



# THE NOTEPAD

FAMILIES  
HELPING  
FAMILIES

Pathways Serious Mental Illness Society



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## Message from the President



Pathways Serious Mental Illness Society is built on volunteers, who, while managing their own daily challenges in supporting a loved one with a serious mental illness, also dedicate time to helping other families in similar circumstances navigate this difficult path. This unique sharing of lived experiences and giving of time to assist other families makes our organisation so special. We are stronger together than we are standing alone.

As we near the end of 2022, I would like to thank all our volunteers for their generous gift of time to Pathways over the past year. Because of your contribution of shared experiences and knowledge, we have created a community and a pathway to better well-being for so many individuals and families.

I would also like to thank the many donors who have helped us achieve our mission to alleviate suffering caused by mental illness. Your gifts ensure that we have the necessary resources to provide programs without cost to families in need and are helping Pathways create a larger, more vibrant community of care and understanding.

We are genuinely grateful for your generosity.

To the dedicated staff of Pathways, I would like to acknowledge your ongoing contribution to improving the lives of families supporting loved ones. Thank you for your strong commitment and hard work in continuing to provide the necessary tools for Pathways to deliver support to those families in need.

To all of you, on behalf of the board, staff and volunteers, may 2023 be a new beginning for all of your hopes and dreams.

Respectfully,  
Joseph Gormley  
President

## Merry Christmas! Or is it?

*Five ways to get through the festive season*



The anticipation of Christmas is the promise of cheery rooms scented with spices as families gather to exchange gifts and stories. The bustle of present buying and menu planning precedes the day and takes on a frenetic speed. It seems as though the whole world has caught the one-way sleigh to a jolly good time, and if you haven't jumped aboard, you're missing out big time.

While many enjoy the planning and parties, others find it stressful. Families can come undone over roast turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy. "Christmas is an especially charged time of the year," says Valeska Gauthier, a counsellor and a support coordinator for Pathways SMIS.

### **Be Present**

For Valeska, Christmas means being far away from home and family, which is heart-wrenching. It also brings back memories. "I have perfect memories of Christmas past", says Valeska, "but life was not perfect at home. Memories can often be hyper-accentuated as perfect. If we live in the future in our minds, we can become anxious about something that may or may not happen. If we always think about our past, nostalgia could lead to depression."







## Avoid unrealistic expectations

Disappointment tends to occur when we have unmet expectations. If you believe the holiday season is about giving out of love, share this with your family in a gentle and open conversation without attachment to the outcome, and you may be surprised at what you inspire.

“We put a lot of pressure on ourselves as to what we think we should be doing and what we think the output should be”, says Donald Pavlovich, volunteer and past president of Pathways SMIS.

Don lost his mother on Christmas Eve. Since then, “Christmas has a different feeling. The Hallmark sense of what it’s meant to be like, I don’t feel that at all”, he says. Don reminds us that “not all Christmasses are the same. Some are lousy, and some are great. The day is for yourself and not about what you think you should be doing but what you want to do. It’s a holiday! Stay in bed and read a book until noon. Break the daily routine. Do something different. And, if you don’t feel like being around people, there is nothing wrong with that.”

Choose who you wish to spend this time with, such as a small group of supportive family or friends who bring empathy and understanding to the table.

## Simplify and enjoy

Don and Valeska both agree on simplifying your plans for what you can accomplish. Forgive yourself if the table and trimmings are not perfect; your love, health and sanity are your gifts to your family, so try not to let the festivities take over.

“We are all doing our best at any moment. Sometimes just getting out of bed is a huge achievement. Don’t judge yourself. Embrace yourself. Love yourself. Treat yourself like you would treat your best friend,” says Valeska.



Get out and exercise. Drink moderately, if at all, to reduce the risk of triggering people with alcohol or addiction issues. Festive food and drink can make us lethargic. Balance it out by trying not to overindulge. And sleep. The long winter nights remind us that this is the time to sleep.

**WEEKLY SUPPORT GROUPS**

For families, significant others and friends of a loved one with a serious mental illness.

