

## **“Trashing” in the Anti-Oppression Movement** *By Jennifer Chambers, Empowerment Council Coordinator*

Anti oppression work is beautiful and fulfilling, yet sometimes very painful. Some of that pain is from fighting the status quo as expected and sometimes it comes from closer to home. I've been part of quite a few movements for change and one aspect that is seldom talked about is how members can go from attacking the problem to attacking each other.

In the beginning stage of our liberation, we find each other and are excited by our common experiences. Sometimes, for the very first time, we realize that what we had been told was a problem with “us” might actually be a problem with attitudes and actions towards us. We're delighted with each other and sometimes even with ourselves as we join together to challenge whatever is hurting us.

As we work together, differences in opinion, style, and ability begin to emerge. Some people's interests and abilities result in them doing the kind of work that brings them into positions of leadership. I'm defining leadership as simply a type of work that might be thinking and acting particularly effectively on behalf of a group, which often happens to get recognised more than other work .

At this point, problems began to arise that are common to most liberation movements. We had found what seemed to be the safe, friendly community for which we'd long been searching. When differences in values and style appear (such as partnership with the traditional mental health system versus separatism), the group no longer feels quite as cozy. When this happens, some people give up, feeling that even here their point of view is not shared or respected. Perhaps we all struggle with that sense of hopelessness. We still want many of the same things and have much in common, but it is often our differences we feel more. Too often, at this point, more energy and outrage can

get focused on differences within the group than on the original problem.

People in prominent positions of leadership often start to encounter a lot of people's negative feelings directed at them. There are various reasons for this. People do make mistakes. We've not had great models of leadership from which to learn. Our presence in a group that fights oppression means that we have previously had a bad time with people in positions of power. We've been disappointed and we've been hurt, leaving a backlog of resentment against leaders in general.

It is also true that people can be overwhelmingly supportive and caring about members of our community who are trying to make things better. This is why there still are people fighting the good fight.

People who have taken on certain “leadership” tasks often feel isolated in their attempts to make things happen. Asking for help is something almost drilled out of us – labelled “cheating”. A lot of influences can make it difficult to share work or organize help. We may have tried and decided that it was so difficult, or we felt so guilty, that we try to do it all ourselves. Our experience as oppression survivors means that we typically did not get useful support when we needed it, which may result in our giving up on people too easily. In the end, we may try to do everything by ourselves or turn to a small group of people to get things done, abandoning ideals of collective decision-making (which is difficult at the best of times). Resentment may develop about being overworked on the one hand, and unappreciated on the other.

Every group is oppressed in particular ways, and as mental health and/or addiction system survivors, we have had our own special mistreatment. It's natural for people to do what they learn, so we may end up abusing our fellow survivors or ourselves. (cont'd p.3)





## The 2014 Cheap & Crazy Symposium Mobilizing Strategic Conversations: Coming Together and Getting Organized

by Kris Ward & Lucy Costa

On Saturday, November 22nd, 2014 over 70 inquisitive attendees comprised of workers, clients, consumers, psychiatric survivors, students, lawyers, social workers, peer support workers, activists, advocates and community members came together to get organized and discuss important & relevant issues impacting the community today.

Organized by The Empowerment Council, the Symposium titled, “*Cheap and Crazy Symposium: Mobilizing Strategic Conversations*” brought together critical thinkers, as well as concerned and engaged community members to tackle and address injustices occurring within the mental health system, legal system, and social services in Ontario. With the aim of building unity through active discussion, the Empowerment Council brought speakers together to talk about a variety of issues. Below a list of our speakers and topics of the day:

The first panel, entitled, “**Stigma Campaigns versus Real Discrimination**” had two speakers:

- Navi Dhanota presented, “*Post-secondary education and issues of accommodations*”.
- Judy Verseghe presented, “*Charity advertising and stigma campaigns*”.

The second panel, “**Protecting the Rights of Children**” featured Myrna Schacherl, a WRAP facilitator, and her presentation, “*Unique Problems of Survivors of Childhood Abuse within the Mental Health System*”.

Panel three was called, “*Still a ‘fragmented’ mental health system?*”



Judy Verseghe, Navi Dhanota, Andrea Daley

- Our very own EC Board member Danielle Landry presented, “*Building imperfect solidarity: Working towards mad-positive labour politics in Toronto*”.



Danielle Landry

- Lana Frado, Executive Director of Sound Times, and Heather McKee, survivor-at-large, shared their presentation, “*‘Open doors’ to what? Psychiatric survivors take a closer look at ‘integrated access’*”.

In the fourth and largest panel of the day, “*Cheap and Crazy Symposium*” presented, “**Law, Madness, and Capacity**”, which included lawyers in the Ashley Smith inquest, Karen R. Spector, Mary Birdsell and Tess Sheldon and their work, “*Future Directions for Advocacy Following the Ashley Smith Inquest*”.

- Second presenters were Steve Hubel, WRAP Facilitator with the Mood Disorder Association of Ontario, and Edgar-Andre Montigny, a lawyer with Arch Disability Law Centre, with a presentation entitled, “*Legal Education and WRAP Plans: Protecting Your Rights: Capacity, Autonomy and Substitute Decision Making*”.
- Lastly, Dianne Wintermute and Nabila Khan from ARCH Disability Law Centre presented “*How supported decision making can be used to enhance capacity to instruct lawyers*”.

