



THE NOTEPAD

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Pathways Serious Mental Illness Society

IN THIS OCTOBER 2022 ISSUE

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Welcome, Gabi Guerrero

Gabi Guerrero stepped into the position of Executive Director for Pathways SMIS on September 26, 2022, to take up the leadership of our small but powerful organisation. Gabi has all the qualities needed to represent Pathways SMIS: resilience, intelligence and passion. Furthermore, she is a highly accomplished professional with 25 years of international business experience in management and operations.

Nineteen years ago, Gabi immigrated from Lima, Peru, to Vancouver, Canada, with her small family of three young children. She left behind all that was familiar to her, the support of her parents and family, a top-notch job as director for Publicitaria Nasta Ogilvy – WPP¹, to a safer and better life in Canada.

Gabi Guerrero, Executive Director,
Pathways Serious Mental Illness Society

“I took every job offered, and every job was the 'best' job because I was working,” says Gabi.

It takes sheer grit and determination to immigrate and assimilate into a new country. Settling into Vancouver, Gabi found herself— despite a Bachelor of Business Administration from Ricardo Palma University, in Lima, Peru— up against candidates with Canadian experience.

Not deterred by obstacles, Gabi worked her way into Vancouver’s job market. “I took every job offered, and every job was the 'best' job because I was working,” says Gabi. Her experience in various industries enriched her career and credentials as she worked her way up from office manager at Humphries Construction to Director for BC Original Minds Association’s Destination Imagination—a global organization with 80 different affiliates worldwide.

“It was a steep learning curve. However, it allowed me to deal with a diversity of people while problem-solving in a Canadian context,” says Gabi.



Gabi Guerrero, recipient of the 2016 Richmond Community Foundation's Ethel Tibbits Scholarship.

Gabi's work history is only one facet of her immigrant journey. Gabi quickly realised that she needed Canadian credentials to get ahead in Vancouver. She enrolled at Kwantlen Polytechnic University for Business Management Diploma, from which she graduated in 2016 while raising her three children as a single mother. There were many times when she nearly gave up, but she persevered, knowing that a Canadian diploma on her resume would open doors. Welcome financial assistance came when Kwantlen Polytechnic University awarded Gabi the 2016 Richmond Community Foundation's Ethel Tibbits Scholarship.

"I understand what it feels like not to know how to deal with the mental health system... This experience is why Pathways SMIS resonates with me."

To many, it may sound like Gabi's journey was simply building on success after success, but we all know that life can be squiggly. When her middle child suffered from anxiety and depression and was admitted to BC Children's Hospital, Gabi had to navigate through the system in pursuit of help. It was a very difficult time. "Sometimes the answers or help that we are looking for don't come fast enough." Over those intense first couple of years, Gabi was fortunate to get the help that they needed and be referred to support groups for her child.

"I understand what it feels like not to know how to deal with the mental health system. An organization like Pathways would have made a huge difference in my life. This experience is why Pathways SMIS resonates with me."

Gabi believes in Pathways' mission, vision and work. "No one is free of having a loved one suffering from a serious mental illness. Pathways has reached and helped a lot of families. I want to see it grow and expand. For families going through serious mental illness challenges, I want them to know they are not alone. We can support them," she says.

Pathways SMIS welcomes Gabi in her new challenge to grow the awareness and capacity of our organization. The Pathways community will support her every step of the way. We wish Gabi success. And, for a little break from life's stresses, you may wish to join Gabi on the tennis court—she is a four-time Peruvian National Junior Champion.



Gabi with her beautiful family enjoying time out together.



Gabi Guerrero, four time Peruvian Junior National Tennis team champion continues to enjoy success in her lifelong passion in Vancouver.

¹ Ogilvy is one of the largest agencies in the world. The Latin region, of which Paraguay is a partner through Nasta, is the most creative network cluster of all the regions where Ogilvy operates. It leads the main creativity festivals such as One Show, Cannes Lions, Clio, D&AD and LIA.

Pathways Serious Mental Illness Society offers free weekly family group workshops

The lonely journey of severe mental illness need not be so lonely.

Living with a loved one with a serious mental illness, whether a member of your family or a close friend, can be a lonely experience. Family and friends can overextend their physical and emotional capacity in a long and often frightening journey. The energy is focused outward on the ill and struggling person, often depleting loved ones.

