

Mood for Thought

Mood Disorders Ottawa Newsletter

**Forty Years of Peer Support:
The MDO Story**

May 2026



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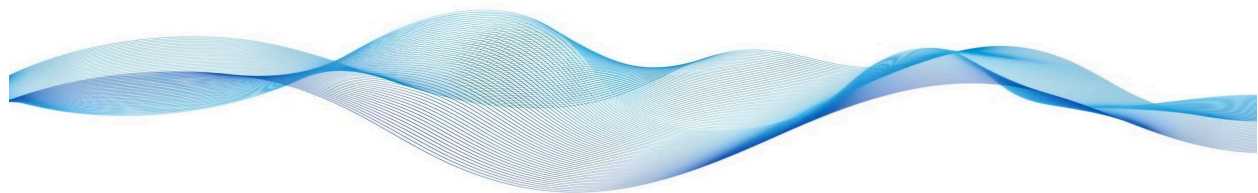
Welcome

Welcome to the 40th Anniversary edition of the MDO Newsletter, *Mood for Thought*. This is not just a celebration of years passed, but a tribute to the countless stories, memories, and milestones that have shaped MDO into a beacon of hope and support. Our story is a living tapestry, woven from the voices of those who have walked through MDO's doors—sometimes hesitantly, often bravely, always with the hope of being understood.¹

Storytelling is at the heart of MDO's journey. For four decades, our circles have offered a safe, non-judgmental space where every voice is valued and every experience matters. As Danielle, a member since 2020, shares: "A key aspect of storytelling circles is not only sharing our stories, it is more importantly about listening to others with compassion and without judgment." These stories of resilience through struggles, of finding belonging after isolation, of volunteers stepping up in times of need are the threads that bind us together.

What makes MDO extraordinary is its unwavering commitment to "peers supporting peers." Whether it's a gentle word from a facilitator, a hand held during tough times, or the simple act of showing up, every gesture has helped shape MDO into a safe, welcoming space for all. Our founders would be thrilled to see that, four decades later, this spirit remains at the core of everything we do.

As you read this special edition, you'll meet the people who built MDO, the volunteers who keep it thriving, and the members whose stories remind us why this community matters.² Through their authentic voices, we honor MDO's enduring values: empathy, courage, inclusivity, and hope. Together, we continue to build a future where no one walks their recovery journey alone.



¹ The stories and reflections shared in this edition were gathered during a special online storytelling circle, bringing together both past and current members and volunteers of MDO. Their willingness to open up about their journeys has enriched this collection and deepened our understanding of what makes our community so unique. We are deeply grateful to everyone who participated, generously offering their time and experiences. The names of all contributors can be found in **Appendix A**. To each volunteer and storyteller, thank you for your invaluable contributions, not only for sharing your stories, but for the countless ways you have supported and shaped MDO over the years. Your voices are the heart of this celebration.

²**Appendix B** includes the names of volunteers who have contributed to MDO, and **Appendix C** is a memorial honoring those who have passed away.

1. A Grassroots Beginning

In the spring of 1986, a small group gathered in Ottawa, united by a desire for mutual support. Linda, a member since 1986, recalls:

"I was there at the very first meeting, and I can tell you, it was so wonderful to think that this group was going to be coming into existence here in Ottawa... I had been diagnosed with bipolar the previous year. I didn't know anyone else who had it, except maybe one or two people I met at the hospital, but kind of didn't keep up a relationship with."

Following a diagnosis of bipolar disorder the previous year, Linda found herself navigating an unfamiliar landscape. Her connections to others experiencing similar challenges were limited. Determined to learn more, she turned to the library as a source of knowledge. At first, Linda immersed herself in the available resources, diligently reading a variety of books and watching educational videos to better understand her condition. However, she soon realized that what she truly needed was to connect with others and discuss their shared experiences.

Linda recalls when she first heard over the radio the announcement about MDO's first meeting. "My journey took another turn when I heard an announcement by Gerry McGee (one of MDO's founding members) on the radio (CBC) about an upcoming meeting focused on bipolar disorder. Intrigued, I decided to attend, hoping to further connect with others and expand my understanding of my situation."

1.1 Remembering the First Meeting

"There was this woman from Richmond Hill. She was, as we used to say at the time, a consumer survivor...she had started a group like MDO in Richmond Hill. And then... that family... the Mathers... the parents of a fellow who was a guy with lived experience... made arrangements for her to come... Gerry McGee...he had been in touch with the Mathers and this woman... Anyway, they just said there was going to be the founding meeting. So Arabella (Linda had met Arabella after posting an ad in the local newspaper looking for someone to connect with over their shared mental health experience) and I heard that we thought (was) fabulous.'

The founders at the first meeting already had in mind expectations on the group's structure as Linda explains: "...the really good expectation was that it would be called a Mutual Support Group, so both people with lived experience and their family members could be part of it...this was an effort to create an organization where we would be allies to each other." The founding vision was straightforward: to establish a space where people with lived experiences, along with their families, could work collaboratively and provide each other mutual support.

