

SHARE & CARE

THE RECOVERY OF HOPE - THE HOPE OF RECOVERY

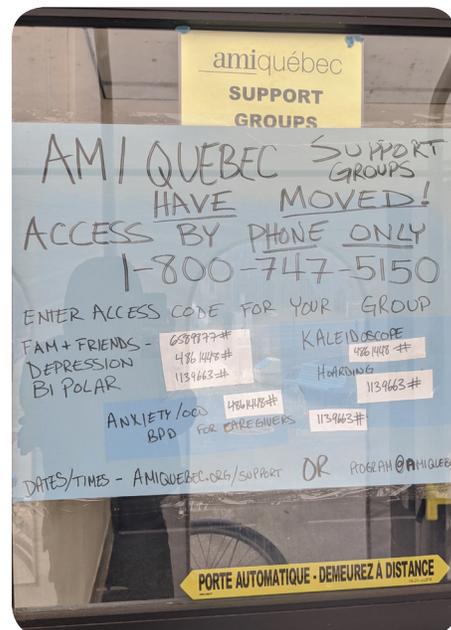
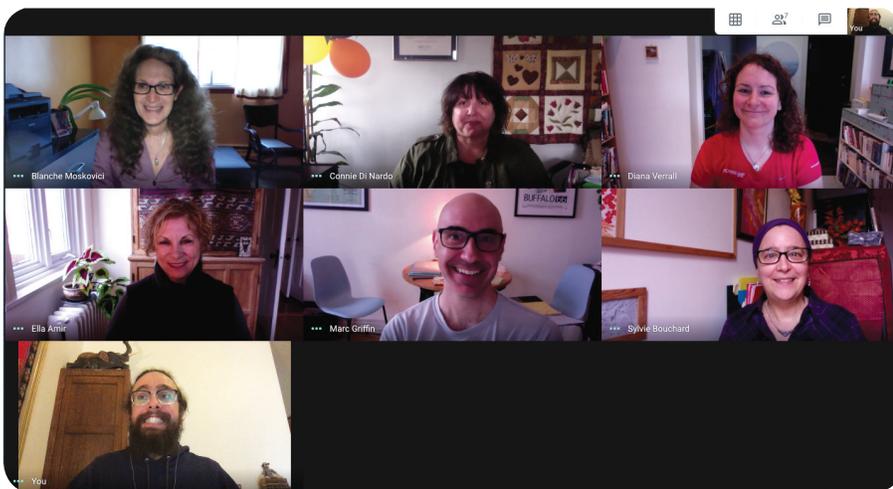
WE ARE STILL HERE FOR YOU!

COVID-19 has thrown our world into chaos. At the onset of the outbreak (even before it was declared a pandemic), the AMI team got together to consider how best we could serve our community in anticipation of tightened regulations. Without wasting time and practically overnight, we transitioned all our programs to remote platforms, including telephone, videoconference, and Facebook. All scheduled programs were and continue to be delivered as planned,

individual and family counselling continued, and we respond to all messages. We continue and will continue to struggle with the ramifications of this pandemic, but AMI is still here for you!

Naturally, the pandemic is an important theme in this edition of Share&Care, so we've included some observations and coping tips. It has affected all of us in many of the same and yet in some different ways. See pages 6 and 7 to hear about our staff's experiences.

Don't forget that the most up to date information on our programs and services can be found on our website **amiquebec.org**, and you can still reach us by phone: **514-486-1448**. ☐



Feeling grief during a pandemic

Our lives have changed drastically since COVID-19 has taken a grip on society. We are faced with a new reality of social distancing, missing out on activities like birthdays, graduations, family get-togethers, friend game nights, baby showers, and other celebrations that bring us joy. Because we are trying to stop the spread of this devastating virus, we are missing out on these important life milestones. With this big change in our lives, many of us are grieving, and some might question whether they should be feeling so sad when there is so much devastation around the world. The following information derived from a Harvard Business Review article explores the grief we are feeling, and what we can do to address it.

In "That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief", Scott Berinato interviewed David Kessler, a well-known expert on grief. Kessler explains that it is right to call what we are feeling grief. Many things in our lives have changed, and during a time of extreme change and disruption it is normal to grieve what we had before and what we want and/or are missing during the pandemic. He also explains that we might be feeling different kinds of grief, one of which is anticipatory grief. This kind of grief can include worrying about the future, concern about those around us being sick, and questioning how things will be once the pandemic ends.

