

## Humber River Foundation welcomes Margaret Trudeau: Working together in support of mental health



Margaret Trudeau delivered an engaging and inspiring keynote address at the Humber River Regional Hospital Foundation's ninth annual - and most successful - Women's Health and Wellness Event. The event raised over \$100,000 in support of the New Humber River Regional Hospital. From left to right: Heather Hurst, President and CEO of the Humber River Foundation; Margaret Trudeau; and Anna Eliopoulos, Chair of the HRRH Foundation Event

Margaret Trudeau is on a mission; to change the face of mental illness and to erase the stigmas associated with it. Toronto's Humber River Regional Hospital (HRRH) shares the same goal.

At the beginning of November, Trudeau and the HRRH Foundation joined together to spread their messages about mental health to over 600 guests at the Foundation's ninth annual – and most successful – Women's Health and Wellness Event in support of the New Humber River Regional Hospital. Trudeau delivered an engaging and inspiring keynote address and shared her experience living with a mental health condition.

"I went 30 years without any real help, it was like a roller coaster," admits Trudeau, who suffers from bi-polar disorder. "I had no information; I was full of shame, full of guilt and full of fear. I never, for one minute, thought that I didn't have a perfect brain."

Women's "brain health" – a term Trudeau prefers over "mental health" – and the importance of seeking treatment to achieve balance in body, mind and spirit was the theme for the evening, which raised over \$100,000 – the most ever in the history of the Women's event.

"As women, coming together to share our stories is vital to erasing disease-associated stigmas that all too often preclude our ability to reach out for help," says Anna Eliopoulos, breast cancer survivor and Chair of this year's event. "It is so important to have a space in which mothers, daughters, sisters, friends and all women can rally together and advocate for a cause that deserves attention – women's health, our health."

"Our Women's Health and Wellness Event is a unique opportunity for our community to gain valuable knowledge and to share experiences with friends and colleagues," says Heather Hurst, President and CEO of the HRRH Foundation. "From information on relevant medical topics to interactive wellness workshops and outstanding keynote addresses from renowned Canadians like Margaret Trudeau, it's an evening that distinguishes itself as a prominent event on the hospital's calendar," Hurst adds. "In the case of this year's event, removing stigmas associated with mental health issues affects everyone and is a major goal of Humber River's Mental Health and Addictions Program."

Under the leadership of Dr. George Awad, HRRH's Chief of Psychiatry, Humber River launched an anti-stigma campaign in 2009 that continues to bring awareness to mental health issues in the Hospital's community and beyond. As an extension of that campaign, Awad was also approached by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) to participate in a national film production on how stigma presents itself in society, in particular in the health care system.

The film is now being used as a component of an MHCC education program that targets health care professionals across the country.

"We are proud to be a leader in changing the way people view mental illness; and, in doing what we can to ensure our staff, physicians and volunteers are educated and informed," says Awad, also a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto. "Our campaign was possible because of the incredible support from my team and senior management group – all of whom helped to make our Mental Health and Addictions Program the reputable, top-level program that it is," adds Awad. "My participation in the MHCC film reinforces Humber River's dedication to combating the stigmas that surround mental illness."

"Under Dr. Awad's vast expertise and strong leadership, Humber River was the first hospital in Canada to launch a campaign that increases awareness about stigmas and aims to combat them through various education tools," says Dr. Rueben Devlin, HRRH President & Chief Executive Officer. "We were thrilled that our launch was followed by the MHCC's announcement about their commitment to a 10 year anti-stigma initiative. We are proud to be working closely with the MHCC and continuing to create awareness throughout our hospital and community."

Creating awareness about stigmas and seeking treatment to improve our "brain health" are important factors in making a change in mental health, Trudeau maintains. As she continues to travel throughout Canada, across the United States and around the world, she relies on her personal experience to help other people.

"What happened to me was a tragedy. I've lived, I've cried, I've died and I've lived again. I fought against demons that I had no idea how to fight. In the end, nobody could force me to live; it was me making the decision. It came from inside me; I found the strength.