From the very beginning, the involvement of families, alongside those with personal experiences in mental health, was essential especially as Board members. This collaborative approach set MDO apart from other organizations during that period.

1.2 Building Community - Moments That Matter

In those early years, MDO established many opportunities for individuals to socialize and cultivate meaningful relationships. Patricia, who has been a member since 1996, emphasizes the vital role of family involvement in these interactions. She shares that it provided a unique platform for individuals with lived experiences and their families to connect as equal partners.

Reflecting on her experiences, Patricia recalls, "There was Judi Barbara, and Jackie... These women were a hoot. I mean, they were family members, but like Linda said, it was great to have family members because it created a really nice balance."

This balance enhanced the supportive environment that MDO fostered, enriching the connections formed within the community. Over time, families and individuals with personal experiences continued to work together on the board. However, they each created their own peer support groups to address their unique needs and to provide a safe space where they could openly share their concerns, including those related to family matters.

As recalls Patricia, "... families (sic) definitely came to the church (board) meetings and everything. But when it came to the peer support ... it was just ..., the consumer survivors and not the families, because families had their own group. It was a matter of just feeling safe."³

³ Patricia wrote down these thoughts after the group ended to clarify the statements made here: *"MDO had many opportunities to socialize and cultivate meaningful relationships. Reflecting on my (Patricia) experiences, as a woman with lived experience, I reminisce of road trips to Westport with Jackie R. and Barbara K. to visit Judi R. These visits were filled with laughter, lunch and a bit of shopping. As family members, these three lovely women gave their heart and soul to MDO over the many years. Judi R. was a leading advocate in bringing to Canada the Family-to-Family program of the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) from the United States. My husband was fortunate to take a 14 week NAMI course which he found beneficial in living with a wife with a mood disorder. Over the years, there were family support groups both in Orleans and Kanata which gave a safe place for family members to share their experiences, challenges and resources. Both Judi R. and Jackie were facilitators. Barbara K. often assumed the role as Secretary of the Board of Directors. She was a gentle, kind person, who loved people, animals, and quilting. She generously opened her home to informal meetings and dinners for ALL MDO members. With Judi R. 's declining health, Jackie R. stepped graciously into the roles of organizer of the Christmas Party for MDO, annual summer picnics and various roles on the Board. As Linda mentioned during the Storytelling Circle (April 26, 2026), it was great to have family members because it created a really nice balance. As people with lived experiences, we had our own peer support. It was called Charlie's Rap group for many years. **I think that having separate family and peer support groups provided opportunities for a safe and open dialogue.**"*

Families developed their own groups, which later developed into NAMI groups and people with lived experiences expanded their peer support opportunities.

2. The Power of Peer Support

Peer support is the cornerstone of MDO.

Catherine's first support meeting in 2007 left a lasting impression: "I met a very special person, and I'm still in contact with her. Her name was Pat. She was the facilitator of the peer support group that night. She was very gentle, kind and welcoming."

John also describes his first meeting in 2009 as being transformative:

"For the first time I'd actually met people who were like me. That was a real shocker... The most valuable thing I learned was the value of peer support and meeting people at different stages in their recovery."

Nancy, a member since 2016 reflects, "It felt so nice to be in a spot that I felt there was other people that could relate and understand me. And I think it was the first time I really felt that in my life."

Sharon, a member since 2016, similarly recalls the positive influence that the peer support at MDO has had on her wellness journey.

"My fondest memories at MDO... it would have to be like, okay, Tucker's is one, just being in that room that we had there and doing so many different programs, The WRAP, the peer support, yeah, the story telling group... it took me from one stage of life, right, the difficult stage, the very difficult stage, and it brought me to a place where I was able to feel belonging, feel acceptance, and just a family, you know, and that helped me tremendously with my recovery... I'm just very grateful for MDO, yeah, and the support that I got in my journey".

2.1 The Power of Connection

Kim, a member since 2014, recalls the annual tradition of gathering with fellow MDO members at the restaurant Tuckers:

"There were so many people there... I got excited to see them sitting a couple of tables across. And then we get up. We go for the buffet, and I would sneak up behind someone. "Oh, my God, I haven't seen you in forever." And then we'd have a chat, and then you got to reconnect."

Anita, who joined MDO in 2012, recalls a similar experience at an MDO Christmas party. "My most fond memories are definitely the time when Lianna was on the board... I just remember

the Christmas parties, you know, like, and was it Jackie that did the cooking? Yes, and, and there was Santa and, and I was very alone during that period. And I just, I just the community that came together and seeing familiar faces and being around people who cared. I just really, really, really appreciated the MDO Christmas parties.”

