



## **Upholding Human Rights**

**CMHA Sask. Division  
Involvement in Enhancing  
the Mental Health and  
Addictions Component at  
the Canadian Human  
Rights Museum in Winnipeg**

**Prepared by:**

**David Nelson, RPN(Ret.), RSW(Ret.)  
Associate Executive Director, CMHA (Sask) Division**

**Rebecca Rackow, BA(Hons.), BSW, RSW,  
Director of Advocacy, Research, and Public Policy Development**

## **Background:**

In a family visit to the Human Rights Museum in August 2018, our Director of Advocacy, Research, and Public Policy Development, Rebecca Rackow was very impressed with the museum overall. However, she did notice some obvious gaps in the mental health and addictions areas in the various displays. In contacting our sister Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Division in Manitoba, we discovered they too had been communicating with the museum regarding improvements to the various displays to more effectively convey human rights discrimination.

### **Arrangements were made to meet the Executive Director, Manitoba Division and subsequently Human Rights Museum staff.**

On November 15, 2018 the Associate Executive Director, Dave Nelson and Director of Advocacy, Research, and Public Policy Development, Rebecca Rackow, spent the day researching the exhibits of the museum to assess the coverage of mental health discrimination. From this day of research, the following observations and recommendations were made and presented to the Senior Advisor to the President, Stakeholder Relations of the museum, Clint Curle, with our partners from CMHA National, CMHA Manitoba and CMHA British Columbia.

The visit to the Canadian Human Rights Museum in Winnipeg has done many things in a manner respectful to those who have been discriminated against such as:

- Incorporating mental illness in the disabilities section entitled “Inclusion for All”.
- Showing a willingness to evolve and grow as indicated by the new disabilities mention in the Holocaust exhibit on floor four and the expansion of the Holodomor exhibit.
- Developing a firm understanding in visitors of the living history and changing nature of Human Rights over time.

The following recommendations for improvements to exhibits were presented and discussed. These suggestions were positively received and we learned that the entire disability section of the museum was going to be revamped over the next three years. Our Association was added to be a stakeholder consultant as work in the area evolves.

## **Recommendations:**

We at the CMHA, Saskatchewan Division Inc. would like to congratulate the Canadian Human Rights Museum on a job well done. We also have some suggestions that would reflect the plight of persons with lived experience with mental illness, a large portion of the Canadian population, with more accuracy and inclusivity.

### **Inclusion for all exhibit:**

In the “inclusion for all” exhibit, mental illness is mentioned in the pages but not on the board defining disabilities. We would like “Psychiatric Disability (e.g. Mental Illness, Addictions)” to be a separate category like “physical disability” or “Intellectual Disability” on the description board.

Differentiate Mental Illness from Intellectual Disability. In the pages of this exhibit, there is a confusion between the two. While both are “invisible disabilities” the lived experience of each of these barriers are very different, keeping in mind that the causes, etiologies, and treatments of each of these disability categories are all very different.

### **Histories Wall**

On the histories wall, the following information and history should be incorporated:

- 1407: the first facility specifically for mental health is established in Spain.
- 1808: Britain passes the county Asylums Act ushering the modern era of institutionalization of the mentally ill.
- 1869: Francis Galton writes Hereditary Genius starting the eugenics movement.
- 1955: Deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill began with the introduction on antipsychotic medications.
- 1972: Routine sterilization by the state of the Disabled and Mentally Ill abolished in Canada.

### **Breaking the Silence (suggested area)**

- In this area a more complete understanding of the damage and done by the eugenics movement should be incorporated.
- Eugenics was enforced on those with disabilities and mental illness in Canada and around the world based on Francis Galton’s Hereditary Genius book.
- Supporters included politicians such as Tommy Douglas until he saw the results of this policy in Nazi Germany.
- Alberta was the last province to abolish this practice in 1972. In 1973 British Columbia appealed the abolishment.
- Article II of the United Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the crime of Genocide defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children from one group to another.

### **The Conversation**

- It was also stated that Mental Wellness needs to be recognized as a human right
- Canada has fallen behind other countries in addressing mental health
- Prisons have become the largest mental health facilities
- Approximately 350,000 visitors come to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights per year
- Systemic discrimination and stigma are also issues persons with lived experience face
- CMHA offered a video available that has Dr. Clarence Hincks, CMHA's founder, speaking on the need for parity
- To CMHA's knowledge, there are no museums globally that house exhibits relating to mental illness

### **Their Response**

The Canadian Human Rights Museum listened intently to what we had to say as well as became educated by all CMHA representatives regarding the human rights issues that people with lived experience live with every day in our country. Clint Curle agreed to the following:

- CMHA is invited to be a stakeholder for a new disability exhibit when this one fulfills its contract starting with meeting with the new curator early in 2019
- All of the recommendations will be considered
- Marion Cooper will be the lead contact for this initiative
- Dave Nelson and Rebecca Rackow will create a scorecard to monitor the progress
- The Museum has indicated that 2019 will be the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rwanda genocide and the Museum's board would like to do a piece on survivor's trauma as it relates to mental health
- The Museum would welcome information from CMHA relating to policy work for newcomers/refugees and perhaps subject matter keynotes to address these issues

The Canadian Mental Health Association, Saskatchewan Division is very interested in working to enhance the history and understanding of the discrimination against those persons who suffer from psychiatric disability and looks forward to working with our partners in this area.

