

## Member Profile: Norm Brown

By *Catriona Wallace*



Norm Brown is passionate about recovery. He has devoted himself to helping people “who are doing everything right to help themselves but still feel lost and alone.” His volunteer position as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Healthy Minds Cooperative allows him to pursue that commitment.

**“Have I recovered? No. Have I made super-super headway? Yes. It doesn’t matter what we’re handed but we’re better off if we can deal with it.”**

At the age of 20, Norm started a very successful tire company. Thirty years later, legal actions instigated against him threatened his plans for semi-retirement, and resulted in huge financial losses and the shutdown of his business. The accompanying emotional trauma stayed with him as he rebuilt his life and business over the next thirteen years, triggering ongoing battles with post-traumatic stress and depression. One severe depressive episode occurred in June 2008, after the end of 8 weeks in the day-treatment program following his stay at the Abbie Lane. The guidance provided by the program was gone, and without it, he felt unsure what was next.

**“There is a lot of work you can do to recover and if you give up, your healing will not be effective, but it is still an illness, people forget that.”**

Norm joined a depression recovery group at the Bayer’s Road Mental Health Clinic on the recommendation of his day-treatment counsellor. In the fall of 2008 he was introduced to Healthy Minds Cooperative which is located next door to the Clinic. He became a member of Healthy Minds and attended many personal development workshops, including certification in the Mental Health Recovery and WRAP correspondence course from the Mary Ellen Copeland Centre. By the winter of 2009, he was co-facilitating a depression support group at Bayer’s Road. When the chair of Healthy Minds stepped down, in July 2009 Norm was asked to take over her position on the Board of Directors.

The Healthy Minds Cooperative is committed to social change and self-responsibility in Mental Health. There are 12 members of the Board of Directors, eight of whom are consumers. As the chairman, Norm works closely with the Executive Director, Myra Donnelly-Gay, the only employee who answers directly to the board. Norm is very involved, on all levels, with the operations of the cooperative. A time commitment of approximately 15 hours per week.

What makes all this effort worthwhile? Changing the general public’s view of mental health issues and helping people who struggle with them. He is motivated by being involved, even with a small piece of how this change is manifested. He wants to be able to say that he really helped one person for every year he has been alive. He wants to help each of these people feel as though they have recovered and are living fulfilling lives. Norm is willing to help people who are ready to put in the effort to take on their recovery and move forward in their lives.

**“Depression is an illness, not just something you need to be told to ‘get over.’ You will get through this; it depends on how much you want it.”**

Norm sees the organization as central to helping people as they come out of structured programs, like the one at the Abbie. “There are so many people out there living with a

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## Inside this issue:

**Member Profile: Norm Brown** 1

**What’s happening at the Co-op?** 2

**Writing Group Exercise** 3

**Community Resource Spotlight: reachAbility** 4

**Member Submission: “Change is in the air”** 5

**Shareholder Cafe** 5

**Club Friday** 6

**Way to Wellness** 6



*(Continued on Page 3)*

# What's happening at the Co-op?

## Invitation to Live Fully:

Enter into the very unique experience of *Invitation to Live Fully*. Invitation to Live Fully will immerse you in a small group gathering and will engage you in an interactive process, one morning every week, over a five-week process. This experience will challenge your existing beliefs about what's possible for you as you move through your world and will open up a whole new way of experiencing life.

**Place:** Healthy Minds Cooperative, Room 165  
**Dates:** March 11th, 18th, 25th, April 1st & 8th  
**Time:** 10am – 12 noon  
**Registration Deadline Date:** February 25, 2010  
**Required reading:** Fully Alive from 9-5!  
**Cost:** \$10 plus tax

Please call Irene Skehen at 404-3715 for more information.



## Shareholder Meeting

**Guest Speaker:** Joe Lang, Entrepreneur Peer Advocate with Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Network  
**Place:** Healthy Minds Cooperative, Room 165  
**Date:** Thursday, March 4th, 2010  
**Time:** 4pm -6pm

Please RSVP Mickie at 404-3525 by March 3rd, 2010

## Writing Group

The writing group offers our members peer support and writing skills development, as well as fun, creativity and the opportunity to explore ideas, writing genres, and to take risks that build confidence and self-esteem. We will meet twice a month!