Our [free weekly family support group](#) is a safe space where you can come and share experiences, ask questions, express fears and offer compassion and empathy.

Karen's Story



Karen takes some time for self-care on an early morning walk.

Karen found Pathways SMIS on Google. Her daughter had a psychotic breakdown three years ago when she started university and was diagnosed with bipolar. “Attending the Family Support Group was a place where I could be open, share my fears and disappointments and ask questions. Talking about mental illness is not a topic you can talk to anyone about, and I tried to hide it from friends and family. Being part of a support group helped me feel stronger and “normal”. I could share with other families in similar but different circumstances,” she says.

“Taking accountability for my behaviour softened the relationship between my daughter and me and my family.”

Karen’s relationship with her daughter improved, as did her relationship with her husband and son. She learned self-care techniques like going for a walk in nature and thinking about why she felt so scared and angry. “Taking time for myself allowed me to be more reflective and honest about my behaviour and reactions. When I am reactive, my daughter is reactive, and we fight and yell, both of us trying to make our points. Taking accountability for my behaviour softened the relationship between my daughter and me and my family,” says Karen.

“My husband and son are more reserved and don’t talk much about their feelings. We have adapted our parenting style using tools I learned at Family Group. Pathways SMIS encouraged us to go to family counselling. We accessed resources and books to educate us on bipolar,” she adds.

Karen and her husband now practice self-care. They take notice of what they eat, get enough sleep and take time out to be together as a couple and family. “We have learned that listening is essential to loving parenting and relationships,” says Karen.

MJ's Story

“It saved me,” says MJ, whose daughter has struggled with alcohol abuse, referring to Pathways’s weekly Family Group Support. MJ’s daughter is diagnosed with bipolar and lives in denial, meaning she is on and off her meds. As a result, her adult life has been tumultuous, with failed and sometimes abusive relationships, an unplanned pregnancy and a short period of homelessness.

In 1969, MJ and her husband immigrated to Canada with their two small children. Arriving in Canada, she finished English Grade 12 and then went on to get a diploma in social services. However, her marriage broke down, and MJ was left keeping hearth and home together for herself and her children. She recalls listening to a talk show one day, and the speaker, a renowned celebrity, said, “everyone needs one person who will stick with them for life.” It was then that MJ decided, “I would never leave my daughter. My daughter and I struggled for 40 years till two years ago. It was only then that I discovered the Pathways Support Group, and that saved me,” she says.

“Hearing other people's circumstances, I learned a lot. They understood me. They understood my pain. Most importantly, I learned to care for myself and set boundaries.”

The Pathways’ free family support group, has been a game changer for MJ. “Hearing other people's circumstances, I learned a lot. They understood me. They understood my pain. Most importantly, I learned to care for myself and set boundaries. I can never trust my daughter; I never know what the truth is. Sometimes there are lies and abusive behaviour. I have learned to care for myself and set boundaries.”

MJ’s daughter's behaviour remains erratic. “I used to get emotionally involved, and then I could not sleep or eat. Now I know that the only person I can take responsibility for is myself,” says MJ.

MJ urges members of the Pathways community to “join the support group because the situations are different, but the pain is the same”.

Join our weekly online support groups

Support groups offer shared experiences, encouragement, reassurance and compassion needed on a harrowing journey of traversing mental illness and the multilayered systems within the Province's mental health care. Families often run up against red tape, legislation and different interpretation of legislation by different staff and institutes. These roadblocks, lack of information and feeling of loneliness and social stigma and shame can leave families isolated and in fear. Pathways Serious Mental Illness Society offers a free online weekly Family Support Group and welcomes family members, significant others and friends of a loved one with a serious mental illness.

If you know a family member or friend who is living with a person who has a serious mental illness, tell them about our Family Support Group. No one has to make this journey alone. We are here to support each other.



Lee Goulden (1980 - 2022)

The Goulden family recently lost their son and brother, Lee. His brother, Jean-Paul, wrote this poignant letter and asked that we share it with the Pathways community.

Letter from Jean-Paul Goulden, brother to Lee Goulden (1980 - 2022)

Despite the fact that it could be argued the only constant in nature is change, humans have been struggling with mortality since before civilization. We have to remind ourselves that what Lee ultimately went through, we all go through, with the only variance, of course, being the circumstances involved. With great sadness, he wasn't truly given a

chance at a good life, and his life was taken from him far too soon.

