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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CMHA PEI launches new Peer Support Program *The program will be rolled out in phases across PEI*

Charlottetown---The Canadian Mental Health Association PEI Division (CMHA PEI) has launched a new Peer Support program. Peer Support is the process of disclosing one's lived experience and recovery history as a means of inspiring hope, as well as providing support and guidance for Islanders experiencing struggles/crisis with mental health or addictions.

CMHA PEI Division has been offering and supporting informal peer support initiatives for many years, but recently has implemented a formal Peer Support program. Several services being offered by Peer Support over the last couple of months include the development of peer support groups, having one on one sessions with clients, accompanying clients to appointments, hospital, and meetings.

Ashley Belanger-Birt, Peer Support Coordinator, says she and her team of three Peer Support Specialists will be rolling the program out in phases over the next few months. "Since it's a new program here at CMHA we've essentially divided it into some key areas and identified the goals we want to achieve. Some of those goals are empowering peers through personal disclosure and encouraging self-help, providing guidance through one-on-one and group talk, identifying needs, facilitating community resources, and advocating for accessibility to mental health services. The work of peer support helps to inspire hope, mental wellness, and self-determination."

Belanger-Birt says the Peer Support program is unique. "Our team of Peer Support Specialists can empathize with the struggle and emotional pain that may accompany a mental illness or addiction by sharing our own insight on the path we took to recovery. We can identify with what a person may be dealing with because we've also been down that road. We believe in the power of peer support."

She adds, "Peer Support Specialists provide support and advocacy to clients from the community and from all program areas of CMHA PEI including housing and suicide prevention. They also bridge the gap between the client and the services that they need, such as community mental health, addiction resources, and other service providers."

For more information on this new program please contact Ashley Belanger-Birt at 902-628-3666. For information on CMHA PEI visit the web-site at: www.pei.cmha.ca

BACKGROUND

- One in five Canadians will experience a mental health problem in any given year.
- Mental health problems affect people of all ages, educational background and income levels

The **Canadian Mental Health Association – PEI** is one of ten provincial divisions of Canada's first and only truly national mental health organization. Specialized services and supports are delivered in, and tailored to, the community and its mental health needs. CMHA-PEI exists to promote the mental health of all persons on the Island by working with individuals, groups and communities to increase control over and enhance their mental health.

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