



NEWS RELEASE

BAREFOOT FOR BIPOLAR THE STIGMA FREE SOCIETY

Although we are becoming much more aware and educated about mental health in the community, mental illness is still often shrouded in an isolating cloud of stigma. Many people with mental health challenges feel alone, or feel that they have no one to have real and raw conversations with about recovery, a diagnosis, or just the ups and downs of life. In fact, most of a person's support falls within an institutional infrastructure that inhibits a very essential human need to positively engage connections with others, especially connections to their community.

Barefoot for Bipolar was therefore created by Vancouver based artist, Benjamin Garner, who after living much of his life within the confine of these institutional infrastructures, experienced firsthand the hardships of being socially stigmatized. As a mental health survivor and activist, Garner felt a deep connection to those who also had suffered from social stigmas and felt it was his turn to contribute to the overcoming of these traumas for everyone. Barefoot for Bipolar in turn, aims to anonymously bring together both the general public and those living with a mental illness, and to participate in an event side by side that potentially helps bridge the social gap between these two distinct groups of people and their differing perspectives. During the walk, the general public is given an opportunity to show an empathic support toward a highly stigmatized population just by participating in the event itself, while those who live within these social barriers every day receive the gift of experiencing a community support and inclusivity in a non-discriminating and indirect way firsthand, by remaining anonymous. This also helps inform the public to the realization that mental illness is an invisible disease and without visual clues, potentially anyone can be struggling with a mental illness no matter what they look like on the outside.

The walk is scheduled August 26th, 2018 at 10 am to 1pm at the grass field at Second Beach in Stanley park and continues around the seawall back through the lagoon and ends at the starting point; it is intended to be done barefoot which is something that Benjamin often

experienced personally in specific mental states of his diagnosis and through the years, realized this was common for others in the same state of mind. In addition to the health benefits of walking barefoot, it is also an act of grounding one to the earth as as many who deal with mental challenges often lack this very essential requirement for optimal mental health. Though, the barefoot element of the walk is optional, everyone who participates is still encouraged to trace their footprints with a green piece of chalk (mental health awareness colour) given to the participants before they start their walk, or to leave messages of hope, encouragement, or love in memory to those who have succumbed to their battle with a mental illness. The aim is to have not only an experiential impact for the participants, but a visually memorable and inspiring account of the support and love demonstrated by the green footprints that will cover the length of the seawall—a documented record of all those people who essentially walked a mile in the footsteps of someone challenged by mental illness. All of this in support of the greater cause influencing the mental health movement that is taking part in the world today.

Proceeds of the event go to Barefoot for Bipolar's main supporting sponsor, The Stigma Free Society, formerly known as the Bipolar Disorder Society of B.C., who have a true grassroots history supporting those challenged by mental illness. The society, founded by President Andrea Paquette, who created the Bipolar Babe Project to share her personal experience of living with mental illness so others did not have to suffer in silence like she once did, changed their name to the Stigma-Free Society in August 2016, in an attempt to create conversation around common misperceptions relating to mental health diagnoses and to help end the stigmas associated with mental illness. The Stigma Free Society now aims to educate and inform the public on all stigmas, and Barefoot for Bipolar is an event in support of that cause!

We welcome anyone who is interested in stomping out STIGMA to join the Stigma-Free Society in support of Barefoot for Bipolar, a community-engaged walk around Stanley Park's beautiful Seawall: <https://stigmafreezone.com/>.

Barefoot for Bipolar Fundraiser Details:

August 26, 2018 | 10 AM to 12:00 PM | Stanley Park, Vancouver, BC.

**Meet at the grass area at Second Beach. Google map: <https://goo.gl/maps/5jN2wmx8ZE52> **

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