

## **Greetings from the MDA Group in Fort St. John**

Another year has passed and our group is still going strong. At our last meeting I asked people the following question:

How does your participation in the group motivate or help you in your daily life? The following are the responses I got:

- The group makes me feel like I'm not so isolated in being ill. You find out that other people have similar things happen or worse. Talking one to one with my psychiatrist is good but she has never been there and can only understand to a point. The group can really understand.
- It encourages me to take my meds faithfully and regularly, which is the key to staying well. It also keeps me informed about new medications and side effects.
- The camaraderie around having shared experiences.
- Knowledge and awareness of the illness helps keep you on your meds and on track.
- It is good to hear other people's stories - interesting and helpful.
- It gives you information you would not normally have access to about different treatments, programs and medications
- I learned about a new medication which my psychiatrist switched me to-it changed my life as I had felt quite sedated before. It is a safe place to share your struggles-friends can only understand to a certain degree. It gives hope to see how well people with the same illness can function when properly treated.
- The people in the group are always there with support in rough times. I can speak freely about my struggles.
- I know I am understood by group members in a way others cannot understand. There is a recognition that the illness occurs in a variety of people- it is not respectful of economics, age, education or social standing. There is no stereotype. I recognize that there is no limitation for me-no need for shame. Attending the meetings is always a positive for me- I look forward to going. In some ways I've gotten more out of attending the group than seeing my psychiatrist because I can speak more freely. The doctor's role is to evaluate whereas the group's role is to empathize and support.

For myself I find the meetings a source of support that I could not find anywhere else. It keeps me mindful of how sick I have been in the past and the need to continue with treatment in order to stay well. I always leave the MDA meetings feeling positive.

When we started the group we had 4 people at the first meeting. 3 of the original four are still attending 10 years later!! The 4<sup>th</sup> moved away. To me this speaks volumes about just how special this group of people is. Our numbers have grown but the equation has remained the same:

**Shared Experience, Education and Support. That's what MDA is all about.**

- **Joan, Fort St. John, BC**  
**Dec 2006**