Online | Zoom  
1.5-2 hrs

**PATHWAYS SMIS**  
Supportive Mental Illness Services

<https://pathwayssmi.org/weekly-support-groups/>

## Find a support group

Don encourages members to take advantage of the Family Support Group, especially before Christmas. He got involved with Pathways SMIS when a family member was diagnosed with schizophrenia. He saw the fear in his loved one and decided to take Pathways SMIS’s free Family-to-Family course.

“Helping others is one of the most important things I can do, so I started by seeking additional information because I didn’t have a clue. It changed my whole philosophy on people who were mentally ill.” Don now facilitates Family Support Groups. Don’s advice is: “Let people

talk. It’s important to listen and only offer factual advice if you offer any at all.”

Valeska reminds us that “every time we have an interaction with another person, we leave an impact on that person. Spreading kindness and gentleness has a ripple effect. Every single person makes a difference on the planet.”

### Take time out for gratitude

Care for yourself. Sink into a long, hot bath, sip a mug of delicious chai, take the time to savour each mouthful of a cookie and lick the icing sugar from your lips. Watch a wintery sunset slip away at the end of the day on a late afternoon walk. Find the small moments that bring joy and squeeze out every drop of joy at that moment, and you will find gratitude and acceptance.

Maybe our gratitude is that we learn and grow from our hardships and setbacks. Even slight feelings of joy can help lift our spirits and focus on what is really important. Permit yourself to feel the sad things and reach out for support.



*"You are allowed to feel messed up and inside out. It doesn't mean you're defective—it just means you're human."*

*— a quote from the novel Cloud Atlas by David Mitchell*



### Tips and tools to practice mindfulness

Mindfulness is staying in the present moment without judgement or attachment. Here are some practical tools and techniques from Valeska Gauthier, support coordinator for Pathways SMIS, for practising mindfulness this Christmas.

#### 1. **Feel your body, hug yourself, and breathe deeply**

Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 7 and breathe out for 8.

When you breathe in, imagine you are smelling a flower.

When you breathe out, imagine you are blowing out a candle.

(Note: use a rhythm that works for you, as long as the ratio is 4:7:8)

## **2. Be in your body**

Place your feet on the floor. Feel the surface that you are sitting on supporting you. Feel the back supporting you if you are sitting on a chair or couch. At this moment, you are safe and secure.

## **3. Be mindful of your body**

Do a check-in. Where are you holding tension in your body? Breathe into the tension and let go.

## **4. Be mindful of your thoughts**

As they float up, notice them and if they are negative or distressing, change them. Instead, choose an uplifting thought. Valeska describes this as “weeding the garden in your head.”

## **5. Our minds can run away from us**

When this happens, do one of the following:

- Engage in a task and be aware of every small step. Involve all your senses in the task.

For example, if you are washing dishes, notice the soap suds foaming in the clean water as you fill the sink. Smell the lemony scent of the dish soap, and feel the warm water on your hands. Enjoy the gleaming, clean dishes dripping in soap suds as you place them on the drying rack. By taking notice of each sensory moment of the task, you will still your mind.

- Ask a question such as “why am I so lucky?” instead of going down the spiral of “why is this happening to me?”

When you catch yourself asking negative questions, ask yourself empowering mental questions such as

- What am I most happy about in my life, and why?
- What am I most excited about, and why?
- What am I most grateful for, and why?
- What am I committed to in my life right now, and why?
- Who do I love? Who loves me? And why am I so loved?



*"To the world you may be one person, but to one person  
you may be the world."*

*– Dr. Seuss*

## Note the dates

### Circle of Strength

Pathways SMIS members and friends can look forward to celebrating our society at our annual Circle of Strength fundraiser on **Saturday, April 22, 2023**. After two years of social shutdown, we are thrilled to invite you all back to help us host this wonderful luncheon event at the Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral. Join us for a delicious meal and listen to Inspirational guest speakers from our community who will share their stories to help us better understand mental illness.



### Host a table

Circle of Strength is an opportunity for you to host a table of eight to ten people. Hosting a table plays a key role at this important fundraising event.

