



HELLO MARCH



Welcome to the **Stigma-Free Society March Program Highlights Newsletter!** Today, we are sharing the evolution of our charity and the immense progress we have made over the years.

Stigma-Free Society has a true grassroots history, which was first a project ignited by Andrea Paquette, who created a Bipolar Babe T-shirt and website to share her personal experience with bipolar disorder so that others did not have to suffer in silence like she once did. In 2010, her efforts led to meeting supportive and dedicated individuals in the

local Victoria, B.C. community with whom she formed the Bipolar Disorder Society of British Columbia, now known as Stigma-Free Society.

We are proud to have grown from a small charity into a powerful force in the mental health sector, reaching hundreds of thousands of children, teens, and adults across Canada.

Keep reading to learn more about our story!

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS



In 2010, Stigma-Free Society (called Bipolar Society of British Columbia at the time) ran the Teen2Twenties Peer Support Group, a unique program that provided peer support for those living with a mental illness aged 15-25 years. The group facilitated friendships and ensured that nobody suffered in isolation.

Andrea Paquette, President and Co-Founder of Stigma-Free Society, initially ran the Teens2Twenties Support Group out of her basement suite. It soon became a funded program and the sole mental health youth peer support group in the Greater Victoria Area.



Andrea and Drella Simpson, Co-Facilitator for the Teens2Twenties Support Group.



**From “Bipolar Disorder Society of British Columbia” to
“Stigma-Free Society”**

It was a significant turning point in 2016.

The Society changed the name and focus of our charity from *Bipolar Disorder Society of British Columbia* to *Stigma-Free Society*, reflecting our goal of combating stigmas of all kinds and promoting acceptance of ourselves and others.

In 2016, we also piloted our **Children's Mental Health Presentations** for students in grades 4-6, which quickly gained popularity and became a monumental success. Dave Richardson and Andrea Paquette partnered to launch the **Stigma-Free Zone Superheroes Classroom Presentation Program** for students in grades 7-12.

The Society has reached thousands of youth with in-person presentations from 2010 - 2020 and quickly adapted its entire suite of programs in the virtual space during the beginning stages of the pandemic.

