 40,000 Ontarians each year. The program has been running successfully across Canada for over 12 years, and in this region for four years.

?We know that it works,? says Ms. Shields.

BounceBack offers two streams for help. Online videos offer practical tips on managing mood, sleeping better, building confidence, increasing activity, problem solving and healthy living. Videos are available in English, French, Mandarin, Cantonese, Punjabi, Arabic and Farsi, reflective of the multicultural makeup of the Region.

Coaching is available over the phone for additional support in managing depression. A referral is required for the service, either from your primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) or through self-referral, which can be completed in an online form.

The program involves three to six over-the-phone coaching sessions and your coach is there to help you develop new skills, keep you motivated and monitor how you're doing.

?With our phone program, you will get some books through the mail and you will have a coach to support and help you understand and motivate you to understand the material,? says Ms. Shields. ?Everyone gets the first book, which is about starting out and how to

keep going when you're feeling stuck, understand low mood and understand depression. There are over 20 books available and people can then choose the books that are meaningful for them. Maybe it is how they are responding to a chronic illness. One of our most popular books is on disordered sleeping and overcoming sleep problems. Others can be dealing with anxiety, practical problem solving, understanding phobias. There is a whole host of different books depending on what your interests are. You get the books and work with a coach, and then it is all delivered over the phone.

?This is helping understand cognitive behaviour therapy, which works, but to be clear, it is not a counselling program. This is about really supported skill-building.?

In the four years since BounceBack was established in York Region and South Simcoe, the CMHA has been working with primary care doctors in supporting their patients in using this program because, in many instances, people reach out first to their primary care provider. Now, they're ramping up in making sure people are getting the support they need through a variety of access points.

?There is data coming out of the Canadian Physicians Association that people will often wait over four to ten years before they will actually go and seek help or support for a mental health issue because of stigma,? says Ms. Shields. ?People are struggling far more than they need to and it is an issue like any other illness. You wouldn't wait four years if you had a cough, but for some reason people have misunderstood that brain illness is an illness like any other, whether it is cancer, diabetes or a broken arm. Early and effective treatment is the best chance for overall recovery.

?With good mental hygiene, good skills may or may not, in association with a medication, have the ability to turn people around so they can lead the best quality of life possible. We really want people to get the support they need and that recovery is possible, and perhaps people can resume and have a full and healthy, happy life.?

For more information on BounceBack, call 1-866-345-0224 or visit bouncebackontario.ca. Hours of operation are Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and sessions are also available on Saturday and Sunday.