



# Eating Disorder Awareness Week: February 1 - 7, 2021

## “WHAT HAPPENED WHILE WE WAITED?”

As a followup to the theme from previous years “*Eating Disorders Can't Afford to Wait*”, the theme this year is meant to bring focus to the devastating impact that COVID-19 has had on individuals and families who have had to deal with an eating disorder during this already challenging period. Both the number and severity of eating disorders is on the rise and the impact on the healthcare system is showing with increased wait times and increased numbers of hospitalizations across Canada.

This past year has been a very challenging year for the Foundation in its efforts to maintain its many support programs for our eating disorder families, fortunately our families understand the importance of coming forward for support. Despite COVID-19 I am so impressed by the commitment shown by families and for their ongoing persistence and caring for their loved ones who are experiencing, in my view, the most serious of all mental health disorders. It's worth pointing out again, as I have over many years, that eating disorders are the number one mental health disorder in our province particularly amongst our adolescent population. It's been difficult getting this awareness message out to our healthcare leadership. While much progress has been made improving our inpatient and outpatient services, we are still in the early stages of recognizing the full impact that eating disorders are having on families. I realize there are many mental health challenges facing our province, however, an eating disorder is the most serious and complex mental health disorder and therefore requires a more intense and comprehensive study, so why are so many of our young people experiencing this debilitating disorder? It's clear to me the challenges facing our adolescent population today are daunting and a lot more difficult and complex than past generations. The social media revolution, obtaining a good education and finding a good job can be insurmountable for many of our adolescents, obviously these are contributing factors to higher rates of eating disorders. The

bigger question to raise here is why are we collectively not able to better understand this growing and most serious mental health matter. Is it because we are overwhelmed by the magnitude of our many mental health challenges or is it because we lack the intellectual fortitude to dig deeper into the research required to better understand and respond to the social and economic challenges facing our young people?

Eating disorders are increasing on average in the 30% range everywhere and its now time to stand back and determine what research is required to address the root causes of such a devastating mental health disorder. One would have to spend some time with an eating disorder family to observe the impact that eating disorders are having on the family unit. As with most mental health disorders the need to educate our families on how to cope and act as caregivers is perhaps the most critical need, despite our best efforts, we are falling short of this need.

Clearly our treatment and support services have improved, however, until we can treat the entire family unit on how to cope, much of the valuable treatment support provided will be lost due to a lack of continuity at the family level. Full recovery can only be realized when we treat and support the entire family. Sending a recovered eating disorder person back into the same environment they came from without the necessary family training and support substantially reduces the chance of a longer-term recovery. That said we are so proud of our families who despite these challenges



are providing the care and support to the best of their understanding and ability, however, it is not enough for a longer-term recovery. We have tried as a Foundation to ring the bell on the magnitude and critical nature of eating disorders and it's my belief that while good progress is being made, we are losing the battle to stem the tide of eating disorders, this has to change and soon. It is unfortunate that community support groups like ours are not afforded the resources required to increase and improve its support services, much more can be done if we were treated as a more willing and worthwhile partner, remembering that community service groups are the first and trusting point of contact for families. I am hopeful someday Governments will truly understand the value of community support groups and respond in a more meaningful fashion.

A broader point to make here is to remind governments that community support groups provide an essential and, in my view, the most important support for families

and therefore should be an inclusive partner in the recovery process. While a few dollars of support is helpful it is not enough to say we support community support groups, we need to be included in the early planning processes, we have a lot to offer if given the opportunity. I know I speak for community support groups when I say we are prepared and able to be a productive part of going forward, the only impediment to this is we must be given the opportunity.

As Chair of the Foundation's Board, I feel it is my responsibility to raise the alarm now that eating disorders are at epidemic levels and that we must act now and in a more decisive manner if we are to mitigate the growing and most serious rate of eating disorders.

These comments are in no way intended to diminish or recognize the very good work already done by families, healthcare leadership and those caring healthcare professionals who respond every day to our eating disorder families. Many thousands of families have been supported over the past 15 years and significant numbers of recoveries have been achieved.

We must continue bringing this message to the people of the province, as someone who understands the scope and depth of eating disorders, its urgent that we acknowledge that our mental health families are unable to cope and care for their loved ones without the supports required to be caregivers. This is critically important as most mental health disorders are handled on an outpatient basis.

