



## **NOTICE**

**MEETING:** St Mary's Municipal Council  
Committee of the Whole

**DATE:** Wednesday, September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018

**TIME:** 10:00am

**PLACE:** St. Mary's Municipality  
Council Chambers, Sherbrooke, NS

**Please advise if unable to attend**

Dated: August 29, 2018

Marvin Macdonald, CAO

**Municipality of the District of St. Mary's  
Committee of the Whole  
Wednesday, September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Approval of Agenda and Any Additions
4. Approval of Minutes from Committee Meeting held July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018
5. Business Arising from Minutes
6. Help the Helper Event - John Garth MacDonald (IPS Clinical Coordinator CLHC )
7. Correspondence
  - a. Letter – Municipality of Barrington
  - b. Letter – St. Mary's Genealogy Research Centre
8. Other Matters of Business
  - a. Council Newsletter Update
  - b. Economic Development Committee – Terms of Reference
  - c. TIR Cost Share Agreement
  - d. Public Beach Access
  - e. Carbon Surcharge Fund
  - f. October Meeting Dates
  - g. SSI Consulting Solutions – Training Session Managing Conflict in a Customer Service Environment
  - h. Asset Management
  - i. Resolution for Pre-Approval of Debenture Issuance Subject to Interest Rate
  - j. Development Update (In-Camera)

Adjournment

**Municipality of the District of St. Mary's  
Committee of the Whole  
Wednesday, September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

**Meeting, Date & Time**

The Committee of the Whole meeting of St. Mary's Council was called to order on Wednesday, September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 10:00 am in the Council Chambers Sherbrooke, N.S.

**Attending**

Warden Mosher  
Deputy Warden Dort  
Councillor Kaiser-Kirk  
Councillor Baker (Arrived 10:33am)  
Councillor Smith (Left 1:00pm)  
Councillor Findlay  
Councillor Malloy

**Also Attending**

Marvin MacDonald, CAO  
Denise Sawlor, Municipal Clerk/Special Projects Coordinator

**Approval of Agenda**

*On motion of Deputy Warden Dort and seconded by Councillor Smith that Council approve the agenda with the following Changes and Additions:*

- Help the Helper Event Presentation - moved to 1pm.
- 8. Other Matters of Business
  - k. Ambulance Service

*Motion carried.*

**Approval of Minutes**

*On motion of Councillor Findlay and seconded by Councillor Malloy that Council approve the minutes of the Committee Of The Whole held July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018*

*Motion carried.*

**Business Arising From Minutes**

- None

**Correspondence**

- Letter from Municipality of Barrington
- Letter from St. Mary's Genealogy Research Centre
  - Question was asked as to whether the Research Centre is creating electronic copies of their materials and keeping a copy offsite. Councillor Findlay will find out.

**Other Matters of Business**

- Council Newsletter Update
  - Marvin provided a draft of the first Council update for the October newsletter.

- This will be the first of several updates periodically published in the newsletter.
- Topics for the first update are Financial and Infrastructure.
- Adjustments will be made to the draft and submitted for publication in the October newsletter.
- Economic Development Committee – Terms of Reference
  - It has been difficult to recruit members for the committee due to the current restrictions within the terms of reference.
  - Proposed amendments to the terms of reference is intended to open membership to a broader range of residents.
  - Proposed changes include eliminating membership by district requirement and replacing it with 8 members at large.
  - It was suggested that the youth age be lowered to 16 from 18 years old.

*Councillor Baker arrived 10:33am*

- It was suggested that the “from Business or non-profit organizations” condition for the at large members be removed.

***On recommendation of Deputy Warden Dort and seconded by Councillor Malloy that council accept the proposed amendments to the Economic Development Committee terms of reference.***

***Recommendation adopted.***

- TIR Cost Share Agreement
  - The Department of Transportation Infrastructure Renewal are requesting applications from municipalities for cost shared subdivision projects.
  - Hospital Road and Restoration Drive were identified as high priority roads for the road submission list.
  - Hospital Road will be placed first on the list.
  - Marvin will draft a response letter listing the priorities.
- Public Beach Access
  - There have been some complaints from residents regarding private property owners restricting access to beaches.
  - The Public Beach Act does not discuss public access to beaches.
  - In 2004 Dalhousie University published a research project regarding public beach access in the Halifax Regional Municipality. According to this publication, the province of Nova Scotia is not taking any action on the issue.
  - There appears to be no laws regarding restricting beach access across private land.
  - It was suggested that complaints on this issue be referred to the province since the matter is under their jurisdiction.