The fifth and last panel of a very packed and eventful day of dialogue was, “**Mobilizing Peer Support Advocates and Researchers**” and began with:

- Gord Singer, a Peer Support Specialist with the FOCUS program at St. Michael’s Hospital, and

his talk, “*Advocacy to Direct Service or Vice-Versa?*”

- Second on the panel was The Dream Team’s presentation of, “*The Tenant’s Bill of Rights*” provided by Leslie Miller.

The Symposium provided an opportunity to revisit the CAMH Bill of Rights on its 10th anniversary, to assess what has happened through the decade within



*Karen Spector, Mary Birdsell, Tess Sheldon*

the mental health system and human rights, as well as deciphering the pressing human rights issues around which the community needs to discuss and organize. We would like to encourage this type of event to continue into this year 2015.

### **A Call Out for Next Year’s Panel**

The Empowerment Council would like to make a call out to the participants of the Symposium, as well as other community members, to organize next year’s event so that we can come together once again and update each other on what has happened over the year regarding important current issues.

The following are some suggested guiding principles for next year’s event :

- Provide a space and opportunity for people to share what they have been working on (projects, writing,

initiatives) or what is happening currently, either within the LHIN or in the larger mental health system.

- Continue the combination of research focused and frontline issues that made the conference relevant and successful. Half of the participants stayed until the end of the day!
- Use public space to discuss the most relevant issues impacting consumers and psychiatric survivors, with the main goal and intention of coming together to build unity and get organized with a strategy.

The Empowerment Council would like to take this opportunity to say THANK YOU to all of the Symposium presenters for all that they shared with participants and for contributing to the success of the day! Thank you to all of the participants for your engagement and contributions to all the critical conversation that occurred. Lastly, thank you to all the volunteers and staff for your hard work in making it all happen.



*Kris, Steph, Lucy, Natalia, Kim, Samra*

### **“Trashing in the Anti-Oppression Movement” (continued from page 1)**

Many of the same guidelines used for doing advocacy apply to how we treat each other within the movement. When there are differences, and there always will be, it helps to first clarify what everyone really means. Often there is common ground that has been overlooked. Keeping criticisms specific, so that they are aimed at the issue not the person, greatly increases the chance that the other person can hear it. It is more important to emphasize what people are doing right than to point out flaws. Why would anyone want to do things differently if they are criticized either way? Ideally, the purpose of discussion is shared understanding leading to action (not shutting someone up or scoring points off them). Paying attention to how things get done as well as what gets done is critical, on the organizational and personal levels. As a general rule, we can all use encouragement.

I feel I have been incredibly fortunate in the comrades I have connected with over my 30 years of anti-oppression work. I have learned from everyone, whether joyfully or painfully. No one regrets my multitude of flaws more than me. However, we can’t wait to be perfect to try and contribute to the work. Let’s just make our imperfect way forward, and laugh as we learn together.

# Examining the Toronto Homeless Shelter Sector

By Tucker Gordon, Systemic Advocate in Addictions

With the onset of winter, Toronto shelters are again making the news. Several people have died on the streets (whether they had tried to access shelters those nights is unknown). Back in November, several activists were arrested for staging a sit-in to protest the City of Toronto's delay in opening a planned 24-hour women's shelter. Even though it was approved by the City, the City failed to put its expenses into the operating budget. Apparently the approval of a project by council does not automatically lead to it being put in the City budget!

The occupancy rate of all shelters is regularly cited as 92%, however, this number is being skewed in part by the rate of occupancy for shelters for families staying in motels. To the right is a chart of the City of Toronto occupancy rates on January 18, 2015.

This chart doesn't break it down into regional capacity. This is important to consider, as certain parts of town fill up faster than others, and people may not be able or willing to go to a shelter in an area of town that they are unfamiliar with or that is not near the services they access, due to being unable to return to them the following day.

These shelters have curfews, which unless someone

Shelter sector	Jan. 18th Occupancy	Capacity	Occupancy rate
Co-ed	439	442	99%
Men	1,615	1,749	92%
Women	578	603	96%
Youth	491	525	94%
Family (shelters)	771	814	95%
Family (motels)	240	350	69%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,134</b>	<b>4,483</b>	<b>92%</b>

calls in to say they will be late (which requires access to a phone) a bed someone had will be given away. Some do not allow admittance after curfew or if intoxicated. The only harm reduction shelter within Toronto is Eva's Phoenix, which is for youth. While some people want or need shelters where others aren't intoxicated, or need the earlier curfews to ensure they can get rest before work or appointments the following day, others, whose work may keep them out late, and those who aren't at a point to be able to or do not want to be sober need access to shelter as well. We need spaces in Toronto that mean regardless of who you are, where you are at in your life, you can sleep at night without it costing you your life or safety.

## EMPOWERMENT COUNCIL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP FORM

**EC Statement of Purpose:** *To conduct system wide advocacy on behalf of clients.*

**Contact Information:** *(Please Print Clearly)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Postal code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email address \_\_\_\_\_

I have used mental health and/or addiction services (*check those that apply*):

College Street site \_\_\_\_\_ Queen Street site \_\_\_\_\_ Other: Mental Health \_\_\_\_\_

Russell Street site \_\_\_\_\_ White Squirrel Way site \_\_\_\_\_ Other: Addiction \_\_\_\_\_

**I support the purpose of the Empowerment Council:**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: **Empowerment Council, 33 Russell Street, Room 2008, Toronto, ON M5S 2S1**

Or fill out a membership form online at our website: [www.empowermentcouncil.ca](http://www.empowermentcouncil.ca)