Your role as a host is to extend invitations to influencers within your community who can give generously or wish to gain a deeper understanding of the stigma and challenges around mental illness. We provide written invitations and emails for you to send to your business contacts, friends and family. Our event coordinator, Elana Andrews, is a wonderful coach and supporter of hosts as they fill their tables.

### Help raise awareness and funds

Previously, the Circle of Strength luncheon has been transformational as we continue to raise awareness for mental illness and funds to expand our services to those who need them.

Circle of Strength has been Pathways SMIS's primary fundraiser for 15 years, raising between \$35,000 - \$50,000. These funds have made possible the provision of our [Family-to-Family Course](#) and our [weekly support groups](#), all at no cost, to those who use and benefit from these services, helping to transform the lives of caregivers of mentally ill loved ones.

As Pathways SMIS navigates the fundraising challenges posed post-COVID-19, we rely on critical and generous donations more than ever to continue to provide support, free of charge, to families and caregivers.

We encourage you to step up and be a host. If you are interested in hosting a table, please contact Gabi Guerrero, Executive Director:

Email: [executivedirector@pathwayssmi.org](mailto:executivedirector@pathwayssmi.org) Phone: 604-926-0856

If you are interested in attending, please contact us:  
Email: [info@pathwayssmi.org](mailto:info@pathwayssmi.org) Phone: 604-926-0856

## **Family Support Groups**

Tuesday, December 20th, 2022, 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Friday, January 6th, 2023, 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Thursday, January 12th, 2023, 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Thursday, January 19th, 2023, 4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, January 28th, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Friday, February 3rd, 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 16th, 4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, February 25th, 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

[Register today](#)

## **We thank you from the bottom of our hearts**

### **Thank you for your trust**

Thank you for trusting us and sharing your heartfelt tears and laughter during the Family-to-Family course and to all of you who attend the Family Support Group. We are committed to you.

### **Thank you for your support and advocacy**

With your help, Pathways SMIS continues to advocate for the timely treatment of those with serious mental illness.

Thank you for having the courage to fight for involuntary admission where appropriate. Thank you for speaking up.

Thank you to the many organizations that invited us to present to their members.

### **Thank you to our volunteers**

You give in so many ways. Without you, we cannot deliver the services we do.

### **Thank you to our many donors**

**The Vancouver Irish Golf Society (VIGS)** presented Pathways SMIS with a cheque for funds raised at a September event in Whistler, which included 10% of all membership fees and a matching contribution from the Rina M. Bidin Foundation.





From left to right: Chris O'Hare, member of VIGS; Bonnie Sauder, education program coordinator for Pathways SMIS; Cillian Altman, member of VIGS; Gabi Guerrero, executive director for Pathways SMIS, and Roddy Carroll, members of VIGS.

Thank you to the Rina M. Bidin Foundation for your continued generosity in donating to Pathways SMIS. The Foundation's support is focused on established BC-based programs to improve the future for families, children and youth at risk, including First Nations children and youth.



From left to right: Nina Lyons, executive director for the Rina M. Bidin Foundation, with Gabi Guerrero, executive director for Pathways SMIS

Thank you to Grant Thornton LLP and colleagues in Vancouver, Langley, and Abbotsford for your generous gift from the [Grant Thornton Foundation and the Greater Purpose Program.](#)

“Mental illness is an important cause and one that needs ongoing support. Pathways Serious Mental Illness Society goes above and beyond helping the community, and we greatly appreciate what you do,” said John Harris, managing partner for South Coastal BC, Grant Thornton LLP.

## Sending blessings



Christmas has not always been easy for me. My holiday season is bittersweet.

I come from a culture where family is very close and united. My move to Canada separated my family across the continents of The Americas. I have my children, but the rest of my family is overseas. Throughout the years, I've learned to cope with the distance and make the best of what I have. I find joy in doing things that make me and my family happy.

This Christmas, I will celebrate how honoured I am to lead an organization that has helped so many people affected by mental health. Living with someone with a serious mental illness is never easy, and with added festivities, engagements and obligations, Christmas can be an extra stressful time.

I could not be more proud of the work we do at Pathways SMIS. To all of you, many blessings over the holiday season, and wishing you all the best for the coming new year.

Warm regards,  
Gabi Guerrero  
Executive Director



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.