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Grief ... continued from page 1

Many people might feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed by this grief. Kessler stresses that acknowledging this grief is important, and part of managing it includes accepting the emotions we are experiencing, accepting how things are, and how we can each contribute to flatten the curve like washing our hands and practicing safe social distancing. To help control our grief and anxieties during this difficult time, Kessler recommends four techniques:

- 1) **“Find balance in the things you’re thinking”**: This is especially important when your thoughts might be spinning like a hamster wheel. Kessler explains that whenever you have a negative thought, bring up a positive one to counter it. For example, if you think, “So many people in the world are dying and someone near me will as well”, instead think, “Those close to me are taking the right precautions to take care during this pandemic.” This does not mean dismissing the negative thoughts; they are a part of the experience. What is important is finding a balance of negative and positive thoughts.
- 2) **“Come to the present”**: It is easy to think ahead and fill our minds with all the worst possible scenarios for the future, but Kessler insists that it is crucial to stay in the present. This is a practice we see in meditation and mindfulness. Bringing ourselves back to the present moment can help alleviate the grief and anxieties we are experiencing. Some tricks you can try are breathing exercises to stabilize your breathing rate and looking around the room and naming the objects you see. In a time of stress like this, it is important to take things one day at a time.
- 3) **“Let go of what you can’t control”**: This is definitely something that seems easier said than done, but it is extremely important in managing our emotions. Some of our anxieties are about other people and wondering if they are doing what they need to do to contribute to diminishing the spread of the virus, but we must tell ourselves that we cannot control what they do. Instead, focus on the things that you can do: washing your hands, practicing social distancing, avoid gathering in big groups, and following the rules implemented by the government. By doing all of this, you are doing your part to keep yourself and those around you safe.
- 4) **“Stock up on compassion”**: Being compassionate to ourselves and others is especially important in a time when grief and anxiety can take over a person in ways it did not before. Be patient with those who might be more aggravated than usual. Be kind to the person who is expressing higher levels of anxiety. Reach out to those in your social circle--call your parents, message a friend, or email a co-worker to see how they are coping. Be kind to yourself too!

These are difficult times for everyone. We are faced with many uncertainties and questions about our future, and it might feel like it is a huge hill to climb with seemingly no end. What is important is that we must stay strong and do everything in our own power to contribute to the healing of our society. If you feel overwhelmed and are having difficulty managing your grief and anxieties, you can always contact Info-Social 811 where you can speak with a psycho-social intervention worker who can help guide you to feeling better and more in control of your emotions. □

For more on grief from David Kessler, visit grief.com.

– Gabrielle Lesage

Living Through a Pandemic with an Anxiety Disorder

Gabrielle’s experience and advice

We are currently living in an unprecedented time. COVID-19 has taken over the world, and we have completely changed our daily lives to flatten the curve to save as many lives as we can. The stresses of this new life bring about negative thoughts about the present and future, but what happens when your brain is geared this way even without a pandemic? Today I thought I would share with you my experience during a pandemic with an anxiety disorder.

My anxiety often manifests itself in worrying about the future, especially things that are not in my control in the present moment. Because there are many things that are out of my control lately, my anxiety has been over the roof. Not knowing when things will go back to normal and how things will be once we are out of this self-isolation period has caused me to develop more anxious symptoms like difficulty sleeping and restlessness. My worry for things out of my control also permeates daily life, such as the fear of a virus in people who have no symptoms. This applies to me as well; I stress that I might be a carrier and not even know it. I worry that every small cough or every small temperature change could be COVID-19, and this makes daily life even more stressful.

My brain goes into overdrive when I think of all the worst-case scenarios that can happen, and sometimes it makes it difficult to take an actual deep breath. The most difficult is that all of these worries pile up so much that at some point it becomes overwhelming and I just want to crawl into a hole and emerge only once everything is back to the way it was. I can describe my anxiety as always having a little person on my shoulder constantly telling me that things are bad and that everything feels doomed. With this pandemic, the little person on my shoulder now has a megaphone, making it more difficult to tune it out!

There are several things I do to make sure I manage my anxiety and keep good mental health:

- 1) **Having a support system**: I am very close to my parents, and they have been so helpful in aiding me when I feel anxious and having trouble going about with my day. I talk to them every day, and even though we are not in the same place I still feel their presence when I call them or message them. I also keep in contact with my friends and video chat with them once a week.
- 2) **Take my anxiety medication regularly**: I am prescribed one anxiety medication, and in order to help with managing it I have to make sure I take it every night. If I don’t, my anxiety and OCD resurface more intensely. To make sure I feel the best I can, I make sure to not skip a dose. If I do accidentally skip a night,

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THE EMOTIONAL PYRAMID OF NEEDS

Susan David, PhD, is a founder and co-director of the Institute of Coaching at McLean Hospital of Harvard Medical School, an Instructor in Psychology at Harvard University, and the author of, among other books, *Emotional Fragility, Get unstuck, embrace change, and thrive in work and life*.