For many, these gatherings offered opportunities to break out of their isolation and find a sense of belonging in a community where they felt valued and that truly mattered to them.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to virtual groups has allowed MDO to reach far beyond its initial base in Ottawa. As John points out, we now have active participants from a variety of locations, including Cornwall, Hawkesbury, Renfrew, Lancaster, and Lanark. MDO's reach even extends to larger cities like Halifax and Toronto, and we have members in places as far as Thornhill, Hamilton, Kitchener, and even Florida.

Danielle recalls a memorable story about one member who, while visiting family in Europe, continued to join MDO's weekly virtual peer support groups.

This highlights the remarkable flexibility and sense of belonging that MDO's virtual format fosters. The ability to connect from anywhere in the world reinforces the idea that relationships and support are not restricted by physical locations.

Whether in person or online, MDO has successfully created warm and welcoming environments that keep its members engaged, supported, and connected.

2.2 Changing Lives, One Story at a Time

The impact of MDO on people's lives goes far beyond creating connections and developing a sense of community. It's also about changing lives.

Neil recalls that the first call he received from MDO was truly a turning point for him.

“In 2013, I had left a voicemail message on the MDO... and I got a call from Lianna. And Lianna was very, very compassionate and understood, and I was very appreciative.”

For John, peer support was the push he needed to get out of bed and start his journey toward wellness. Having someone who truly understood what he was going through and who had found ways to move forward gave him a sense of hope and motivated him to make positive changes in his life.

John explains: “I met a gal who introduced me to the notion of peer support, that things can get better, and there are people who are further along in their recovery than I was. And she introduced me to the idea of how to get out of the house, which was, leave my keys, shoes by

the door, socks closer to further away from the door, pants further away, a jacket, a shirt. ... She suggested that (I) don't go to the bathroom at home. Dress up on the way to the door, get out of the house, and the panic at that point was just to get to Tim (Horton) so I could go to the bathroom and have a coffee, and then my day would start. So... it was a slow progress. The most valuable thing I learned was the value of peer support and meeting people at different stages in their recovery."

People often say that speaking to someone who truly "gets it", without judgment, has a transformative effect on their well-being.

3. The Power of Volunteerism

Volunteering for MDO has been transformative for members and the mental health community.

Catherine describes the value of volunteering for MDO. "Volunteering is a great way to make friends and stay connected... What captures the community of MDO is peers supporting peers. No judgement being the key."

Neil believes in the power of volunteerism. In fact, he affirms that "being a volunteer, people bring more heart to the organization. They're not there for a paycheck, and they're doing it because they want to do it."

As for Mylène, who first joined MDO in 2008, "Knowing that MDO is peer run, volunteer run was always an inspiration. I would see the folks that were doing better or worse and still managing to volunteer for the organization and still do some good."

Neil explains that he first joined MDO in approximately 2013 to attend peer support groups.

But once he retired in 2019, Neil made the decision to volunteer with MDO and he has been the Secretary of the board since 2020. Neil finds that being a volunteer has been very rewarding.

Neil may find his volunteer work personally rewarding, but it's evident that others feel even more grateful for what he has done. Patricia pointed out how vital Neil was in guiding MDO through the shift to virtual programming when the pandemic restrictions kicked in. His caring support made a real difference during that tough and stressful period.

Volunteering is not just about giving back; it's transformative for both the individual and the organization. Catherine explains that, "With more volunteers this can happen, but we need volunteers to do all the little things as well as the big. Every little idea can become reality with participation of many volunteers, and volunteering is rewarding."

Sharon explained how she was able to discover new skills and talents, with the support of MDO peers, and the reciprocal effect it had on others.

"I think what I really appreciated about MDO was the opportunity to be creative, you know, it brought out ... a creativity in me that I didn't even know that I had, right. And I think somebody said, you know about making, you know, it's okay to make mistakes and just to be yourself for the most part. So that is what really helped me to stick with MDO, you know. So, yeah, because, like, for example, the writing thing, I didn't know that I could write, you know, and so it brought out, allowed me to bring that out, right? So, and I saw that too for other people. So that was really encouraging."

For Sharon, exploring her own limits within the nurturing framework provided by MDO was a transformative experience. This supportive structure not only helped her build more confidence but also allowed her to connect deeply with others around her. As she shared her journey, she found herself inspiring those in her community, while also drawing inspiration from their stories and experiences.

Being a volunteer in this context means being part of a unique bond where peer support thrives. The supportive environment fosters ongoing encouragement that makes a real difference. It's about creating an atmosphere of collaboration and inspiration, where everyone contributes to one another's growth. This communal effort enriches the entire experience, as individuals uplift each other, creating a cycle of motivation and mutual support.

4. Resilience in the Face of Challenge

MDO has faced many challenges—illness and lack of volunteers, lack of office space and meeting rooms, and the upheaval of the pandemic. Yet, the community's resilience shines through.