**Place:** Healthy Minds Cooperative, Room 165  
**Time:** 2pm-4pm  
**Date:** March 9th and March 23rd

Please call 404-3525 for more information!

## The Speakers Bureau

If you are interested in educating others about mental health and illness issues through sharing your experiences, join us! Please call 404-3525 for more information!

**Place:** Healthy Minds Cooperative, Room 165  
**Time:** 1:30pm – 3:00pm  
**Date:** March 10th and 24th



## Club Friday: (Detailed schedule continued on last page)

A peer support group that meets every Friday!

**Place:** All Nations Christian Reformed Church, 2535 Robie Street, Halifax  
**Time:** 1:00pm -3:00pm

Please contact Mickie Bowe at Healthy Minds Cooperative: 404-3525 for more details!

# Writing Group Exercise



By Anna Quon

If you've ever sat in front of a blank sheet of paper and wondered, "What can I write?" without receiving an answer— free writing may be for you. Set yourself a time—say 10 or 20 minutes— and write about whatever comes into your head. Don't worry about spelling, grammar or punctuation- shelve your "inner editor" for this exercise. Don't worry that you have nothing to say or that what you have to say is no good. Just write, and if you reach a block, start writing, "I don't know what to write" or something similar over and over again until something comes to you.

I have found that, like dreaming, free writing can sometimes results in strange and revealing discoveries about one's self and one's preoccupations, problems and priorities. Sometimes it's just plain fun. Sometimes free writing produces material that you may want to use later in another piece of writing. But whatever the result, it can be a valuable exercise, which some writers recommend doing every day to limber up the "writing muscles".

Free writing can either be focussed or unfocussed. Unfocussed free writing is just that- it has no focus. Focussed free writing involves beginning to write on a theme. You don't have to stick with the theme, but it gives you a jumping off point into the writing. There are probably as many possible themes to write about as there are atoms in the universe. Choose one, and go for it!

## Possible themes:

- My pet dog •what I did on my summer vacation •the best dream I ever had •friendship
- love hate, anger, happiness •if I could fly •my recovery journey •my ideal vacation • my ideal life partner or job...the sky's the limit!

**Come check out the Writing Group, facilitated by Anna Quon!**

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## *Continued from Member Profile: Norm Brown by Catriona Wallace (Cover)*

mental illness and not even aware of it, let alone getting the proper support. The first place these people will likely go once they are diagnosed is the Abbie, followed by the day program. But after that, most people have no clue where to go. These people desperately need help." When he re-entered the community from the day program, he was not informed about any local organizations, such as CMHA, Healthy Minds or Connections Halifax.

That would change, according to the Board's vision for the cooperative:

- Members would reach out to the day program class, introducing the programs and services of the cooperative.
- Healthy Minds would collaborate with and complement the services of other community mental health organizations.
- It would grow as an organization with more part-time peer support staff.
- Services would be available to all ages via peer support workers specializing in working with youth or elders.

There aren't enough psychiatrists or psychologists to meet the demand, and there won't be. Hiring professionals is not within the mandate of the cooperative, and it has been documented that people can benefit immensely from peer support services. "Peers have the advantage of being able to understand what it is like to have a mental illness and more easily empathize." Indeed, the mental health community needs more of this type of service and training.

The chairman's term is limited to 4 years but Norm will not be disappointed when it's over. He feels he will have accomplished a lot by then, and 'new blood is always good. His connection to Healthy Minds, the place that helped him so much after the day program was over, is very strong, and will continue after his term as chairman ends. Norm's intention is to become a peer support worker himself.



## Community Resource Spotlight



reachAbility is a registered charity that has helped thousands of individuals living with all types of disabilities since its inception 10 years ago. We are a nationally recognized, award winning, organization where innovative responses, creative problem solving and cutting edge technology meet individual needs. At reachAbility challenges are not seen as barriers but treated as opportunities to effect change.

We provide organizational and employment development for individuals, professionals, organizations, and entire communities in the context of disability through our programs and services.

Currently reachAbility offers eight programs, at no cost to our clients, which focus on employability skills and education initiatives as well as providing a free legal referral service. Emphasis is given to issues such as conflict resolution, stress management, time management, effective communication, building self confidence and self esteem among others.