She has developed an “emotional needs” pyramid model that illustrates how “to deal with both the reality of our present and the emotions that come with this reality, in a healthy way. The steps outlined can leave us more resilient and stronger than ever”. The following description was edited for length.

1. **Gentle Acceptance** suggests that under uncontrollable situations feelings of anxiety, hopelessness or grief

can be expected, therefore accepted. Acceptance is the prerequisite for positive change.

2. **Compassion:** During unprecedented times such as the current pandemic, forgiveness, flexibility, and compassion—for both yourself and for others—can alleviate anxiety and burden.

3. **Routine:** Routine provides a sense of order, the glue that holds us together from day to day. When faced with the unfamiliar, we tend to fill in the gaps with fear; instead, we can fill the gaps with things that are comfortable, familiar, and connected with our values. Healthy routines are essential, specifically those associated with sleep, exercise and eating. Our bodies and minds are so interconnected and our physical health is reflected in our psychological state.

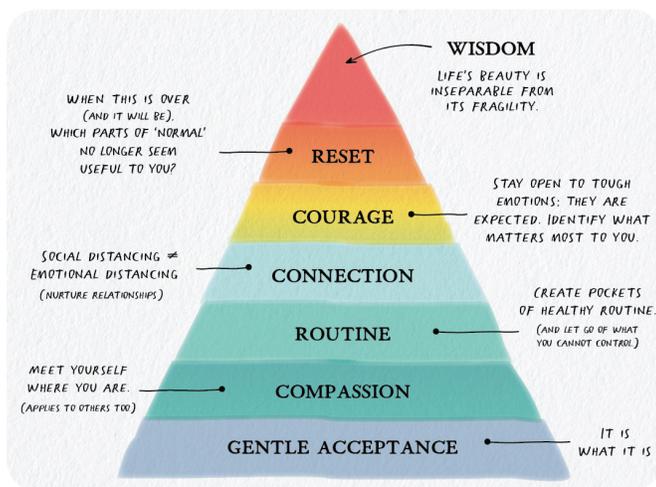
4. **Connection:** Physical distancing is not synonymous with social distancing. Connection is more important than ever. Nourishing relationships, especially if you’re feeling lonely, can be done despite physical distance.

5. **Courage:** Research now shows that the radical acceptance of all of our emotions—even the messy, difficult ones—is the cornerstone to resilience, thriving, and happiness. Slow down and face into your difficult emotions with courage. What you find there will direct you to make better decisions and take values-based actions.

6. **Reset:** This is the time for reflection. What priorities did you once have that no longer seem important? What parts of ‘normal’ do you not want to rush back to? Gather your data, and reflect on what you learn about yourself. This will guide you as you move forward.

7. **Wisdom:** Life’s beauty is inseparable from its fragility. The only certainty is uncertainty, and once we realize this as truth, the healthier and more authentically happier we will be. Courage is not an absence of fear; courage is fear walking. □

Learn more at susandavid.com.



Living Through ... continued from page 2

I’ll make sure to take my medication the next night without fault.

3) Creating a routine: Even though I cannot follow the routine of getting up and going to work like I did before the pandemic, I make sure to establish something similar at home. I’ll make sure I wake up at a reasonable time and eat my three meals at regular hours. I’ll use my agenda and schedule activities like writing, taking care of emails, reading, and watching a TV show. By keeping a routine, I feel like things are slightly normal.

4) Taking things one day at a time: When I talk to my mom, she often tells me that in times like these we can only take things one day at a time. It’s not always easy to do this, but it is extremely important. This

especially comes in handy when I think too much of the future and become overwhelmed; I ask myself “What can I control now?” and I focus on that. I wash my hands. I make sure to practice social distancing. I minimize my trips to the grocery store. If I start worrying about things that are too far in the future, I ask myself what I can do in the present moment. Often times I realize that there is nothing I can do right now and so I have to tell myself that when the time comes to take care of these things that I will be able to do so.

I hope that sharing my experience has made you feel less alone. Remember that we will get through this pandemic together. Hopefully soon we will be able to resume our life as we knew it. □

– Gabrielle Lesage

STAY INFORMED!