4.1 Creative Solutions

Kim tells a story of how, when faced with a problem, the community came together and found a very creative solution that helped build stronger bonds with their community: "We just started a WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) group... and we needed a place to meet. One of our participants said, 'I have a friend who has a magic shop in Vanier, and you can use his basement.' For that particular fall WRAP group, eight out of the 10 weeks were in the basement of a magic shop in Vanier... the peers showed up, offered solutions, and we just made it work."

4.2 Challenges Due to Illness: A Testament to Resilience

Illness and burnout are universal challenges, not unique to those with mental health conditions. In fact, recent studies show that nearly 1 in 3 workers in Canada report symptoms of burnout or significant stress (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2026; WHO, 2019). At MDO, these challenges are met not with blame, but with compassion and collective strength.

"The biggest obstacle MDO has ever had is illness, and people falling ill... Sometimes they're running a program, and then they just have to step away. But in my experience, you tend to hold out your hand and somebody's going to hold it and say, 'I'll help you...'" — Mylène.

Rather than seeing illness as a personal failing, MDO members embrace a culture of acceptance. When someone needs to step back, others step in. As Danielle shares, "I crashed and had to end a program, but I knew I would still be accepted. People understood—it wasn't the end of the world. That support meant a lot to me."

This mutual support is a hallmark of MDO's resilience. As Mylène explains, "It's about stepping in during tough times and ensuring no one faces challenges alone. The mutual support within this community fosters collaboration for the greater good."

Burnout and illness affect all communities. The World Health Organization recognizes burnout as an occupational phenomenon, not a personal weakness (WHO, 2019). MDO's response, based on flexibility, empathy, and teamwork, offers a model for any organization to manage these challenges.

4.3 Financial Challenges

MDO's journey has been marked by persistent financial challenges, yet the organization's resilience and creativity have allowed it to thrive for four decades. Here are direct quotes and stories from members and volunteers that highlight both the obstacles and the spirit with which MDO has overcome them:

As John so eloquently states, that as a volunteer organization, "it's difficult to get our heads around money, and it's a chronic problem, because if you want to put together a dance, if you want to put together a picnic or a dinner of some sort, it ... costs money ... all organizations require adequate funding and it requires long term planning. This is one of the big differences between PSO and MDO... it requires kind of more of a professional attitude by the board and thinking along the lines of making sure that there's adequate funds, long term planning, adequate funds to deliver the products or the services that they want. It's a difficult place to put your head in an organization like this."

In spite of consistent lack of financial resources, Linda is amazed at what MDO has been able to achieve in spite of this. Specifically, Linda says "what MDO has done without funding is phenomenal. It's really just amazing."

From 1998 until recently, MDO received approximately \$7,000 annually in funding. In the first decade, this support came from a Community Investment Fund established by the Ontario Ministry of Health and was distributed through Psychiatric Survivors of Ottawa (PSO). For the following 18 years, funding was funneled through the Canadian Mental Health Association

(CMHA), ensuring MDO continued to have the financial resources necessary for its operations and community outreach.

CMHA and PSO have played a crucial role in MDO's success. By facilitating funding, supporting our volunteers with training, and providing access to meeting rooms, their support has allowed MDO to connect with more individuals and maintain resilience during financial and operational challenges.

Today, MDO's collaborations have expanded to include The Ottawa Hospital, Civic Campus, which generously provides a meeting room at no cost three evenings a week for hosting in-person and hybrid programs and events. This valuable partnership has significantly enhanced our capacity to connect with a wider audience, allowing us to engage more individuals in our offerings and strengthen our community impact. Through these initiatives, we are better positioned to address the diverse needs of those we serve.

4.4 Thriving Through Resourcefulness and Creativity

MDO's innovative mindset, strong mutual support among its members, and strategic partnerships with community resources have been crucial in overcoming challenges and sustaining its mission. These efforts have significantly enhanced the organization's capacity to navigate difficulties and improve the support it provides. As noted by Linda and Kim, MDO consistently demonstrates an impressive ability to effectively address challenges, enabling it to continue making a positive impact within the community.

4.5 All Voices Matter

Although MDO is recognized as being adaptable to meet people's various needs, it still has some work in regards to equity, inclusion and diversity.

As Roman, a member since 2021, so eloquently implied, inclusivity is an evolving process, not a fixed achievement.

Although Roman acknowledges that MDO is making efforts to be inclusive, they also point out that there is still room for improvement.

Roman's perspective on diversity is influenced by their personal experiences and a desire for organizational growth.

"As a queer person who is trans, non-binary, and uses they, them, pronouns, I often notice in the mental health community, I have to decide whether I'm going to bring up my identity... I think having open conversations is a part of us staying inclusive."

This highlights a key barrier to inclusivity within the mental health community—the emotional burden placed on individuals from underrepresented communities in educating others about their cultural backgrounds or advocating for their specific needs often results in feelings of invisibility and exclusion within the group.