Expansion and Adaption: The Launch of Our Student Mental Health Toolkit

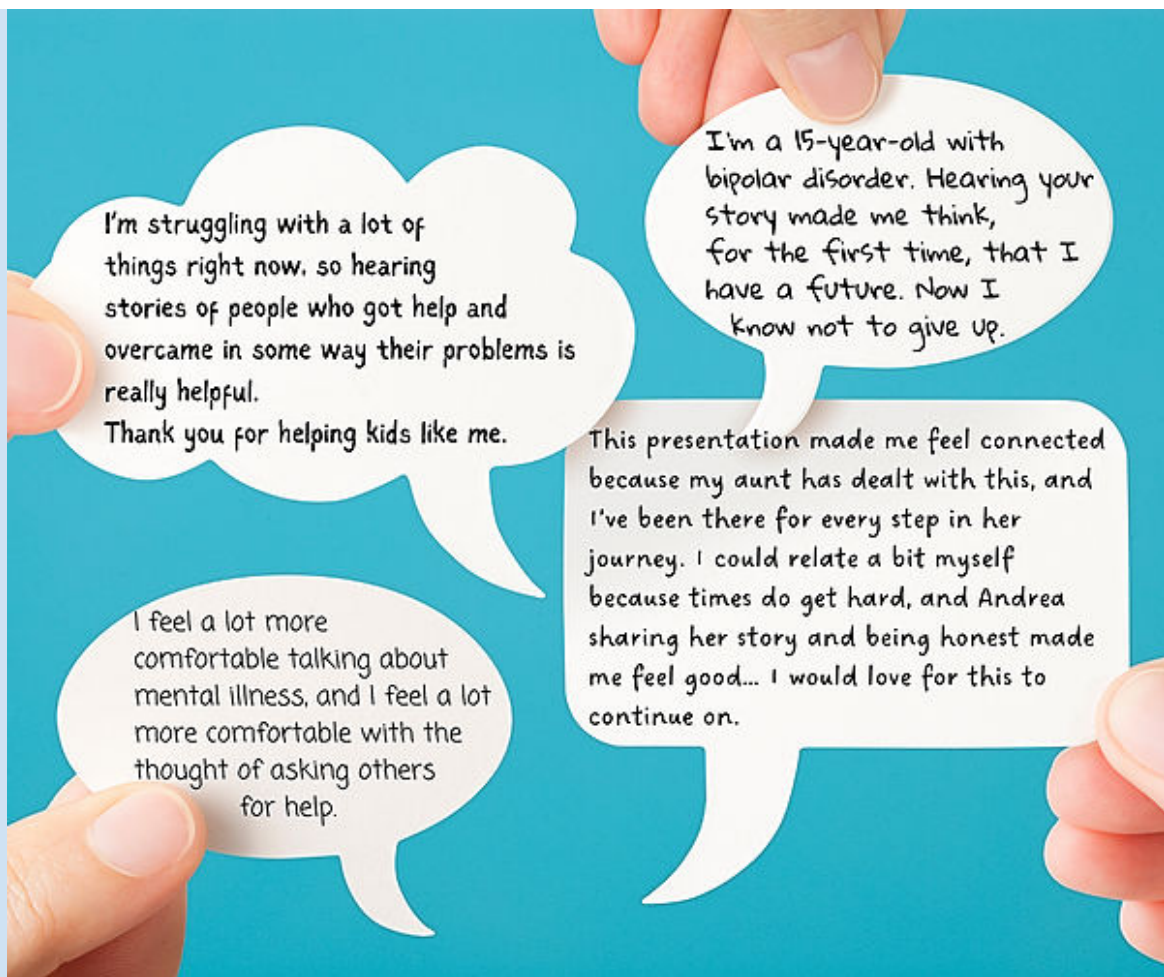


At the dawn of the COVID-19 pandemic, Stigma-Free Society created the **Stigma-Free COVID-19 Youth Wellness Toolkit**. The purpose of the Toolkit was to meet the growing need for mental health resources and support for youth, educators and parents/guardians during the COVID-19 pandemic. The [Student Mental Health Toolkit](#) was launched soon after. Both Toolkits became reputable and were utilized across Canada in 2020. We offered

our **Virtual Stigma-Free School Program** to continue the impacting work of bringing mental health awareness and education to students.



Our ***Virtual Stigma-Free Presenters*** share their inspiring personal stories and teach students about mental health and stigma.



Our Impact: Touching Lives and Changing Minds

Since our charity was founded in 2010, we've had the privilege of hearing how our programs help people cultivate acceptance of themselves and others. We are delighted to share some of the moving feedback we have received over the years:

We are always touched and motivated by the glowing feedback from students.

It affirms the immense impact we are having in the lives of countless individuals, for both persons with lived experience and their loved ones.

Honing Our Focus on Education and Rural Mental Health



Recognizing an underserved demographic in rural and agricultural communities, the Society developed the [Rural Mental Wellness Toolkit](#), which housed mental health resources and peer support training for those who need it most.

To promote our educational resources, we offered Virtual Professional Development Day Sessions, where our team gave a virtual tour of the Student Mental Health Toolkit to school staff. Through these sessions, we shared our Toolkit in engaging and interactive ways with a variety of stakeholders in school communities and provided them with an opportunity to experience a virtual school presentation.

ONWARD AND UPWARD: WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2023?



Our primary focus for this year is national expansion of our school programming!

We are refining our programs and innovating our [Student Mental Health Toolkit](#) to raise more awareness about stigma across Canada. In addition, we plan to significantly increase the number of virtual presentations delivered in multiple provinces beyond BC, Alberta and Manitoba.

With the success of educator professional development sessions launched in 2022, we are expanding our capacity to reach more school staff by building out of school program to include new peer specialist training for educators in 2023.

We also anticipate a two-fold growth in audience numbers for the [Student Mental Health Toolkit](#) with new content developed for specific regions, French translation of the Toolkit including classroom resources, and a broader approach to our Stigma-Free mandate.

And, many more exciting developments to come!

Thank you



This past decade has been truly inspiring for us, and we look forward to continuing our work of creating a stigma-free world. Thank you to our amazing donors for supporting our mission over the years.

Join us in our mission to eradicate stigma, provide mental health education, and ensure that everyone in our community feels accepted and included.

Please reach out to us with any questions or feedback about our programs and share our [Student Mental Health Toolkit](#) with your colleagues and friends!

Support Our Mission & Feel Free to Donate



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