Putting Mental Health Above All—Literally

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Putting Mental Health Above All–Literally

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While traveling in Nova Scotia this summer, I came across a delightful idea in a newspaper article by Starr Dobson, the President and CEO of the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia.

As noted by the author, "sometimes it's the simplest things that spark the most amazing results" (Dobson, 2017, p. 2). I am pleased to pass along to you this creative and low-cost Canadian idea, called the Putting Mental Health Above All Initiative. It was designed to get more Nova Scotians to "look up"—and then engage in some conversation about mental health.

This Mental Health Foundation project began by giving local artists "gently used" commercial quality ceiling tiles, with requests for the artists to paint anything from wildlife to abstract designs—anything that would depict a story of hope regarding recovery from mental illness (Dobson, 2017). The painted tiles are then donated to any businesses or organizations that will install them in the ceiling of an office or lobby, to convey the message of "mental health above all." The one colorful painted tile, visible by someone sitting in a dentist’s chair, waiting room, or doctor’s office, always prompts the viewer to ask "Why is there only one painted ceiling tile?" The question provides the opportunity for a brief discussion of mental health issues. In short, the art gets people talking.

Based on a steady stream of manuscript submissions, emanating from countries across the globe, I am acutely aware that mental health disorders and substance use disorders are still widely stigmatized. Any initiatives seeking to decrease stigma and raise awareness about mental wellness and recovery are surely welcome. This particular initiative, "Putting Mental Health Above All," could be replicated by any local mental health foundation or professional association. Once approved by the organization’s board of directors, local artists and cooperating businesses could be recruited. Both traditional and social media could be useful in enlisting participants. In the Nova Scotia project, both amateur and professional artists have contributed.

Please contact the foundation web site if you would like additional information: www.mentalhealthns.ca.

Reference