Creating affinity spaces (for example, for trans, queer, and BIPOC individuals) can enhance the overall community rather than separate it. True equity often requires establishing specialized spaces that address the unique needs of diverse groups.

Along with its adaptability, recognizing and respecting diverse experiences can lead MDO to a more inclusive and supportive community, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the organization in supporting its members.

5. Stories of Triumph and Transformation

At MDO, proudest moments are not measured by grand gestures or public accolades, but by the quiet, powerful transformations that ripple through our community. These moments are deeply personal, yet profoundly communal, each one a testament to the courage, compassion, and resilience that define MDO’s spirit.

5.1 Facilitating Change, One Life at a Time

Mylène, a dedicated WRAP facilitator, captures the essence of these moments: “It is so rewarding. It’s only one person in the group. You see their eyes light up when they get just one concept, I don’t care about the whole program, and then they come back at you, like, five years later, and explain how that one concept changed the course of their life. To me, that is the thing I am the proudest of.”

This pride is echoed by Sharon, who found strength in vulnerability and the support of her peers. After a difficult experience with a co-facilitator, Sharon shares, “I managed to bounce back from that because of support from other facilitators, and so I kept facilitating. I think I’ve helped a few people along the way. I hope I have.” Her story is a reminder that resilience is often born from community, and that setbacks can become stepping stones with the right support.

5.2 Proud Moments to Cherish

For many, proudest moments are found in the simple act of showing up and being present for others. Nancy reflects, “For me, it meant that I saw people that understood and have been where I was, you know, giving back, and it provided a lot of hope for me. That’s something huge, and that’s different for MDO compared to other organizations.”

Patricia recalls the collective achievement of organizing a conference during a challenging time: “We managed to put on a conference... and it really went quite smoothly, and it was one of the best things that I feel like I’ve been involved with.”

5.3 The Ripple Effect of Peer Support

John speaks to the long-term impact of MDO: “What makes me feel proud about MDO is that people got their life back, a new life, not the same as before, but they’ve acquired the skills they need to survive, to get jobs, get married, raise kids. It’s not very often we get an opportunity to see the fruit of our labor.”

Sharon’s admiration for Nancy’s growth is a beautiful example of how pride in others becomes a shared celebration. “Nancy, I admire you. You are such an inspiration. I remember that you used to be shy, right and oh my gosh, oh girl, you make my... heart glad. You kept going and going and you know you’ve overcome so much, and I’m so so happy for you. Yeah. So just keep it going, baby, keep it going. Yeah, keep it going.”

Sharon shares the inspiration of seeing other volunteers, like Nancy, blossom and grow throughout their journey as volunteers for MDO.

5.4 Adapting and Thriving Together

The transition to virtual programming during the pandemic stands as a collective achievement. Patricia and others highlight how Neil and Nancy’s leadership helped the group adapt quickly, ensuring that no one was left behind. “You guys did a quick turnaround to turn it into online. There was no delay in transforming, and I can only imagine how much work that must have been,” Danielle notes, underscoring the pride in the community’s adaptability and commitment.

5.5 A Legacy of Empowerment

These proudest moments are not just milestones; they are the heartbeat of MDO. They remind us that every act of kindness, every story shared, and every hand extended in support is a victory. Whether it’s facilitating a workshop, organizing a conference, or simply being there for someone on a hard day, these moments are woven into the fabric of MDO’s legacy.

As we honor forty years of peer support, we honor not just the achievements, but the spirit behind them: the belief that together, we can heal, grow, and inspire one another to keep moving forward. These are the moments that make us proud to be part of MDO.

6. Hopes for the Future

As we look ahead, the spirit of MDO is alive with hope, shaped by the voices and dreams of those who have walked this journey together. The future we imagine is not just about programs or numbers—it's about people, connection, and the courage to keep growing, even when the path is uncertain.

Many members, like Nancy, dream of MDO reaching even more people, offering a lifeline to those who feel alone in their mental health journey. "My biggest dream is just to continue and grow and reach more people and impact more people's mental health journey," she shared. This vision is echoed by Catherine, who hopes for a return to more in-person activities, especially for those who may not have access to online spaces. She reminds us that every small act of volunteering, whether it's organizing an event or simply reaching out, can make a big difference: "Every little idea can become reality with participation of many volunteers, and volunteering is rewarding."

John sees opportunity in MDO's adaptability, especially as the world changes. He envisions expanding online peer support and recovery programs, reaching people far beyond Ottawa, and reintroducing family support groups to meet the needs of caregivers. "There's a huge demand for online facilities that offer peer support. WRAP is now available online, as is Pathways. Those areas could be expanded. The family component, I think there's a huge demand for that."

Mylène and others long for a return to grassroots gatherings, simple, in-person moments where friendships are forged over snacks and conversation. "It's just about people being together, doing whatever, and having that chit chat, even if it's for five minutes. It breaks isolation, and that person might be your best friend for life."