Find our most up-to-date information at:
www.amiquebec.org

For regular updates, follow **AMIQuebec** on:



Sign up for monthly emails:
amiquebec.org/email

Or call us: **514-486-1448**
(1-877-303-0264 outside Montreal)

WE HAVE TO GRIEVE IN ORDER TO AVOID TRAUMA

In his April 29 piece in the *Toronto Star*, physician and addiction specialist **Gabor Maté** suggests that to get through these terrible times and prevent trauma, we should be sad. As a physician working extensively with trauma and as a writer exploring its origins and healing, Gabor offers some guidance. The following are excerpts from his essay.

Maté says that “we have never been so alone together, nor so together while being vulnerably alone. The novel coronavirus had already wrought the conditions for extraordinary collective trauma. Then, the unspeakable horror of (the) Nova Scotia massacre struck another blow to the collective psyche [referring to the killing of 22 people on April 18-19]. How to endure such twin catastrophes, one exacerbating the other, how not to succumb to fear, hostility or dejection?”

“Across the country and around the world, as we seek to avoid being traumatized by this tragic time, we must understand that trauma is not the same as suffering emotional upset, pain, fear, grief, rage or panic — not if we can move through those emotions, find ways of releasing them so as to return to a full, present sense of ourselves”.

“We are traumatized only when we become more constricted than we were

before the event that induced the stressful emotions: when we remain fearful or embittered after the threat has passed, defensive or aggressive in the absence of present danger, in chronic pain when nothing in the moment is jabbing at us. The experience of genuine grief protects from trauma. He quotes Canadian psychologist Gordon Neufeld who said: *We shall be saved in an ocean of tears.*

“In the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic” says Maté, “I found myself in a state of partial denial. *What are they making such a fuss about?* I thought. *It’s no worse than the flu.* But over time, I began to notice a heaviness in my chest, a constant tension... I soon recognized I was tensing to defend against opening to grief”.

“Something in me both understood and resisted accepting that, for better or worse, I was losing something. We all were losing something: a sense of security that, even if illusory at the best of times, we all cling to; a sense of normalcy, which, no matter how precarious, holds us in a world that appears familiar and in which we feel we know how to be; a sense of ourselves. When I finally allowed and acknowledged

the grief... the reality of the loss, the tension abated”.

Maté suggests that “when you notice any tension in yourself, take time to be with it, to accept it, give it quiet attention.

“Sitting with grief is necessary, but this always-difficult process is made yet more so by our current predicament. Touch is essential to human beings; it is the most elemental way of connecting. The virus has inhibited and limited the physical dimensions of grief. Like the Nova Scotia killer, it claims its victims without warning, one

by one, in isolation, without the solace of loved ones to ease and support the passing. One of

our challenges to avoid trauma is to grieve together, alone. People are finding beautiful ways of doing so, both in Nova Scotia and across the world”.

“These displays of collective grief remind us that we need not be traumatized — that is, constricted — by painful and fearful events now engulfing us. We can grow from them.

“It is not too early to begin asking what the lessons of today’s catastrophes may be. One obvious truth being revealed is the unity of all life and, in particular, of all human life. Can we still deny it, will we remain oblivious to it when this is all over — if it ever will be completely over?” □

For more from Gabor Maté, visit drgabormate.com.

“The experience of genuine grief protects from trauma.”

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

On June 9th, over 40 members and friends joined us for our Annual General Meeting online. We looked back at 2019-20, laughed together, and celebrated another successful year helping families. Although the pandemic kept us

physically apart, as Executive Director Ella Amir said in her closing remarks, “I hope that next year we will be able to gather face to face, and even hug each other if we wish. Together we will get through this. Who knows, maybe we will be better for it.”



Donna Sharpe, President, led everyone in a virtual toast:

“Please raise your glass:

To those individuals who worked behind the scenes to make this event possible, thank you for your dedication.

To AMI Quebec staff and volunteers, thank you for continuing to respond to the needs of caregivers.

To our members, thank you for your continued support.” □

Social Media and Caregiving

Is it good for you?

Social media takes a lot of space in our modern society, especially today. Sometimes it seems like everyone is connected, and it can make us feel disconnected if we are not online. But being online doesn't mean you will connect with others; you might feel supported, but also more alone, especially for caregivers. Social media is tricky because there are so many components that make it both positive and negative. We decided to look at the pros and cons of social media use by caregivers, and the implications it may have on their mental health.

Advantages of social media use

There are many ways that social media can benefit caregivers.

