

For immediate release: December 10, 2013

After 33 years of dedication and inspired leadership CMHA/Peel CEO, Sandy Milakovic, announces her retirement

BRAMPTON, Ontario - The Canadian Mental Health Association/Peel Branch (CMHA/Peel) today announces that its CEO, Sandy Milakovic, will retire in the New Year. After 33 years with CMHA/Peel, Sandy's well-deserved retirement will enable her to spend more time with her family and loved ones. Her last day in the office as CEO will be January 24, 2014.

Sandy started at CMHA/Peel in 1980 as a psychiatric nurse supporting people with mental illness in the community. At that time the branch had only 8 staff and ran on a shoestring budget. Sandy held progressive positions with CMHA/Peel, finally becoming Executive Director in 1999 and CEO in 2006. Today, under her leadership, CMHA/Peel has grown to 104 staff, serving over 4,000 clients and providing resources, training and mental health information to over 17,000 members of the community annually.

Reflecting on her time with the organization, Sandy says "Over my 33 years with CMHA/Peel I have seen the agency grow exponentially. There are two constants through all the change – the courage and resilience of those experiencing mental illness and the families that support them; and the dedication of our staff. I have been privileged to work in a field I love with these people. I truly believe mental health and addictions are the next frontier for the healthcare system and will watch its progression with a heart full of hope."

Trusted for her sound judgment and thoughtful leadership, Sandy is a tireless advocate for people with mental health issues, and a vocal proponent for eliminating the misperceptions and stigma associated with mental illness. Sandy is highly regarded both within the CMHA family and within the local and provincial mental health sector. In recognition of her years of service to the community she was recognized with Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012.

"It has been a privilege and a pleasure to work with Sandy over the last few years," says Board Chair, Gilles Paquette. "Her passionate support and commitment to the most vulnerable in the community is an inspiration to the staff, our Board, and the many individuals throughout the community who she has positively affected. Her compassion, patience and integrity, as well as her remarkable ability to handle the changes and challenges of her profession with grace and good humour, will be missed. I know my colleagues on the Board join me in expressing our great thanks and gratitude for her inspired leadership, and wish her the very best for the future."

The Board of Directors has been actively working on succession planning to ensure a smooth transition when a new CEO is appointed.

Milestones CMHA/Peel has achieved during Sandy's tenure include:

- In 1984, CMHA/Peel established Supportive Housing In Peel (SHIP). SHIP was incorporated as an independent community mental health program separate from

CMHA/Peel in 1992.

- In 1994, CMHA/Peel provided mental illness awareness training to 1,000 officers and 500 civilian staff within Peel Regional Police.
- CMHA/Peel developed the Mental Health and Justice program in 1998, recognizing the need for supportive interventions for individuals with mental illness that come into contact with the law. This program currently serves over 700 clients.
- In partnership with the John Howard Society, Sandy and CMHA/Peel advocated for, and developed, the first overnight drop-in for homeless men. This was followed by the first homeless shelter for men in Peel Region in 1999. Today, the Peel Outreach Program handles over 12,000 calls to the Street Helpline.
- In April 2008, COAST Peel (Crisis Outreach And Support Team) was launched. A partnership between CMHA/Peel, St. Elizabeth Health Care and Peel Regional Police, the COAST Peel team comprises a non-uniformed police officer and mental health professional who can respond to crisis calls in Mississauga, where appropriate.
- In 2012, CMHA/Peel celebrated its 50th Anniversary and Sandy lead the agency to achieve full accreditation with the Canadian Centre for Accreditation, validating its commitment to providing the highest quality of service as a health and social service agency.
- In 2012, CMHA/Peel established its first Consumer Council. Comprised of current and former clients and others with lived experience, this group of individuals can speak at an experiential level on how best to improve our services.

About CMHA/Peel

For over 50 years, the Canadian Mental Health Association – Peel Branch (CMHA/Peel) has been a pioneer in providing services for people with mental illness and educating Canadians about mental health issues. As the leading client-driven, community-based mental health organization serving the Region of Peel, we are innovative partners in proactively strengthening individual support, and developing a responsive mental health system. CMHA/Peel champions good mental health for everyone and supports the full participation of those with mental illness and addictions in the life of the community. In addition to providing a variety of mental health services, we are committed to community development, mental health awareness and addressing the stigma surrounding mental illness.

About Mental Illness

Mental illness affects everyone, either personally, or through family members, friends, or colleagues. One in five Canadians will personally experience a mental illness at some point in their lifetime and suicide is one of the leading causes of death in both men and women from adolescence to middle age.

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