These comments and observations are intended to be frank, helpful and supportive

and hopefully will be heard by our healthcare leadership. The rate of overall mental health disorders in our province is alarmingly high and our hopes for any social and economic recovery in the province has to include a more honest, respectful and profound response to overall mental health issues. As this is Eating Disorder Awareness Week lets reflect on the urgent need to be more understanding of what our eating disorder families are experiencing including a commitment to do our very best to partner with them on their journey to recovery.

The success of a Foundation like ours is the sum total of a lot of caring staff, supporters and volunteers who struggle every day to assist our eating disorder families cope with the challenges of being a caregiver. Full credit goes to our caring eating disorder families remembering that literally thousands of families are in a better place today.

On behalf of our families, I want to express our gratitude and appreciation to our Board of Directors, our Funding Partners, the Department of Health and Community Services, Eastern Health, special Volunteers and most importantly the Renata Elizabeth Withers Centre for HOPE Outpatient Program, Janeway Program and Inpatient Program who do the caring and support for families every day. We are thankful and fortunate to have a committed, thoughtful and dedicated staff of Paul, Tina, Patricia and Cathy who despite COVID-19 care for and work always in the best interest of our eating disorder families.

Regards,  
Vince Withers

## Proclamation

### Eating Disorder Awareness Week February 1<sup>st</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Whereas:** An Eating Disorder is a serious mental illness with often devastating physical implications;

**Whereas:** Eating Disorders affect many individuals and families in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador;

**Whereas:** Recovery from an eating disorder is a journey that includes support from families and caregivers;

**Whereas:** The Eating Disorder Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador is a leadership advocacy group dedicated to promoting awareness, treatment services and providing family support services and information about matters related to eating disorders;

**Whereas:** February 1-7, 2021 is dedicated across Newfoundland and Labrador and the entire country as a special time when many educational and awareness activities take place to help raise the level of understanding of Eating Disorder Prevention, Treatment and Recovery;

**Whereas:** The theme for Eating Disorder Awareness Week 2021 is “What happened while we waited?”

**Therefore:** I, Vince Withers, Chair of the Eating Disorder Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, do hereby proclaim February 1 to February 7, 2021 be observed as Eating Disorder Awareness Week in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

**Dated** this 1st Day of February at St. John's, NL

Vince Withers

Board Chair, Eating Disorder Foundation of NL

February 1, 2021



Vince Withers, Founder and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Eating Disorder Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, signs a Proclamation declaring February 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> as Eating Disorder Awareness Week throughout the province. Witnessing the signing is Paul Thomey, Executive Director of the Foundation.

## Eating Disorder Foundation of Newfoundland & Labrador Call for Applications

### 2021 Renata Elizabeth Withers Memorial Scholarship

Applications are being invited for two (2) \$1000 Scholarships

*Scholarship Criteria may include the following:*

- \* Recipient is currently enrolled in a course of study from a recognized post-secondary institution within Newfoundland & Labrador
- \* Recipient's course of study should be related, broadly speaking, to eating disorders/disordered eating and plan to continue this work in the health and education field
- \* Persons involved in projects/thesis work related to eating disorders/disordered eating are encouraged to apply
- \* Persons wanting to attend recognized eating disorders/disordered eating continuing education programs are also encouraged to apply
- \* Provincial representation is encouraged
- \* Educational and healthcare professionals are encouraged to refer potential students/candidates

Scholarship applications can be forwarded in the form of a **Cover Letter and Resume** outlining educational interest in the field of eating disorders and mental health:

Scholarship Committee  
Eating Disorder Foundation of NL  
13-15 Pippy Place St. John's NL A1B 3X2 or  
Email: info@edfnl.ca

**Closing date for Applications:  
Friday February 26, 2021 12:00 PM**

Winners will be announced at the  
EDFNL Annual General Meeting on Friday March 26, 2021



HOPE ALWAYS  
EATING DISORDER FOUNDATION OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

**Annual General Meeting and Scholarship Presentations  
Friday, March 26 at 11:00 am  
EDFNL office via ZOOM**

The Foundation is here to help. If you or someone you know need to talk about concerns of an eating disorder please contact us, we are available to chat by phone, email, and Zoom.

709-722-0500 | info@edfnl.ca  
www.edfnl.ca