

Workshop accepted and presented. CBC Radio interview followed for us.

Workshop Proposed For IAPSRS Conference Vancouver June12/97 3:45

BEING OUT ABOUT IT

Two presenters with experience of major mental illnesses and previous hospitalizations talk about "being out", making the choice to go public about their experience - the benefits and risks.

Presenters: **Bruce Saunders**, organizer of MOVIE MONDAY, a consumer-driven project that presents weekly movies in a psychiatric hospital theatre; and **Ingrid Olson Mercer**, a consumer/provider employed in a psychiatric day program at CAPITAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION; both of Victoria, BC, Canada.

How does a person heal from a traumatic experience of psychiatric illness without admitting that it ever happened? What is the emotional cost of hiding such an important secret? How can someone overcome stigma when we carry the seeds of self-hatred within ourselves? How does anyone receive support when no one knows he or she is hurting? Because mental illness is an invisible disability, we can "pass for normal", at least on our good days.

In the gay community there is a saying, "Being out saves lives." Psychiatric survivors can also save lives by being role models of productive human beings and giving hope to others.

"Being out" is a major step in our wellness campaign. We have both suffered the shame, trauma, and hopelessness of major illness (manic-depression and four episodes of brief psychotic disorder), and have struggled to get back on track with family and our community. We have made ever bolder revelations of our stories and have found strength, healing and liberation in the process.

Other consumers have given us their stories as well. There is great power in this sharing and testifying to our experience. Bonding with each other makes each of us stronger.

Our talk is illustrated with brief video clips and graphics.