***On recommendation of Councillor Baker and seconded by Deputy Warden Dort that Marvin draft a letter to the Department of Natural Resources and copy MLA Lloyd Hines about public beach access.***

***Recommendation adopted.***

- October Meeting Dates
  - Meeting dates for October will be as follows:
    - COTW Tuesday October 2<sup>nd</sup> at 1pm
    - Council Tuesday October 9<sup>th</sup> at 7pm
    - COTW Wednesday October 24<sup>th</sup> at 1pm

- Fire Services Meeting to be determined.

Break 11:02am – 1:01pm

**Presentation: Help the Helper Event – John Garth MacDonald (IPS Clinical Coordinator CLHC)**

- See attached.
- The 5<sup>th</sup> annual Help the Helpers Event will be held in Antigonish on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018.
- This year's "Help the Helper" Scholarship was awarded to Madison Harpell from St. Mary's Education Centre/Academy.
- Having elected officials attend the "Help the Helpers" Events is beneficial in providing support and spreading awareness.
- Currently our healthcare system has navigation systems in place for cancer, heart & stroke, etc. but no system is in place for mental health patients.
- To register for the event go to <https://www.helpingthehelpers.ca> , email [helpingthehelpersns@gmail.com](mailto:helpingthehelpersns@gmail.com) or find them on Facebook.

**Other Matters of Business**

- Carbon Surcharge Fund
  - Various options were considered for the application.
  - Marvin will look into submitting an application for the library floor insulation.
  - The fund application will be brought back to the COTW on September 19<sup>th</sup> prior to submission.
- SSI Consulting Solutions – Training Session Managing Conflict in a Customer Service Environment
  - Marvin was contacted regarding a training course on managing conflict in a customer service environment put on by SSI Consulting Solutions.
  - The cost for the course based in 10 participants is significantly lower than the price of similar courses offered by other companies.
  - The Municipality of the County of Antigonish had staff attend this training which resulted in the development of their new Customer Complaint Policy.
  - The course is an all-day 10 person session that would be held at the Municipal Office in Sherbrooke.
  - Council agreed this training would be beneficial. Staff will attend and any remaining seats will be filled by Council members.
- Asset Management
  - Marvin has completed the Asset Management course.
  - As a course project Marvin created an asset management plan for the waste water treatment plant.
  - Copies of the plan will be distributed to Council.
- Resolution for Pre-Approval of Debenture Issuance Subject to Interest Rate
  - A resolution for the Pre-Approval of Debenture Issuance Subject to Interest Rate needs to be passed by Council then signed by Clerk and Warden.

***On recommendation of Councillor Findlay and seconded by Councillor Baker that Council accept the Pre-Approval Debenture Issuance Subject to Interest Rate as presented.***

***Recommendation adopted.***

- Ambulance Service

- The property where the ambulance service is housed in Sherbrooke is for sale.

*Deputy Warden Dort Left 2:01pm*

- Marvin attempted to contact the ambulance service several months ago but did not receive a response.
- Marvin will draft a letter to the Minister of Health and request an update on the ambulance services for St. Mary's. The letter will be brought to the September 19<sup>th</sup> COTW for review.

*Deputy Warden Dort Returned 2:03pm*

- Development Update (In-Camera)

*On recommendation of Councillor Findlay and seconded by Deputy Warden Dort that council moved into an in-camera session to discuss a confidential matter.*

*On recommendation of Deputy Warden Dort council reconvened to regular session at 3:09pm.*

*On recommendation of Councillor Baker and seconded by Councillor Malloy that a letter be sent to MLA Lloyd Hines and copied to the Port Bickerton & Area Planning Association in response to the letter sent to the Premier of Nova Scotia from the Port Bickerton & Area Planning Association.*

*Recommendation adopted.*

**Adjournment**

*On Motion of Councillor Kaiser-Kirk there being no further matters of business, Council adjourned at 3:10pm.*

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Recorded By  
Municipal Clerk

Approved By  
Warden Mosher



2447 Highway 3, P.O. Box 100, Barrington, Nova Scotia B0W 1E0

August 14, 2018

The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc  
 Minister of Fisheries, Oceans  
 and the Canadian Coast Guard  
 House of Commons  
 Ottawa, On  
 K1A 0A6

The Honourable James Gordon Carr  
 Minister of Natural Resources  
 House of Commons  
 Ottawa, ON  
 K1A 0A6

and

The Honourable Catherine McKenna  
 Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
 House of Commons  
 Ottawa, On  
 K1A 0A6

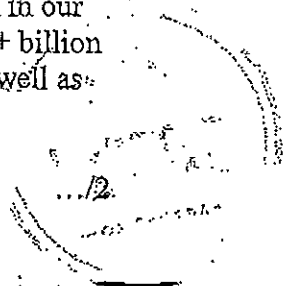
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Dear Ministers:

**RE: OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION**

On behalf of the Council of the Municipality of the District of Barrington, I am writing to express Council's concerns with respect to Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board's (CNSOPB) decision to allow oil and gas drilling by British Petroleum (BP) Canada approximately 300 kms off Halifax.

