

# Island Health community wellness grants

## Mental Health First Aid on Quadra Island – a Quadra Circle success story

Seniors and others on Quadra Island experiencing mental health challenges have a stronger support network thanks to Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), an education and skills training program.

Over 50 Quadra Island community members, volunteers, health professionals and first-responders took part in two days of MHFA training this spring courtesy of Quadra Circle Community Connections Society, with support from Island Health's Community Wellness Granting Program.

Mental Health First Aid Canada, describes MHFA as the help provided to a person developing a mental health issue or experiencing a mental health crisis. Just as physical first aid is provided until medical treatment can be had, MHFA is given until appropriate support is found or until the crisis is resolved.

The Quadra Circle Community Connections Society is a well-respected, volunteer-run, community leader with over 100 volunteers and professionals, mostly seniors, committed to a community-based model for mental health and wellness initiatives.

More than 50 per cent of the 2,400 people living on Quadra Island are seniors, many with multiple health issues. An Island Health mental health clinician visits the community twice a month. Distance to other mental health services, as well as economic challenges, can present barriers for those who live on Quadra Island who need more immediate supports.

“Quadra Circle brought MHFA to the island to increase the understanding of mental and emotional health, and increase the capacity of the community to support those who need help,” said Maureen McDowell, Quadra Circle board president.

Too often there is harm associated with mental health crises. Friends, family, volunteers and first-responders may have low levels of mental health literacy or lack the confidence to support those experiencing a crisis or in their daily living.

MHFA program teaches participants to recognize and respond to mental health behaviours with practical strategies, and guide people to make the best use of existing resources.

“Mental Health First Aid training fits well with our ‘we help ourselves and each other’ attitude, and builds community resilience,” said McDowell.

“In an emergency, the first critical links are often citizen-volunteers who have invested time to learn some basic support skills,” said Clint Young, mental health first responder and MHFA training participant. “These people are especially important in smaller, more isolated communities with a limited



pool of professional first responders, like Quadra Island. Our neighbours, friends and fellow residents rely on everyday people to provide care and support until more appropriate resources become available.”

Due to the nature of small communities where people know one another well the stigma associated with mental health challenges can also be an obstacle.

“How we view people who are affected by complex health issues impacts their health as much as the disorder itself,” said family physician Dr. Sameen Ahmed. “Stigma leads to discrimination which can stop those who need care from reaching out for services and supports, and results in isolation and marginalization.”

“When we improve our understanding through programs like MHFA we also reduce the shame and misconceptions so often attached to mental health,” added Ahmed. “Knowing the myths and facts and responding to people with compassion and empathy improves their health outcomes and makes for a healthier community for everyone.”

McDowell said that the support from Island Health’s Community Granting Program was critical to Quadra Circle being able to offer the MHFA training.

The granting program provides one-time funding opportunities for local partners to work with Island Health to promote health and positively influence individual and community well-being.

Local community organizations, governments, and Aboriginal communities are encouraged to apply to the program for one-time financial support to be used to enhance existing community resources and networks that make it easier for people living in our care region to make healthy lifestyle choices.

“Quadra Circle is very proud of the success of the program,” said McDowell. “It is amazing to see how a small investment from the granting program and our collaborative efforts can have such far-reaching benefits in our small, remote community. As we hoped, those who participated in MHFA are sharing what they’ve learned with other Quadra residents, spreading interest, understanding and knowledge across our island. Together we are building a circle of informed, supportive friends, family and professionals, to grow our ability to care for each other.”

Island Health, one of six health jurisdictions in British Columbia, provides health care and support services to more than 765,000 people on Vancouver Island, the islands in the Salish Sea and the Johnstone Strait, and mainland communities north of Powell River.

With more than 20,000 staff, 1,900 physician partners, 6,000 volunteers, and the dedicated support of foundations and auxiliaries, Island Health delivers a broad range of health services, including: public health services, primary health care, home and community care, mental health and addictions services, acute care in hospitals, and much more across a huge, geographically diverse region. Quadra Circle is a non-profit organization composed of Islanders aged 55 and over who want to enrich our community,

their own lives, and especially the lives of seniors through social, educational and service activities.

Quadra Circle encourages friendship, fun, lifelong learning and mutual support as well as fostering the development of services and facilities to meet the changing needs of Islanders, particularly as our population ages. Membership is free and is not a requirement to participate in our programs.

For more about Quadra Circle Community Connections Society, visit [www.quadracircle.ca/about.html](http://www.quadracircle.ca/about.html).