

# HISTORY IN PRACTICE

## Community-Informed Mental Health Curriculum

Five decades ago, the Canadian mental health system was turned inside out. Nearly 50, 000 beds were closed in aging provincial asylums, with patients following a new regime of short hospital stays, psychiatric drugs and community services.

History in Practice uses the power of education to foster professional and caring attitudes and values in mental health services and to improve the capacity of these services to understand client wellbeing as related to the whole person, with a history, opinions, and talents and located in a social, economic and political environment. To this aim, researchers worked alongside community experts – people who have received mental health services – to create a diverse set of engaging and intelligent teaching resources for use in post-secondary environments.

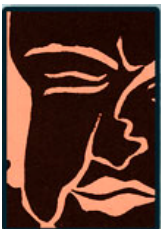
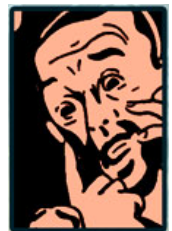
Brainstorming sessions with community experts illuminated six key areas which those experts would like mental health service providers to better understand. Each module in this curriculum is based on one of these areas, and includes both historical and contemporary pieces designed to inspire critical thinking, compassion and empathy in future mental health practitioners.



In **Models of Practice**, we ask what works *for* people using mental health services. Inspiring practice models presented in this module demonstrate pathways to empowerment, community and wellbeing.

This module includes information about Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre, which was created as a response to the closure of hospital beds in the 1970s, as well as Unity Housing – a peer-run housing model in Vancouver.

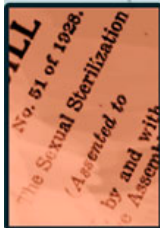
The module on **Stigma and Discrimination** asks: how can we challenge intolerance and inequity in the mental health world? In this module, early media efforts at public education, including CBC radio plays from 1948, are presented alongside accounts of stigma and discrimination experienced by service users. One service user asks us to consider what society would be like if we treated cancer as we do mental illness.



**Respecting Emotions** invites practitioners to learn about the emotional experiences associated with using mental health services. Exploring poetry and art-work on a map of emotions, this module fosters a deeper respect for the humanity of service users.

Materials in this module include a map of mental hospitals in Canada in the 1940s, and a graphic novel created by a community expert and activist.

Drawing on a film about a grassroots mental health activist group from the 1970s - the Mental Patients' Association, or MPA - **Advocacy and Activism**, asks students to consider how practitioners can harness the potential of community activism. Recognizing citizenship as a tool for positive mental health, this module gives insight into peer support and collective empowerment.



Why do medical treatment models dominate in mental health? **Medicine and Power** unpacks the medical model of mental health, giving perspective on the merit of professional power and asking us to consider alternatives. The history of forced sterilization in mental asylums provides us with a cautionary tale from the past, while contemporary pieces asking us to critically evaluate the power of medical science, and placing value on holistic medicine provide us with insight into today's mental health system.

Finally, **From Policy Into Practice** provides a historical perspective on the first blueprints for deinstitutionalization, and evaluates the translation of this policy into action. Comparing past and present, this module provides perspective on gaps between well-intentioned community programming and the mechanisms of living with mental health difficulties. Contemporary pieces showcase what it is like to live with a mental illness in today's social and economic context.



This curriculum will be available for free, and is aimed at post-secondary students who may one day work within the mental health field. It is our hope that professors and students in relevant University and College programs, as well as practitioners who are currently practicing, will learn from this curriculum, and that this will facilitate a more empowering mental health world for service users. If you are interested in piloting these materials within your classrooms, the project team is interested in hearing about your experiences.

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[http://www.yorku.ca/laps/sosc/heso/profiles/m\\_davies.html](http://www.yorku.ca/laps/sosc/heso/profiles/m_davies.html)

See also:

[//historyofmadness.ca/the-inmates-are-running-the-asylum/](http://historyofmadness.ca/the-inmates-are-running-the-asylum/)