

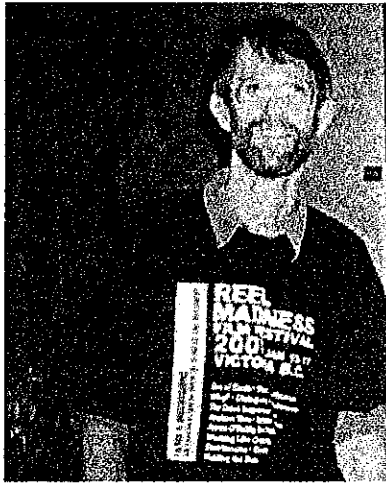


GIRAFFE NEWS

Report on the Giraffe Movement # 44

"Nobis Est (It's Up To Us) So Stick Your Neck Out"

H O N O R R O L L



L"Lights! Cam-eras! Activ-ism!" could be the motto of Giraffe Bruce Saunders, of Victoria, B.C. A twice-hospitalized mental health patient, Saunders' love of movies and his battle against the stigma of his disease led him to start a ground-breaking program that challenges stereotypes and raises

public understanding about mental illness.

A gardener by trade, Saunders has had bouts of manic depression (bipolar disorder) for many years. A second suicide attempt landed him in a hospital psychiatric unit, where he discovered that the facility had an underutilized 100-seat theater. "The idea of showing films there for patients and ex-patients captured my imagination," he says.

Saunders started "Movie Monday," as "a guerilla psycho-social rehab project." It's a free weekly movie that's not only for current and former mental health patients, but also for the public-at-large, defusing anxieties and misconceptions people may have about mental illness. Saunders intentionally selects an eclectic mix of features, showing general interest films as well as movies dealing specifically with mental health issues. Facilitated discussions often accompany the films. Guest speakers and audience talk about how movies like *Sybil* and *One Flew Over the*

Cuckoo's Nest portray mental illness. Movie Monday also showcases art by mental health patients—sculptures, graphic arts, music, photographs, and paintings.

"A film night is a good draw," says Saunders, "but we can show what else people who sometimes struggle with mental illness can do. We can help them define themselves as something besides sufferers."

Saunders took huge risks to start Movie Monday back in 1993. A psychiatrist advised him not to "reveal" his mental illness. "What if you want to get a real job?" he warned. The challenge of a regular schedule can be enormous for a person still experiencing some of the characteristics of manic depression; mood swings sometimes make even the simplest tasks monumental. "We did expect him to fail," said one observer. But Saunders not only persevered in his mission, he expanded it. Saunders used his own money to launch the program and soon raised thousands of dollars to introduce the "Reel Madness Film Festival," five days of film and discussions on mental illness and recovery. Saunders aims for discussions that "break down myths about conventional treatment...and show that people need more than just medication."

Asked whether he'd seen the stigma of mental illness decrease by getting people together around movies, he says, "That's what Movie Monday's about. I see it personally every time... One of the best results of this experiment has been to shed all the baggage that comes with the usual secrecy about mental illness."

Every Monday for almost eight years, Saunders has passed his own "screen test." He says, "People think that if you have a mental illness you're unreliable." Steady and consistent, he's come through for hundreds of events. Saunders says, "I think just because I'm showing up I'm changing people's attitudes."

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THE GIRAFFE PROJECT

The Giraffe Project is a nonprofit organization that moves people to stick their necks out for the common good—and helps them to do it better.

The Project finds and commends "Giraffes," people who are already sticking their necks out. Supporters of the Project are urged to spot such people and report sightings to the Project. Each quarter, a volunteer jury decides who will receive Giraffe commendations. The jurors focus on the personal risks nominees have faced, and whether or not they were acting for the common good. The risks can be social, financial or physical, but are never "one-shot" actions.

The Project uses these heroes' stories, and what we learn from them, in a curriculum for schools that gives kids real heroes and moves them into brave, compassionate service themselves. There are Giraffe Heroes Programs for children in kindergarten-through-twelfth grades.

The Project has placed stories about "Giraffes" in hundreds of local and national print and broadcast media.

The Project also gives workshops, speeches and seminars that help companies, colleges, labor unions, government agencies, service organizations and entire communities use Giraffe spirit and street-smarts in their work.

For more information on materials, on education programs, on speeches and workshops, or on particular Giraffes, contact:

The Giraffe Project
PO Box 759, 197 Second St., Langley WA 98260
voice: 360-221-7989 fax: 360-221-7817
office@giraffe.org www.giraffe.org

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