Most important right now: social media allows us to stay connected to family. They can get updates from you and the person you are caring for. It is an essential way to maintain important relationships in your life, no matter the distance.

It can also be used as a platform for reaching out to other caregivers in similar situations. Sometimes knowing that someone else is going through the same thing as you can bring a sense of comfort and hope. Social media can also become a way to vent any sadness, anger, and insecurities. Platforms like Facebook groups give the chance for people to connect with those they would have never met before (like someone from a different city, or even another country!).

Social media use can also be advantageous because it can be a learning platform. Many people share informative articles on Twitter (for example), and this can allow the user to learn more about a specific illness or condition, which can be very helpful as a caregiver. Make sure the source material is reliable, of course!

Downsides of social media use

It can be easy to get swept away in the positive online world of social media, and it is just as easy to fall into a downward spiral.

Some may experience feelings of sadness and jealousy because others' lives seem to be better than theirs. Often times, people will post only the positives that happen in their lives, and so when we see their posts we think they have the perfect life and that our life is not as exciting; that can make us feel trapped, especially if we are taking care of another person.

Excessive social media use can lead to an addiction, and this applies to everyone (not just caregivers).

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SUMMER 2020

Please note: due to COVID-19, all our programs (including support groups, workshops, and counseling) are taking place online and by phone, not in person. Visit amiquebec.org/coronavirus or call 514-486-1448 for access details and the most up to date information.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Mondays, 6:30pm, by phone or online

Visit amiquebec.org/support or call 514-486-1448 to find out how to access a group

No registration necessary

For family, friends, and people with mental illness unless otherwise indicated.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS for relatives and friends

June 29; July 13, 27; August 10, 24

BPD for relatives and friends

July 13; August 10

ANXIETY/ OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

July 13; August 10

BIPOLAR DISORDER

July 27; August 24

DEPRESSION

July 27; August 24

HOARDING

June 29; July 27; August 24

KALEIDOSCOPE for people living with mental illness

June 29; July 13; August 10

SOUTH SHORE support groups

Postponed until further notice.

BOARD MEETINGS

Tuesdays 7:00pm, Online

July 21, September 1

WORKSHOPS

Facebook Live Hot Topics Q&A

7-8pm, online, for all

Details: amiquebec.org/hot-topics

Mental Health in the Workplace

July 16

Parents Supporting Adolescents

August 13

Validation Practice Group

6-8pm, online

Must register in advance

Details: amiquebec.org/practice

July 15

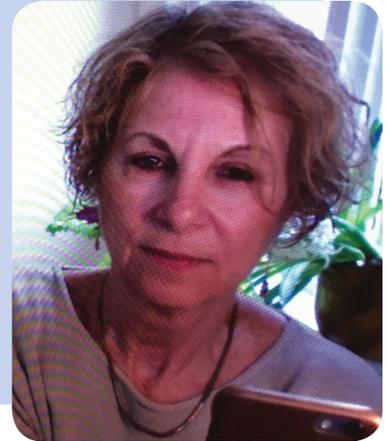
AMI STAFF ON THE CORONAVIRUS

In mid-March, virtually overnight, the AMI team moved all programs and services to remote platforms. Although our office is physically closed, and will remain so until the crisis has passed, we are still here for you! Visit amiquebec.org often for information and updates.

Here are our team's thoughts and feelings on the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic was an uninvited guest into our lives, and has certainly overstayed its welcome, but in this challenging time there are discoveries and opportunities. Being part of the AMI team has provided me with a greater than ever appreciation for the strength, commitment and loyalty of all of us; the way we grouped together to make sure 'life goes on' despite the challenges, has been a reminder of human resolve and resilience and the remarkable importance of love and connection.

— *Ella Amir, Executive Director*



In this time of crisis, it's easy to focus on the bad things. I miss my family so much. I worry every day. I'm having trouble sleeping. Social distancing is a hassle and a struggle. These are things we are all feeling. And yet, amidst all this chaos, we have managed to keep AMI afloat. We know that problems don't disappear even though our world is upside down. Now, more than ever, if you need us, we are here.

— *Diana Verrall, Administration*



When it rains look for rainbows. I have realized that rainbows are all around me. Being part of the AMI team for one. This journey has shown me my inner strength and ability to adapt.

One of the biggest challenges was most definitely learning all the new technologies. But with the help and patience of our AMI techies it's actually been fun.