I truly believe he made the best of things that he could, given his schizophrenia and concurrent substance use disorder, with, quite possibly, the latter causing the former and preventing him from being able to cope with the disease or to treat it effectively. The sad fact is he never stood a chance in this often dangerous and unforgiving world. As you're probably well aware, over 10,000 illicit or street drug-caused deaths have occurred in only BC since the toxic drugs epidemic was declared in 2016. Of course,

there's fentanyl and other extremely lethal drugs unknowingly mixed in with the known drug, giving the user no clue as to what is in it or its potency. He sought out drugs, we believe, mainly to address a common symptom of schizophrenia, his persistent anhedonia, or lack of ability to experience the typical extent of pleasure or enjoyment, along with persistent anxiety. This use then caused a feedback loop, blunting the efficacy of his medication, worsening his episodic delusions and auditory hallucinations, leading to isolation and irrational thinking, which then inevitably led to further problems, including financial stresses and feelings of low self-esteem. This certainly didn't help him experience joy in his life, let alone stability. His disease meant that he simply couldn't see this pattern, unfortunately, which is due to another symptom of his illness, anosognosia; this is similar to waking from a dream, in that one can't remember what occurred, so he could never see the complete picture of the cycle recurring again and again. One of his delusions was even that these illicit street drugs were just harmless "white powder"; he simply could never understand the mortal danger he kept putting himself in, time and time again. The fact is that Lee would almost certainly be alive right now if a legal safe supply was available. I truly hope the various levels of government, along with the support of those willing to vote for such logical and progressive policies, can prevent other families having to go through the horror of losing their dearest loved ones far too soon. The truth is that, given Lee's several prior close calls in overdosing, in some sense, we are genuinely lucky we had him in our lives for as long as we could, at least.

I also believe another factor in all this is the persistent stigma surrounding mental illness and schizophrenia in particular. I think that if more people were made aware of, and truly understood his condition, which affects about 1% of people, then they would have more proactively reached out to keep in touch and be more empathetic of his illness and how profoundly it was affecting him. Oftentimes people need our help most when they push us away.

I'll never forget how much I looked up to him growing up. He was the cool, popular guy in school. An athlete, in the jazz band, he excelled in math and his studies; he was so gregarious and able to get along with anyone. Then he went on to pursue entrepreneurship, music production and even screenwriting. His dreams were so big with such ambition—and talent. He so wanted to be successful in life, and he absolutely would have been had he not been a victim of this terrible illness. I'll also never forget our wonderful road trip to California with Jamie, his best friend and dad. Easy summer days, exploring the world and just the joy of being...together.

Many physicists believe that some form of a multiverse exists, whether that be through the Many Worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics, where the wavefunction's counterfactual possibilities all do occur in parallel universes, or the relativistic cosmic event horizon that is real, where space moves faster away from us than the speed of light at the observable universe's horizon, or eternal inflation, creating ever new bubbles of universes, each with new physical constants, or even just a cyclic, eternal universe, that I think it's highly likely at least one of these or others, is true. If so, anything that is physically possible and consistent will occur throughout an echoing eternity of spacetime.

I like to think that there is a version of Lee out there right now living a good, rich, joyful life and where, free from his illness, he can finally make his dreams come true....

But... we can't be with him....

Maybe, though, we can at least strive to gain some measure of peace with this unending struggle with mortality. As difficult as it is to imagine now, as Bertrand Russell said, "The happy [person] feels

[themselves] a citizen of the universe, enjoying freely the spectacle that it offers and the joys that it affords, untroubled by the thought of death because [they feel themselves] not really separate from those who will come after [them]. It is in such profound instinctive union with the stream of life that the greatest joy is to be found."

Such is the transcendent consciousness we should strive for. With, supposedly, 98% of the atoms in our bodies replaced each year, we are, after all, all related to everything on this superorganism that is Earth, as everything affects everything else and everyone in this unending stream of life. We will carry forward our thoughts of Lee as we live, how he changed us, and shaped our lives, and will continue to do so, sharing what he meant to us, experiencing his works, and never forgetting the special essence of his person.

He is, at least, now free of any suffering, and we can take some solace in that. Rest well, my beloved brother. We will miss you always and forever...

Jean-Paul Goulden



Pathways SMIS is a not-for-profit society that relies on donations and grants to deliver its services.

All services provided by Pathways SMIS are free of charge.