



EMPOWERMENT REPORT

(The Newsletter of the Empowerment Council)

Volume 6, No. 2

Winter 2014



From left: Susan Gapka, EC Board Co-Chair; Julia Greenbaum, Communications Coordinator, CAMH; Catherine Bennett, EC Board Member; Lucy Costa, EC Systemic Advocate in Mental Health; Helen Hook, Director, C/S Info Centre, Beamer Smith, EC Board Co-Chair

Lucy Costa - 2013 Winner of Toronto Access Award!

Empowerment Council staff member Lucy Costa received the 2013 City of Toronto Access Award for Disability Issues in recognition of her work as a Systemic Advocate with the EC, as well as her contributions as a board member at ARCH Disability Law Centre and as Co-Chair of Sound Times Support Services. Highlights of her work for the EC include the dissemination of the Bill of Client Rights, the DVD created for this topic and the creation of a ten-week primer course on mental health and the law entitled Mad About Rights.

"It is a privilege to be a recipient of the 2013 Human Rights Access Award. Over the years, I have learned from so many psychiatric survivors/consumers who have worked for decades (with minimal resources) before me to ensure that the mental health system, government and the courts are less discriminatory towards our community. Advocacy matters, because ideas matter; nothing beats a good idea, like the idea of freedom, equality and inclusion. Even though there are days when we want to give up, it's important we keep going. It's crucial that we keep advocating for the ideas that matter the most." - Lucy Costa

Has your driver's license been suspended because of a mental health disability or substance use?

By Lucy Costa and Toby Samson

The Empowerment Council held a workshop on October 22nd regarding license suspension. Currently there are a number of systemic problems with the arbitrary nature of the Ministry of Transportation's application of standards in respect to license suspension. The following shows the problem, quoting from the Ministry's website :

"Q6: I have a medical condition that my physician feels may interfere with my driving ability. Does that mean I will automatically lose my driver's license?"

A6: No, you will not necessarily lose your license. Not all medical conditions impair ability to an extent likely to significantly interfere with driving ability. **The ministry will review your medical report in conjunction with the established medical standards** and will advise you of the outcome of the review."

- There are no established standards; different facilities differ in what they write or recommend as "treatment" and there are no guidelines on what is required.
- Currently, doctors also have a freestanding obligation with little accountability.
- Patients do not have the information they require to best file an appeal – they may not even know what specific condition was reported.
- Doctors are not accountable to one another – an automatic policy at a hospital could lead to a report counter to what a doctor who has worked with the patient for years would say.

Here are a few challenges as expressed by clients at our meeting:

"I made a visit to the CAMH ER and I have a very sympathetic GP, but I am having a very difficult time knowing what to give to the LAT. They keep asking for more and more documentation."

"The government of Ontario paid for my truckers' training and I got my license, but it was suspended after a visit to St. Jo's because the person I saw there said I was taking too much medication."

"Why didn't they contact me and my GP first before filing a report with the MOT?"

The Empowerment Council has started a petition letter in order to raise attention to this issue and improve the current lack of accountability and standards. In the meantime, page 3 has information on what you need from your doctor in order to begin the process of getting your license back.

New! Follow Us On:

Twitter - @EmpowermentCoun

**Facebook - The Empowerment Council:
A Voice for the Clients of CAMH**



EC Volunteer Toby Samson receives an award at the Trinity/Spadina Volunteer Appreciation Event for her help on the Driver's License issue (with Rosario Marchese & Lucy Costa.)

What Do I Need From My Doctor To Get My License Back?

You may speak with a doctor for help getting your license back at two different points: when your license is first suspended, and when you appeal the suspension. Try to speak with a doctor with whom you have a relationship. Talk about the circumstances that led to your license suspension. If it was not your doctor that reported you, they may be supportive. If it was your doctor, then they will be in the best position to tell you what you need to do.

The first time you will need to speak with your doctor is when you get your notice of suspension in the mail, as you will also receive a letter advising you of what type of medical information is required to have your case considered for reinstatement. Your driver's license will be considered for reinstatement when that medical information is received and reviewed. Make sure you ask for your own copy of the report. If your report indicates that the medical standards are met, and there are no other outstanding suspensions on your driving record, a letter telling you the outcome and a notice of reinstatement will be mailed to you.

Since doctors are often very busy, they can miss some of the key elements of a helpful

report. You can provide your doctor with the list in the box on this page and ask that they address each individual aspect in their report, so that you can get the most supportive report the first time you try.

For a satisfactory medical report, the Ministry of Transportation Ontario looks for assessments that include the following information:

- your psychiatric history,
- diagnosis,
- treatment,
- medication,
- hospitalization(s) including a discharge summary of the most recent hospitalization, period of stability, current status and prognosis.

However, even if a doctor fills out those documents correctly, the Ministry of Transportation Ontario may require additional documentation, and you may also choose to appeal to the License Appeal Tribunal (LAT). For your appeal to the LAT, it is very helpful to submit new or additional

medical documentation. This is why it is important to get copies of the first reports. You can ask a doctor to go into more depth about the area in which the most change has occurred, or see if they missed addressing an area completely. Demonstrating to the LAT that the circumstances leading to your suspension are no longer there is a strong way to show them that you should have your license reinstated. If the initial report was not very helpful, you may also consider going to a different doctor for a second opinion.

For more info please visit <http://pdals.wordpress.com>

The Empowerment Council would like to learn more about EC client experiences trying to make the mental health and addiction system better for service users. As an organization, we are getting many more requests to have people "participate" on committees, focus groups etc. We need to know what works well about that participation and what needs improvement. It would mean a lot to us if you took a few minutes to fill out this short survey. Here is the link:

<HTTP://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YN2YD7Y> If you don't have internet and want a paper copy of the survey please contact: Kailey at.416 535-8501 Ext. 33520.

My Social Work Placement with the Empowerment Council

My name is Kailey, I am a fourth year social work student at Ryerson University. This year I am fortunate enough to be doing my school placement with the Empowerment Council. Through my placement I hope to gain the necessary skills that will make me a better advocate & social worker.

New models of mental health call for appointing people who are consumer/survivors to work in the mental health sector (Gilbert & Stickley, 2012). Professionals with lived experience give consumer/survivors an important voice within the mental health sector as well as creating potential to remove the fear of oppression that is associated with using mental health services. It is also important to acknowledge that there are mental health professionals who are not consumer/survivors, but are good allies and do amazing work.

Each consumer/survivor is the expert on their own lives and should hold the power in decision-making. As mental health professionals, we are facilitators in this relationship. Even if you have lived experience, in order to do good work with mental health clients you must be a good advocate. An important piece of being a good advocate is advocating **with**, not *for* service consumer/survivors. As advocates, our job is to listen to what people want, to empower and seek social justice when necessary.

I would like to be able to bring a mad perspective into my own social work practice and advocacy work within the mental health arena. I look forward to learning how to do good systemic advocacy throughout my placement with the Empowerment Council. - *Kailey Rigelhof*

Gilbert, P. & Stickley, T. (2012) "Wounded Healers": the role of lived-experience in mental health education and practice. *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, 7 (1) pp. 33 – 41.

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, and Toronto, ON M5S 2S1**

Or fill out a membership form online at our website: www.empowermentcouncil.ca