

Greetings and welcome to CINESANITY #2.06.

You are invited to join us for our next movie screening this coming Monday, the 22nd February 2010.

CINESANITY offers a FREE monthly movie on the Fourth Monday of each month (7:00PM at Micah House, 1039 Main Street at Magnus Avenue). Screenings are open to the general public; anyone can attend. Persons concerned with issues of mental illness and addiction and in some way involved in the recovery process - persons with lived experience, family members, service providers, and the community - are especially invited.

CINESANITY films are selected for subject matter and quality. We look always for well-made films that tell compelling stories. Our goals are to entertain and inform and to start conversations about mental wellness. Through recreation, we recreate our community and ourselves. Free popcorn, snacks and drinks are provided. A discussion follows the screening. Some time is available for people to stay and visit if they wish. You are all invited, even encouraged, to participate.

Two themes are running through this season's Cinesanity selections. The first reflects the experience of children and youth vis-à-vis addiction and mental illness; the second attempts to explore various recovery models relevant to dual disorders. We turn to the first theme again this month, a theme close to my heart and to my own experience, with the movie "Canvas".

Gary Armstrong of Lighthouse Point, FL writes, "This movie depicts the tragic reality of schizophrenia through the eyes of a 10-year-old child whose parent suffers from the illness. His and his father's experience are unbearable and unexplainable to the uninformed. I work as a legal guardian for mentally ill wards in south Florida and I know Joe Greco's mother, the subject of this movie. This movie comes as close as you'll get, without experiencing it yourself, to what it is like to have a loved one with a serious mental illness. This is a disease that sucks the energy and the financial well-being of those it afflicts. The occasional humour is what keeps the father and his son from going totally crazy over what the mother is going through. Unfortunately, you can only laugh for so long before reality returns. I would wish that everyone could see this movie to at least have some sense of what its like. It is not A Beautiful Mind, not about a Nobel laureate, but about the everyman (everywoman), the 10's of thousands, who suffer in quiet isolation."

"Canvas" was one of the movies that inspired me to start the CINESANITY project in the first place. My own mother had developed schizophrenia when I was eleven and I have long been fascinated by the experiences of other children whose parents struggle with mental illness and addiction. Although such a life can be devastating, I am inspired and assured by the resilience of young people dealing with intractable circumstances beyond their control. We often not only survive but even excel under the most difficult conditions.

"Canvas" is a movie about mental illness but having thrown in the subject of addiction, this is a good opportunity to explain why I regularly include movies about addiction in the CINESANITY roster.

First of all, the two issues are co-occurring for more than half of either group, the mentally ill or the addicted. Almost two thirds of people with addiction issues also have a psychiatric diagnosis. More than half of people living with mental illness also struggle with addiction. From 45% to a high of 85% of people entering addiction treatment are reported to also have a personality disorder. There is very strong linkage and correlation between the two disorders.

Further, although each one's journey is unique, there is a common pattern in the progression of either illness. Left untreated either condition moves from episodic to chronic with ever escalating crises resulting from poor choices and bad behaviour. While there are many areas of the brain affected, it is significant that the orbitofrontal cortex (OFC), also known as the Executive Centre of the brain, is effectively hijacked by the illness, leaving the individual unable to inhibit unwanted behaviours or to plan for desirable outcomes. This is true of both mental illness and addiction.

There are common patterns to recovery as well. Recovery, as described by people with lived experience, begins with personal insight leading to overcoming "stuckness", discovering and fostering self-empowerment, learning and self-redefinition, return to basic functioning, and improving quality of life. While some individuals may require medication, possibly for life, effective recovery always includes a difficult process of cognitive and behavioural change. It is this process that leads to the long term changes in the brain that make continuing recovery and wellness possible. Again, this model applies to both addiction and mental illness.

Additionally, mental illness, just like addiction, is a family illness; one does not get sick alone. The problems a child encounters living with a parent with a serious mental illness are comparable to those experienced by children of parents who are addicted. Life is unmanageable. Basic needs often go unmet. My mother's illness had a profound impact, both positive and negative, on my life that persists to this day. That early experience is what drives my passion for mental wellness and informs and energizes my work for mental health, but it also led to many difficult circumstances, which at one time involved my own experience of both addiction and mental illness. My mom never found any peace - she suffered daily with her illness for eighteen years before an untimely death from lung cancer at the age of 57 - but today I know many individuals who live successfully and well with schizophrenia and many other mental illnesses, and have myself been living "in recovery" for over eighteen years. Life with mental illness does not necessarily preclude life with mental wellness.

A poster for this event is attached in PDF format. If you have the opportunity and the place, please print the poster and put it where others who might be interested will see it. All are welcome. Once again, if you are able, please join us this coming Monday. We do not get sick alone and we do not walk the road to recovery alone. Do join us on this road to wellness. I'd really like to start a conversation with you!

None of this would happen without the help of others. Thanks go to our sponsors and supporters: Micah House, the Manitoba Schizophrenia Society, the WRHA North End/Point Douglas Chronic Diseases Prevention

Initiative, to the volunteers who help to set up events, and to those who have expressed support and have been promoting this program.

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"So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable." --Christopher Reeve