

Stigma & Support: Conversations on Mental Health

Toronto-based mental health non-profit Reach Out Together's Mental Health Impact Series is building an international coalition of mental health advocates.

TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA, May 4, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Amran Abdi, creator of The Yellow Room, a support network "for marginalized groups and minorities who get dismissed or fall through the cracks of the system," built that network with a push from personal experience.

Speaking with Aanchal Vash in Reach Out Together's weekly Mental Health Impact Series, Abdi relates a step-by-step journey of challenging cultural stigma around mental health, mental illness, and seeking professional support.

About her life with bipolar disorder---before she had the awareness and guidance to put that name to her experiences and feelings, Abdi says, "The stigma around me made me not go seek extra help...I really felt that the system wasn't equipped to understand what I was going through."

“

The cultural stigma ends with you. Start or be a part of an organization...Don't try to do this alone. Work with the people around you."

Amran Abdi

She persisted, and after a diagnosis and multiple hospitalizations, she overcame her own reluctance to take medication.

Abdi sees medication as a step, but the biggest push for recovery was from her ultimate guide.

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Toronto-based not-for-profit Reach Out Together is seeking new volunteers!

"The Yellow Room believes that mental health is a spiritual calling from a higher power," Abdi says.

She credits a spiritual counselor at CAMH, as well as a focus, in her self-care routine, toward mental health-sustaining habits as sources of support.

Both medication and therapy matter, she says, and it's important to challenge stigma around both.

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Cymone Lashae founded "Of a Sound Mind" as a faith-based mental health organization. The name is a reference to the New Testament, Timothy 1:7, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

In a similar sentiment to Amran Abdi, speaking to Aanchal Vash in season 2, episode 5 of the Mental Health Impact Series, Lashae says, "I believe God allowed me to continue living because he had a purpose for me."

Lashae also describes diagnosis as a breakthrough.

"I dealt with depression as an adolescent. My parents had a hard time trying to support me because they didn't know what was going on," she says. "There was no label."

While she credits a medical label as helpful, Lashae views it as a step, not an endpoint.

"Sometimes we get so attached to these labels. I don't think they're something we're supposed to get attached to, I think they're supposed to guide you."

Along with diagnosis, Lashae, too, faced the challenge of stigma.



Amran Abdi, a Certified Mental Health Advisor and Founder of "The Yellow Room".



Nikhil Mukherjee & Sir Louie speak with Aanchal Vash for the Mental Health Impact Series.

She recalls comments such as “You don’t need medication, that’s for people who are weak,” and feeling reluctant to stick with that part of treatment. While it took time to adjust, Lashae says, she now sees it as a necessary step “regardless of what people think.”

Lashae says two things are needed for recovery: communication and community.

“Having professionals around me helping to explain ‘Why’...and these communities like Clubhouse have been extremely invaluable.”

Maham Sheikh, a registered child & youth worker, professional dancer, and wellness coach, encourages clients to be “present with their presence.”

For Sheikh, as well, progress in her mental health journey has meant looking internally.

“I was somebody who was looking for a sense of calm and a sense of connection in all the wrong places...I had no choice but to go within myself and take an inwards approach.”

She focuses on “micro-goals”, a day-to-day self-care routine and steps toward mental health maintenance. This includes watching what she says to herself and keeping a “back-pocket list” of things she enjoys doing.

With meditation and these other daily practices, she says, “You’re going to create a deep sense of equanimity within you.”

Yet she also highlights the importance of community and communication.

“When you’re thinking positive thoughts, you’re attracting yourself to positive experiences and people.”

For Sheikh, this means focussing on servitude, on ongoing learning, and on being inclusive.

All of these things matter to Lubna Khan, an enterprising mom and health coach in Toronto, Ontario. Khan shares her insights into coping with postpartum depression and supporting others through it.

“Society makes women feel like they messed up if they don’t have it all together,” she says. She sees her work as countering this through education about health and nutrition, and mental health advocacy.

“We have to be a good community,” she says. “We have to teach our children the right way.” In her view, this can mean everything from watching our diets to supporting a mom in our network.

For Canadians Nikhil Mukherjee, a producer, composer & mix engineer at Recording Arts Canada in London, Ontario, and Sir Louie, a firefighter-turned-social worker, audio engineer and rapper in Montreal, Quebec, a mix of self-care and support was integral for their career direction.

Speaking with Aanchal Vash, Sir Louie says “Only I can define what a good life for myself is, and only you can define what a good life for yourself is.” Mukherjee echoes this, speaking of music as a field where “you have to take that risk of being unique,” and of rejecting “standardized masculinity.”

Sir Louie says his father, who worked in construction but pursued DJing as a passion, supported him in his switch from a business degree to a musical career.

He speaks at length about meditation as a practice. “The beautiful thing...is how simple it is. Meditation is that five minutes a day where I can centre in on myself, forget about the world around me, and just come in, find stillness, and find silence.”

For each of these speakers, and Reach Out Together, mental health means self-care, support, and above all, persistent practice.

Mukherjee and Sir Louie emphasize persistence in an upcoming track, Champions, with the words “Flowers grow after the rain.” Sir Louie explains, “No matter how dark today is, or how dark your week or life has been, trust me when I say it gets better.”

If you have a story to share, you can reach out to ankita@reachouttogether.com for further details, or connect with Reach Out Together on social media!

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