

## **Erasing the Stigma – Schizophrenia**

Schizophrenia is found all over the world in all races, cultures and social classes, and over 10,000 people in Saskatchewan are affected or will be affected in their lifetime, in a given generation. Schizophrenia is a mental illness with symptoms of psychosis. These could be hallucinations (sensations, like voices, that aren't real) and delusions (strong beliefs that aren't true, like the belief that they have superpowers). The misconception that people cannot recover from schizophrenia leads to hopelessness and despair and as many as 96 percent of individuals living with schizophrenia experience discrimination and mental disorders stigma-other people expecting negative things of them, or nothing at all, because of their illness. This may cause friends and families to hold a negative perception towards recovery. BUT, the disorder takes many different courses and varies with each individual. Some people have episodes of the illness lasting weeks or months with full remission of their symptoms between each episode. Others have a fluctuating course where symptoms are continuous but rise and fall in intensity. Some people have little variation of their symptoms over time.

Schizophrenia has a long history of neglect, demonization and concealment. Even today, the illness does not receive the levels of public attention and research funding warranted by the numbers of individuals and families it affects. The stigma associated with schizophrenia is particularly heavy because of media portrayal. In both movies and national news, those with schizophrenia are shown to be wild and violent, or quiet, paranoid and dangerous. One of the biggest myths around the illness is that it isn't treatable. While there is no cure for schizophrenia, people can and do recover. Recovery may mean learning to reduce the impact of problems, work around challenges, or maintain wellness. With the right supports, people can work or volunteer, be active in their own care, and contribute to their communities.