Inclusivity remains a heartfelt goal. Roman reminds us that true inclusion means being willing to listen, to be uncomfortable, and to create space for everyone's story. "Having open conversations is a part of us staying inclusive... a degree of humbleness and willingness to acknowledge discomfort and be willing to try new things is important for us to be inclusive."

As we move forward, our hopes are simple but powerful: to keep showing up for each other, to welcome new voices, and to build a community where everyone feels seen and valued. Whether it's through a phone call on a hard night, a shared story during a meal, or the courage to start a new group, the future of MDO will be written by all of us—one act of kindness, one story, one connection at a time.

Final Thoughts

As we close this chapter in MDO's 40-year journey, I find myself reflecting not just on the milestones and memories, but on the quiet, everyday moments that have shaped who we are as a community. It's easy to look back and see the big events—the conferences, the gatherings at Tucker's restaurant, the transitions to online and hybrid groups—but what really stands out are the small acts of kindness, the courage to show up on a hard day, and the willingness to listen without judgment.

For many of us, MDO has been more than a support group. It's been a lifeline. I think of Neil, who shared how a simple phone call from a volunteer made all the difference during one of his darkest nights. Or Sharon, who found her own creativity and confidence blossoming in the safety of our circles. Or Nancy, who went from feeling isolated to becoming a source of hope for others. These stories aren't just inspiring—they're real, and they remind us that healing happens in community, one connection at a time.

What makes MDO unique isn't just our peer-led, volunteer-driven model. It's the way we show up for each other, even when we're struggling ourselves. It's the understanding that sometimes, just being present is enough. As John put it, "The most valuable thing I learned was the value of peer support and meeting people at different stages in their recovery."

We've faced our share of challenges—illness, funding cuts, the uncertainty of the pandemic—but time and again, we've found creative ways to adapt. Whether it was meeting in the basement of a magic shop or learning to run groups on Zoom, our resilience has always come from the collective strength of our members and volunteers. As Kim said, "The peers showed up, offered solutions, and we just made it work."

But our story isn't finished. There's still work to do—on inclusion, on reaching those who feel left out, on finding new ways to support each other as our community grows and changes. Roman's words remind us that true inclusivity means being willing to listen, to be uncomfortable, and to create space for everyone's voice.

So as you read these stories and reflect on your own journey, I invite you to see yourself as part of this ongoing legacy. Maybe you're someone who's just found MDO, or maybe you've been here for decades. Either way, your presence matters. Your story matters. And together, we can keep building a future where no one walks alone.

Thank you for being part of MDO's story—and for contributing your unique light, your personal struggles, and your hope to our community. Here's to the next chapter, written by all of us, one day at a time.

Danielle Perron-Roach

References

Citations:

- All quotes and stories are drawn from the MDO 40th Anniversary Storytelling Circle, April 26th, 2026, and member submissions.

Sources:

- For more on MDO's history, see the 25 Years Newsletter at MDO's website.

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NOTE: AI GPT-4o mini was utilized to assist in proofreading this document for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors.

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APPENDIX A

List of People who Participated in the Storytelling Circle April 26, 2026

Name	Pronouns	Year joined	Self-described Roles
Anita	she/her	2012	Participated in Tell Your Story workshop, telling my story at a gathering, Christmas dinners.
Catherine	she/her	2007	Started as volunteer making phone calls to members, later coordinated these efforts, and eventually served as secretary and co-chair on the board, played a key role in organizing events
Danielle	she/her	2020	Member, Board member and Facilitator
John	he/him	2009	Facilitator
Kim	she/her	2014	Peer, Facilitator
Linda O.	she/her	1986	Board member, speaker, advocate, phone caller
Mylene	she/her	2008	Facilitator, board member
Nancy R.	she/her	2016	I facilitate both social and recovery programs as well as peer support groups. Board member-current Chair.
Neil	he/him	2013	Board Member, membership admin, email admin, website and assist Peer Support.
Patricia	she/her	1996	Roles in past: Board member; Conference Coordinator; Peer support facilitator; Tell your story speaker: ODSP, Oasis, etc. MDO speaker: Confidentiality, Women and Depression, Tell your story etc
Roman	they/them	2022	Volunteer facilitator and board member
Sharon	she/her	2017	Board member, lead groups

APPENDIX B

Volunteers

Board of Directors

MDO is a charitable organization completely run by volunteers, with its members forming the Board of Directors. Since there are no paid employees, the Board plays a crucial role in overseeing all aspects of MDO's activities. Their involvement is critical in ensuring that the organization runs smoothly and effectively.

Their responsibilities are diverse and encompass a wide range of functions essential for the effective operation of the organization. This includes the establishment and management of programs that align with MDO's mission, as well as the recruitment, training, and scheduling of volunteers who contribute significantly to the organization.

