

## Tomorrow is Bell Let's Talk Day...

### Annette Larabie Talks about How the North East LHIN-Supported Warm Line Changed Her Life

January 24, 2017 -- Annette Larabie has a warm smile and an easy way of making a stranger feel welcome. But it wasn't always so.

For more than three decades she struggled with depression as well as bipolar disorder. There was a time when she was "too despondent to even look up" to talk to others in a room.

January 25<sup>th</sup>, Bell Let's Talk Day, is an opportunity to talk about the stigma of mental illness that prevents many from seeking help.



Annette Larabie

"I would say the stigma was terrible. I got judged. I was persecuted for it. The fear that we go through is so crippling -- you're so afraid to accept yourself," Annette said. "When I came to Northern Initiative for Social Action (NISA), they took me under their wings."

NISA's Regional Warm Line, combined with other treatments and programs, helped make a difference. The Warm Line is staffed by peer support workers throughout the region – in Parry Sound, North Bay, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie and Timmins—and supported by the North East Local Health Integration Network (NE LHIN).

"The North East LHIN has supported the Warm Line since 2011 as a way to connect Northerners, before they reach a crisis, to a person with lived experience who can listen and connect them to services in their community," said Shana Calixte, Mental Health, Addictions and Housing Officer with the NE LHIN and former Executive Director of NISA. "This investment is an important part of our strategy to improve access to mental health services."

Annette remembers reaching out to Warm Line workers often. "I got to know them in a friendly way. It made me feel so good to know they would remember my name. They encouraged me so much to believe in myself," she said.

Annette has undergone a transformation, coming out of her "cocoon," as she calls it to become the butterfly she is today. And now, she wants to help others.

After spending time at NISA using many of its peer-run programs, she was encouraged by a staff member to apply to become a Warm Line worker. The 65-year-old now works one night a week, taking calls from “lonely people, some having a hard time with depression, and others just wanting to talk.” Not all have a mental illness, she explained “some just want to touch base with us.”

“I love my job,” she said. “Because of my background and what I’ve been through, I know where many of them coming from and I can relate to them.”

### Backgrounder

- The Regional Warm Line (1-866-856-9276) is a bilingual peer support line, open from 6 pm to midnight, staffed by individuals who have personal experience with mental health challenges. To find out more go to: <https://nisa.on.ca>
- This past fall, the Warm Line partnered with TAO-Tel-Aide Helpline to promote access to French language services for those Northern Ontarians living a difficult situation and who need to talk before they experience a crisis. For more on this [click here](#).
- Annette Larabie has written a book about her experiences called, *Shine On, Life’s Journey Through Depression*, and a book of poetry, *Hope For You and Me*.
- On Bell Let’s Talk Day, Bell will donate 5¢ more towards mental health initiatives in Canada, by counting every text, call, tweet, Instagram post, Facebook video view and Snapchat geofilter. Find out more at <http://letstalk.bell.ca>

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