



## **INSPIRATION AWARD WINNER Cynthia Clark**

They say when it comes to love, nothing beats the Mom kind -- and Cynthia Clark is no exception. Being a parent is the hardest job in the world, but being the parent of a child with mental illness is especially challenging.

If Cynthia's name is familiar to you, it may be because her son Justin won an Inspiration Award last year for his many triumphs dealing with schizophrenia and helping other youth in treatment.

Described by her nominator as 'a diminutive tiger', Cynthia took it upon herself to learn all she could about Justin's illness when he was first diagnosed, and she soon became his number one ally in a less-than-perfect health care system.

Even when Justin was doing well, Cynthia went to bat for other young people to ensure they didn't face the same roadblocks that her son did on the road to recovery.

Cynthia channeled her anger at the lack of resources for families into support for others. She is the person on the other end of the phone, day and night, providing other families with an understanding ear, offering encouragement as well as her own experience.

These calls are never planned. The phone rings and there is a crisis, so Cynthia puts everything else aside and listens – sometimes for hours – to help other parents in their time of need. She is also very active in a support group for parents of children with a mental illness.

She was instrumental in securing the participation of Canterbury High School students in an early intervention poster challenge which helped students and their parents understand more about mental illness. Cynthia has also shown courage by putting her and her son's face to mental health through reports in newspapers, TV and posters in an effort to further reduce its stigma.

In the fall she helped rally volunteers to put on the first annual 'Raking for Kids' event to raise funds and awareness of youth mental illness. Committed to the value of early intervention, she lobbied with MPPs and even met with the McGuinty cabinet to explain the urgent need for increased health-care funding for youth mental health care.

Cynthia also collaborates with the clinical team at CHEO to discuss the unique needs and concerns of the families she is supporting, ultimately securing changes that have enhanced the delivery of services to these families.

Cynthia truly is an inspiration, both to her own son and to other families who know they can turn to her when they need a caring source of strength and courage to keep moving forward.



## INSPIRATION AWARD WINNER Denise Leduc

Three cheers for Denise Leduc! That's how a nominator summed up the many reasons why Denise Leduc is an inspiration to everyone around her. Despite living with schizophrenia for more than 30 years, Denise works constantly to improve herself and to remain at her optimum level of health.

Denise became something of a celebrity when she was selected by *Schizophrenia Digest* as the subject of their recent 'Getting on Track' series, which followed Denise over the course of a year as she worked toward wellness and made significant healthy lifestyle changes.

One of these changes was to quit her 2-packs-a-day smoking habit. Denise and her best friend Sandra Potvin, who also suffers from mental illness, decided to support each other and butt out together. They joined an ROH smoking cessation group and on January 1<sup>st</sup> put their New Years 'Solutions' into practice, making their houses smoke-free zones, exercising regularly and seeing a nutritionist.

While mental illness has challenged Denise it's certainly not prevented her from maintaining a positive attitude and commitment to a healthier life that's been a shining example to others in the smoking cessation group. Here's what just a few of them had to say about Denise:

"Denise is the one who encouraged me to come to the group. She's inspired me and sometimes she invites me out for coffee – she's a good listener."

"Denise gives me a reason to come back every week until I quit permanently – her example is just what I needed."

"Denise tells the truth and is more concerned about other people than herself. I think her main idea is to love people and to her that's all that counts."

Denise handles the challenges of her illness in a dignified manner, inspiring others to live their best lives, despite occasional setbacks. She also has grown to become a valued core member of the ROH's Coping With Illness group for the past three years.

"Unfailingly, Denise expresses not only meaningful words of support, but also practical helpful information to her co-participants," says the group's leader. "She points a possible way through problems described by others and also lends her support."

So three cheers to Denise Leduc indeed. She's now achieved 13 months as a non-smoker, and she continues to inspire us by meeting the challenges of her illness head-on and with her trademark 'never give up' attitude.



## **INSPIRATION AWARD WINNER Helen White**

There's an old Aboriginal saying that if you want to really know someone, walk a mile in their moccasins. As someone who has been both a patient and an advocate for patient rights, you could say Helen White has worn a lot of moccasins.

Helen is a very caring and driven person who uses all her expertise and energy to advocate for consumers who need help on their path to recovery. After facing her own personal struggle with bi-polar disorder, Helen is now living beyond her mental illness and she's held many positions aimed at helping others successfully navigate the mental health system.

She worked for five years at the Brockville Psychiatric Hospital as Patient Council Coordinator and joined the Carlington Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team as a Peer Specialist in 1999. A Certified Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioner, Helen also participated in research on the consumer/provider position on ACT Teams and co-authored a paper published in the *Community Mental Health Journal*.

A member of the Technical Advisory Panel for ACT Ontario since 2000, Helen has also been involved in systematic advocacy issues affecting persons with psychiatric disabilities in the national capital region. On top of all this great work, Helen even manages to find time to give presentations about her personal experience to local high school students.

The Peer Support Worker who nominated Helen says being a member of her ACT Team has given him the privilege of learning from Helen how best to serve ACT clients. She knows all too well the many challenges that their clients face: housing, employment, setting goals, and just having a life worth living.

Helen's dedication and commitment to helping others are legendary among other service providers, who say they know better than to try and slip one by Helen, as she is always speaking up for clients who can't speak for themselves and she's quick to ensure those under her wing are treated with respect and dignity.

So congratulations Helen on all your fine work and compassion for others – you can wear our moccasins anytime.