In addition to volunteer management, the Board is actively involved in providing necessary support to these individuals, ensuring they have the resources and guidance needed to perform their roles effectively. Fundraising is another critical responsibility of the Board, as it helps secure financial resources vital for the sustainability and growth of MDO's initiatives.

Moreover, the Board of Directors is tasked with establishing organizational policies and governance structures that guide the overall functioning of MDO. This combination of oversight, support, and strategic planning makes the Board an integral component in driving the success of the organization.

It is important to highlight that while certain board members hold specific positions as determined by vote among themselves, and have defined responsibilities according to the MDO Constitution, all decisions are made through a voting process involving the majority of the board.

Peer Volunteers

As we celebrate the legacy of our organization over the past 40 years, we would like to extend heartfelt gratitude to all current and previous volunteers who have contributed their time, wisdom, and dedication to our members and MDO.

Since the formation of the organization in spring 1986, each of you has played a vital role in shaping our mission and guiding us through challenges and triumphs.

Your commitment and vision have been instrumental in steering our organization toward success, and MDO members appreciate the diverse perspectives and invaluable insights you have brought to the table.

Thank you for your unwavering support and for helping us build a strong organization together.

List of 114 Volunteers Since 1986⁴

Name	Role(s)	Years Served
Alex M.	Board Member, Peer Activity Facilitator	2024–2026
Alex S.	Board member, Peer Support Facilitator	2020
Alexis M.	Program Facilitator	2024
Amer B.	Vice-President	2001–2002
Andrea P.	Nature/Forest Therapy Facilitator, Speaker	2020–2022
Andrew G.	Treasurer, Board Member, Accountant	2008–2018, 2013–2018
Anita M.	Participant in Tell Your Story workshop, telling my story at a gathering, Christmas dinners planner.	2007-2012
Ann P.	Secretary	1988–1989
Anne G.	Secretary, Board Member	2008–2017
Anne R.	Secretary	2005–2006
Arabella N.	Present at first meeting in 1986	1986
Azeem S.	Discovery 2000 Lead, Board Member, Facilitator	2014–2016
Barbara K.	Secretary, Vice-President, President	1988–2006
Basil C.	Writer's Collective Facilitator	2020-2023
Brenda S.	Board Member, Newsletter Editor, Caller, Mail Pickup	2013–2018
Brian R.	Event planner and executor	2005-2015
Candace	Volunteer (general)	2020
Carman	Board Member	2024-2025
Carrie H.	Chair, Treasurer, Grant Writer, Communications, Peer Support Facilitator	2020–2026

⁴We apologize for not having all the information about our volunteers. We might have overlooked some names, roles, or the dates people volunteered for MDO. If you have any details, corrections, or changes, please email us at info@mooddisordersottawa.ca, and we'll be happy to update the list. Thank you!

Name	Role(s)	Years Served
Catherine	Volunteer Support	2020
Catherine D.	President	1997–1999
Catherine W.	Co-Chair, Board Member, Movie Night, Membership Database, Callers Coordination	2013–2019
Cathleen L.	Board Member, Peer & Program Facilitator	2021–2024
Catina N.	Peer Support & Program Facilitator, Board Member	2019–2024
Champ C.	Peer & Program Facilitator	2018, 2024-2026
Charles R.	Secretary, Treasurer	2001–2004
Charlie C.	Vice-President, President	1991–1994
Charlotte R.	Peer support group facilitator, administrative and event assistant	2023-2026
Chloe	Volunteer (general)	2020
Chris P.	Board Member, Discovery 2000 Coordination	2014–2016, 2018–2019
Chris R.	Board Member, Co-Vice Chair, Fundraising, Events, Peer Support Facilitator	2015–2016, 2018–2026
Christina D.	Board Member, Communications Editor, Peer/Program Facilitator	2021–2024
Dan R.	Virtual Peer Support & Mugs Up Facilitator	2020–2022
Danielle P.	Board Member, Co-Vice Chair, Policy & Newsletter Writer, Peer Support Facilitator	2020–2026
David B.	Vice-President	1994–1996
David R.	Vice-President	2001–2004
Dean	Peer Support Facilitator	2020
Deborah G.	President	2005–2006
Denis O.	President	1990–1992

Name	Role(s)	Years Served
Denise L.	Movie Night co-facilitator	2006-2008
Eileen C.	Secretary, Vice-President	1996-2000
Eleanor M.	Founder	1986
Eric V.	Treasurer	2004-2005
Gabby W.	Website, Discovery Events, Board Member	2016-2018
Garth S.	Vice-President	1998-1999
Gary H.	Vice-President, President, Secretary	1992-1997, 2000-2002
Gerry McG.	Peer Support Group Facilitator	1986-2006
Gerry W.	Co-Chair, Board Member, Movie Night	2013, 2015-2018
Grace M.	Peer support group facilitator	2025-2026
Greg G.	Peer support group facilitator	
Heather B.	Producer/ Sound Mind radio show	1993-2011
Howard W.	Movie Night,, Peer Support group facilitator	2006-2008
Inez G.	President	2000-2001
Jackie C.	President	2007-2009
Jackie R.	Vice-President, Christmas Dinner Organizer, Family Groups Facilitator	2005-2015
Jane H.		
Janet B.	President, Writers Collective of Canada facilitator	1988-1990 2022-2023
Jayne H.	President, Vice-President	2005-2006
Jeff R.	Vice-President	2003-2005
Jennifer E.	Vice-President	2001-2002
Jennifer R.	Vice-President	1996-1997