In keeping with our mandate and unique approach to helping individuals with disabilities we offer a "Rhythm" program (**R**eaching **H**alifax **Y**outh **T**hrough **H**armony and **M**usic) which gives youth an opportunity to work with professional DJs while building self confidence and self esteem.

Currently in its third season, "Inclusion Revolution", our regional television show provides audiences with timely information and topics in an interesting and entertaining format. The weekly program airs Sunday nights at 8:30pm on EastLink TV with repeats Monday through Friday at 3 pm.

We also have a book and a board game called "The Fountain of Harmony" – both were developed by former reachAbility clients. The book follows the characters, each living with their own disability, on their journey to find acceptance and belonging.

In just one decade reachAbility has achieved so much and helped so many people we thought it was time to stop and celebrate.

On June 12th we will host a reception at the Argyle Fine Art Gallery for our friends and supporters called Celebration 10. The I –AM-reachAbility themed evening will feature displays of the unique artistic talent of former clients in a variety of mediums such as music arrangements by our *Rhythm* program, poetry, static pieces as well as video and LCD presentations.

**If you would like tickets for Celebrat10n or want to learn more about reachAbility please visit our website at [www.reachAbility.org](http://www.reachAbility.org) or call 429-5878**

# Change is in the Air– by Sheila Morrison

## Change is in the Air

And don't we all need it. Sixteen years ago I took my daughter to emergency where she began her long experience with inpatient treatment. That first week on a ward was a nightmare. We were scared and knew very little about mental illness despite that fact that I was working in the hospital myself. We offered to give a history to the staff and they told us they wouldn't be needing it. We begged until a week later some young intern agreed to listen to us for fifteen minutes, but I don't think the information went anywhere.

On February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010 I was a guest, along with Vince Daigle (peer support) at the Psychiatry Clinical Conference and we were asked to speak about how care can be improved. They want to know what families think and what those who live with illness think. We have indeed come a long way.

Last week my best friend had a massive stroke while we were together. The care she received in emergency and on the neurology ward was first class, unbelievably good care. I was so impressed. Despite the terrible prognosis all the staff gave hope at every step of the way. Hope was in their words, their postures, the environment. I was struck by the differences between physical and mental health care, and I welcomed the opportunity to talk about hope and recovery as we all work together to make treatment more client and family centered.

I have hope too knowing that these days my daughter and I are asked for our opinions frequently. There are many committees within Capital Health working towards change and Nova Scotia may well become a leader in Canada for reform in mental health care.

Sheila

**Thank you for your submission Sheila!**

**Do you have information you would like to share in The Bluehorse Chronicles newsletter? If so, we would love to hear from you! Please contact Mickie Bowe by calling 404-3525 or email [hmnavigator@eastlink.ca](mailto:hmnavigator@eastlink.ca)**

### Shareholder Café:

Is available for your use from **10am to 3pm, Monday to Friday**. Please call in advance to book your computer. Would you like to get some computer assistance and find out more about computer resources available? Call Mickie at 404-3504



Check out this neat health website that Cate passed on to us:

[www.sparkpeople.com](http://www.sparkpeople.com)



## Upcoming Club Friday Events

March 5 <sup>th</sup>	"World Cuisine Sampling" with Sheila Morrison
March 12 <sup>th</sup>	Bowling at the Bowlarama- Bayers Road
March 19 <sup>th</sup>	Creativity with Anna Quon
March 26 <sup>th</sup>	Wellness and Recovery with Irene Skehen

**Club Friday** is a peer support group that meets every Friday from **1:00pm -3:00pm** at the **All Nations Christian Reformed Church, 2535 Robie Street, Halifax.**

For more information please contact Mickie Bowe at Healthy Minds Cooperative: 404-3504

### *Way to Wellness*

*addressing body, mind and spirit ....promoting wellness, wholeness and a sense of well-being.*

*Challenges in life don't arise haphazardly, no matter how accidental or coincidental they may seem.*

*They only arrive when you're ready for them.*

*Not when you're ready to be squashed, but when you're ready to grow, overcome and be more than who you were when they arrived.*

*Mike Dooley – Notes from the Universe*

*Irene Skehen*

*Wellness & Recovery Educator*



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