— *Connie Di Nardo, Reception*

COVID-19 took us by surprise and within a matter of days the AMI team started offering all services online and by telephone. My biggest challenge was learning to use this technology while working from home. I must admit I was feeling quite anxious about it! However, I was lucky enough to have a wonderful team around me and with their support and patience, I was able to make this transition. This pandemic has given me a new appreciation for the work all my colleagues do. The greatest gift was to see how each one of us, with our own unique talents and strengths, were able to work together to make AMI version 2.0 happen!!

I am lucky enough to live by the Lachine Canal, and every morning, before my workday, doing a contemplative walk with my vintage binoculars has been a real bonus for my self-care. So far, I have heard and seen wild geese, blackbirds, seagulls, robins, and even a great blue heron!

— *Sylvie Bouchard, Counselor*



Working online from home as a counselor during COVID-19 includes self-care and scheduling time between calls to reboot my brain and body. I also love baking bread.

I start each day with Qigong practice and by asking, “How may I serve?” At first, when exploring with family caregivers what you are looking for, the situation may seem “lumpy, sticky and completely unwieldy” like newly mixed dough. Together, in SOS Counseling, we knead the dough of one’s lived experience, so it can become “smoother, more consistent, stretchy.” Then, we align to rise. Onward, hearing of progress = Home Baked Bread!

— *Blanche Moskovici, Counselor*



One of my greatest outlets during the pandemic is my new bike; I haven’t owned one in 25 years. Just biking around gives me exercise, fresh air, and an opportunity to clear my head each day. I highly recommend it.

One big surprise these days is the level of patience and empathy Montrealers have for each other. I see it in the kindness to strangers, helping of neighbours, and the lack of complaints when our events at AMI-Quebec have little technical snafus. We’re all in it together, and that’s the only way we’re going to get through this.

— *Marc Griffin, Program Coordinator*

Working from home has been an interesting and difficult but rewarding transition. Learning new technologies and helping other people learn those technologies has been probably the most difficult part of this process. Also, my entire position and responsibilities have completely shifted from working primarily with volunteers to being the primary person hosting the presentations and workshops. It’s been a good transition and I am looking forward to what Corona can throw at us with regards to work and how we can best support the community, because I have no doubt our team can handle it!

— *Tony Alfonso, Outreach Coordinator*



TRIBUTES & MEMORIALS

In honour of Carrie Mazoff

Miryam Barac

In memory of Erika Bloom

Jeremy Becker

Wayne Marcus

Robert Presser

Evelyn Shrier and Henry Geniele

Takei Yam

In memory of James Regier

Cathy, Dave, and Maegan Norris

In memory of Hy Peskin

Margaret Gordon

Sylvia and Bill Klein

In memory of Johanne Tittley

Jean-Guy Gaudreau

Suzanne Tittley

AMI-Québec extends sympathy to the bereaved and appreciation to all donors for their generosity. If you wish to honour someone with a donation, please phone 514-486-1448 or visit amiquebec.org/donate.

amiquébec

Agir contre la maladie mentale
Action on mental illness

AMI-Québec, a grassroots not-for-profit organization, is committed to helping carers* manage the effects of mental illness through support, education, guidance and advocacy. By promoting understanding, we work to dispel the stigma still surrounding mental illness, thereby helping to create communities that offer new hope for meaningful lives.

*Carers (*proches aidants*) are those in the circle of care, including family members and other significant people, who provide unpaid support to a person in need.

Donna Sharpe, *President*
Joanne Smith, *Vice President*
Anne Newman, *Secretary*
Henry Olders, *Treasurer*
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Ella Amir, *Executive Director*

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Share&Care is published quarterly.
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Social Media ... continued from page 5

If someone is always online and constantly checking social media, it can affect the need to carry out certain responsibilities or be in “the present moment”.

What is right for you?

Every person is different, and every person reacts differently. What’s important to know is how YOU feel. If you see that you feel sad or angry most of the time after you look at other peoples’ social media pages, then maybe it would be a good idea to step away from it. As a caregiver, it can sometimes be difficult to see other people happy because your situation might be demanding and draining. Listen to your feelings and follow what makes you content. If you find joy in staying active on social media, then do it! But if it affects you in a negative way more than it brings you joy, then don’t be afraid to disconnect from the online world. ☐

–Gabrielle Lesage

Please visit amiquebec.org/sources for article references.

This issue of *Share&Care* has been made possible by a grant from the Otsuka-Lundbeck Alliance.



YOUR SUPPORT SUSTAINS OUR FREE PROGRAMS

Although AMI receives some government funding, we need to raise more than half of our operating budget each year.

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