Name	Role(s)	Years Served
Jerry	Volunteer	2020
Joanne L.	Board Member, Program Facilitator	2023–2026
John P.	Peer Recovery Facilitator (WRAP and Pathways to Recovery)	2014–2026
Jon W.	Outreach Coordinator, Board Member, Events	2021–2023
Judi R.	Treasurer; Family Peer Support Group facilitator	1990–2001
Kathleen C.	Peer facilitator	2020–2023
Kathleen G.	Recovery education facilitator	2010–2012
Kim H	Peer Recovery Facilitator (WRAP and Pathways to Recovery)	2014–2026
Lianna C.	President, Vice-President, Secretary, Facilitator	2007–2016
Lilla C.	Vice-President	1991–1992
Linda O.	President, Treasurer, Vice-President, Board, Telephone Caller	2003–2005, 2014–2018
Linda R.	President	2005–2006
Lorraine A.	Dance/Movement Therapy Facilitator, Speaker	2022–2024
Lucie P.	Board Member, Peer Support Facilitator	2022–2024
Maria S.	Program Facilitator	2021, 2022, 2024
Mark F.	Treasurer	1997–1998
Mark G.	Secretary	2005–2006
Mark P.	Vice-President	1997–1998
Mary H.		
Mylene P.	Chair/Co-Chair, Recovery Programs Coordinator, Facilitator, Board Member, Event planner	2009–2017, 2020, 2025–2026
Myra C.		
Myriam C.	Program Facilitator	2024–2026
Namara N.	Board Member, Discovery Events, Newsletter	2016–2017

Name	Role(s)	Years Served
Nancy C.	Secretary	2007–2008
Nancy K.	Vice-President, President, Board Member	2000–2002
Nancy R.	Chair, Vice-Chair, Program Coordinator, Peer Support group facilitator	2020-2026
Neil C.	Secretary, Membership & Communication, Website	2020–2026
Paul C.	Event planner, bowling facilitator	2008-2010
Patricia G.	Coordinator and organizer of the 2003 conference, support group facilitator, speaker night planner	1996-2012
Peggy C-W.	Speaker Night Lead/Setup, Board Member	2013–2019
Philip W.	Board Member, Event Facilitator	2021-2023
Puja	Peer support group facilitator	
Roman D.	Board Member, Peer & Program Facilitator	2024-2026
Ross M.	Treasurer	2005–2008
Rudy K.	President	2006–2007
Ruth F.	Vice-President	1994–1996
Sharon R.	Peer Support & Program Facilitator, Speaker Night Support, TYS Coordination	2016–2022
Sheila H.	Peer Support & Program Facilitator, Board Member	2018–2026
Solomon M.	Facilitator	2026
Sonia B.	Board Member, Peer Support Co-facilitator	2014, 2017–2018
Sophie/Sofie S.	Vice-President	2004–2005
Steven A.		
Steven T.		
Steven	Board Member	2021–2023

Name	Role(s)	Years Served
Susan A.	Treasurer, Vice-President	1998–2001
Sylmadel	Peer Support Group Facilitator	2021-2023
Theresa	Virtual Peer Support Facilitator	2020
Tom M.	Treasurer, Vice-President	1988–1991
Tyrone G.	Vice-President	2011-2012
Vicki T.	Peer Support Facilitator, Facebook Lead	2016–2018
Walter W.	Co-President, Peer Support Group facilitator, Shoreline clean-up organizer	2009-2010
Yvan L.	Board Member, Phone Line, Peer Support Coordinator & Facilitator, Speaker	2013–2018, 2020–2026
Yori	Advocate for Pathways to Recovery	

Contact Information:**Info Line:** 613-526-5406**Email:** info@mooddisordersottawa.ca**Website:** www.mooddisordersottawa.ca

APPENDIX C

In Loving Memory

Name	Year of Passing
Arabella N.	2014
Barbara K.	2020
Deborah G.	2023
Eleanor M.	2011
Gerry McG.	2023
Jackie R.	2016
Jane H.	2019
Judi R.	2010
Lucie P.	2026
Mark G.	2015
Mary H.	2024
Myra C.	1998
Sophie/Sofie S.	2016
Stephen A.	2020
Steve T.	2025
Tom M.	2010



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