



Landmark partnership will make fitness sector more accessible for people with mental health-related disabilities

TORONTO, January 23, 2013 — The Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division (CMHA), in partnership with YMCA Ontario and Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO), has launched the Enabling Minds project. The goal is to reduce barriers that prevent people with mental health-related disabilities from accessing physical activity programs and resources at community centres, fitness clubs, parks and other recreational fitness facilities. The Enabling Minds project is funded by the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario's EnAbling Change Program.

"People living with a mental health-related disability have a greater risk of developing chronic physical conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease," says Camille Quenneville, CEO, CMHA Ontario Division. "Physical activity is strongly recommended to reduce that risk or to help manage existing conditions. Research also shows that physical activity can play an important role in promoting positive mental health and supporting recovery from mental illness. CMHA Ontario is committed to improving access to services and promoting social inclusion for people experiencing mental health issues, and the Enabling Minds project will help us achieve those goals."

Enabling Minds will develop tools and training resources to support organizations in the recreation and physical activity sector to meet the requirements of the customer service and information and communication standards under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*. The resources developed through the project will be available by Spring 2014.

"To dramatically improve the health of our communities, we need to work together to improve access to recreational programs and services for people of all abilities. Through the Enabling Minds project, we can take significant steps to support organizations to build their capacity to break down barriers that prevent some members of our community from living happy, healthy lives," says Medhat Mahdy, President of YMCA Ontario.

"Recreation plays an important role in promoting optimal mental and physical health. Making recreational opportunities accessible to more people has the potential to improve health outcomes and allow people with mental health disabilities to have a high quality of life in their community," says Jennifer Reynolds, President, Parks and Recreation Ontario. "PRO is pleased to be partnering with CMHA Ontario Division and the YMCA on this important project that will build on existing expertise in mental health and recreation and enable recreation providers to better serve marginalized citizens."



The Enabling Minds project is now recruiting volunteers to sit on an Advisory Committee to provide expert feedback and advice on the process and deliverables of the project. Membership will comprise individuals with knowledge and understanding of the recreation/physical fitness environment, and/or professional expertise in the mental health sector, and/or lived experience of mental health issues. The role of the Advisory Committee is to ensure that the resources and training curriculum are tailored to the needs of service providers and will enhance accessibility for people with mental health-related disabilities.

ABOUT THE PROJECT PARTNERS

Founded in 1952, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario Division, is a non-profit, charitable organization committed to improving the lives of people with mental illness and their families and to the promotion of mental health for all Ontarians.

The YMCA was established over 160 years ago as a charity dedicated to the health of both individuals and communities. The YMCA's focus is inclusiveness and accessibility, serving people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities through all stages of life.

Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) is a non-profit association that advances the health, social and environmental benefits of quality recreation and parks through evidence-based practices, resources and collaborative partnerships.

For project information, or to express your interest in joining the Advisory Committee, please visit the project website at www.enablingminds.ca or contact:

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