

Not alone

The North Shore Schizophrenia Society gears up peer program.

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Cheryl Olney pushes a bundle of paper across the table.

Neatly written notes run along set lines – “I am a better parent to my son.” “We are not alone in this, we’ve met some wonderful new people.” “I wish I could have known six months ago what I know now.”

“Many of them are lost and confused and don’t know what to do,” says the executive director of the North Shore Schizophrenia Society. “There is a real sense of despair at that point.”

On Jan. 19 the society’s cozy top-floor office off Marine Drive will once again fill with a batch of people hoping to learn more about supporting seriously mentally ill family members.

Having run for 11 years, the society’s Family-To-Family program has seen its participants move into positions as teachers.

It’s a peer-based 12-week course that helps people with family members who have illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression and anxiety, weave through their emotions, medical practices and communicating with their relatives.

“By the end of the course there is hope,” Olney says.

Participants quickly realize they are not alone in facing issues surrounding mental illness, she says. One in five British Columbians, approximately 882,000 people, will experience some form of mental health disorder this year, according to B.C.’s Ministry of Health Services. Often multiple family members attend the sessions together, Olney says.

Research has proven people with mental illness have more success when a family is understanding and supportive, she notes.

“The family becomes a source of strength,” Olney says.



FAMILY TO FAMILY - Cheryl Olney has run the North Shore Schizophrenia Society's Family-To-Family program for the past 11 years.

Rebecca Aldous photo

The classes, reaching 17 people including two teachers, are free. Because class size is limited, pre-registration is required.

The Family-To-Family program runs Jan. 19 to April 13, with a one-week break during the Olympics. For more information call 604-926-0856 or visit www.northshoreschizophrenia.org.

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