

CMHA-YRSS Shields named Communicator of the Year?

Rebecca Shields, President & CEO of the Aurora-based Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe (CMHA-YRSS), has been named Communicator of the Year by the International Association of Business Communicators, Toronto.

The Communicator of the Year award was established in 1997 to recognize executives and business leaders in the Greater Toronto Area whose demonstrated leadership and communication skills drive business results or have had a substantially positive influence on the community.

Those recognized with the Award do not have to be in the field of communications, but someone who uses the power of communication to deepen understanding, inspire action, and transform their community.

Leaders previously recognized with the honour include Dr. Eileen de Villa, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, writer Jesse Wentz, television producer Fennella Bruce, late Mississauga mayor Hazel McCallion, and former TTC CEO Andy Byford.

Rebecca is recognized for her leadership and contributions to community development, inclusion, mental health and addictions, cultural competency, and innovation, said the organization. Under Rebecca's leadership, CMHA York Region & South Simcoe has grown into one of Canada's largest and fastest-growing CMHA branches, supporting over 22,000 individuals annually through 32+ mental health and addiction programs and services. Her achievements include growing agency revenues from \$8 million to \$42 million and earning accolades like Canadian Non-Profit Employer of Choice for seven consecutive years and Canada's 10 Most Admired Corporate Cultures.

Rebecca is recognised for her exceptional leadership in communication, her commitment to mental health advocacy, and her visionary work in fostering inclusive and supportive communities.

Congratulations were also offered by Eric Jolliffe, the newly-minted Chair of the Regional Municipality of York, at his first formal Council meeting at the helm on January 30.

On behalf of Regional Council, I would like to extend warm congratulations to Rebecca Shields, said Jolliffe. This is a well-deserved recognition for Rebecca's exceptional leadership, which continues to be instrumental in advancing the mission of the Canadian Mental Health Association and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our communities.

Shields says she was honestly blown away to receive this honour, noting she was shocked, surprised, delighted, humbled, but stressed that communication is part and parcel of her community work.

Communication is the most important aspect and skillset of my role because a communicator also has to be someone who listens and ensures that the people and that I work with and connect with feel heard and that I can then reflect the messages to our community, to our government, to my staff, to my donors in a way that builds on, I think, our collective vision to improve the mental health in our community, she says. I think it is the foundation of my job.

Communication is also critical in supporting mental health care, she adds.

As we battle stigma and as we improve both our clinical and our therapeutic relationships with our clients, and just our general work with our clients the most important thing is people feel seen, feel heard and feel valued, she says. That is a core value of CMHA and every single one of my staff members, whether they are one of our psychiatrists, nurses or peer support specialists or our great receptionists even our corporate services that is how we treat everyone who walks through the door. You can fumble and mumble, but if people feel seen, valued and heard, then you have the foundations for good communications.

By Brock Weir