Although we recognize the potential economic benefits of oil and gas projects in Nova Scotia, we question whether the risks outweigh these benefits to our community. In light of the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, one of the largest marine oil spills in history, with its devastating impact on numerous communities, we feel that the Federal Government and CNSOPB should exercise due diligence to prevent a disaster of such nature to happen in our offshore. Such a disaster in our waters could have a disastrous consequence to our \$3+ billion fishing industry and thousands of associated jobs, marine species and ecosystems, as well as other industries such as tourism. Our entire wellbeing and way of life is at stake.

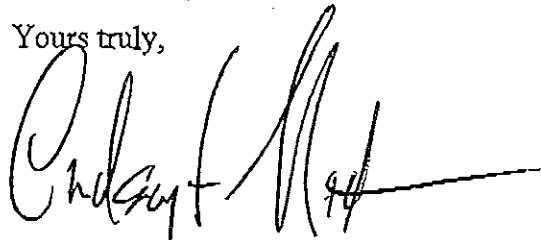


Approximately a month ago, a report by BP of "unauthorized discharge" of drilling mud of approximately 136,000 litres illustrated the technical challenges of drilling in waters at significant depths.

Council does not profess to be experts in this field; however, in light of the above incident and others historically, and the fact that other oil and gas companies may be considering drilling operations in our waters, we are requesting that CNSOPB ensure proper measures are in place to mitigate such accidents.

Our residents are depending on you and your departments to give this issue your utmost consideration and review.

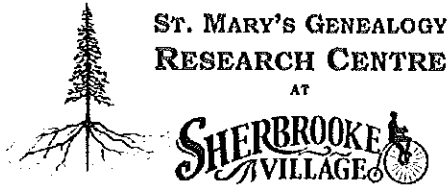
Yours truly,



Lindsay (Eddie) Nickerson  
Warden

LN:sb

cc: Bernadette Jordan, MP – South Shore-St. Margarets  
Chris d'Entremont, MLA - Argyle-Barrington  
NS Municipalities  
Stuart Pinks, P.Eng., Chief Executive Officer - CNSOPB



*copy of file*

St. Mary's Genealogy Research Centre  
Sherbrooke Village Information Centre  
42 Main St., P.O. Box 295 Sherbrooke  
Nova Scotia, B0J 3C0  
email: smgresearchcentre@gmail.com

St. Mary's Municipal Council  
c/o Mr. Marvin MacDonald, CAO  
Municipality of the District of St. Mary's  
PO Box 296, Sherbrooke, NS B0J 3C0

*MM*

August 20, 2018

Dear Municipal Councillors and Mr MacDonald,

The St. Mary's Genealogy Research Centre Committee would like to offer our sincere thanks for your having transferred to our facility the school board and school materials that were formerly in your care. We will preserve them and protect the privacy of individuals named within according to accepted practices within the archival community. We very much appreciate your working with us in this way and ask that you keep us in mind should other archival materials surface that may be appropriately transferred to our Research Centre.

Sincerely,

Keith Gallant, Chair

St. Mary's Genealogy Research Centre at Sherbrooke Village

# THE DAY MY MENTOR FELL

By Tanya Snow, ACP

I always had great respect for my mentor, John Garth. He is genuine; a hard quality to find in today's society. I have learned a great deal from this soft spoken, tattooed "Legend". As a primary care paramedic straight out of school and scared half to death, he taught me so many life lessons that cannot be taught in school. He taught me the knack of looking perfectly calm while being so terrified, he taught me not to get caught up in base or company politics, not letting other people's actions make me a bad person but most importantly, that family is everything — the most prized possession on earth — all lessons learned from an exceptional mentor.

He had the same approach to every call; "treat this person as if they were your own family member," a professional skill I still practice to this day. I kept in contact with John following my PCP practicum. His mentorship continued as he pushed me to become an Advanced Care Paramedic. This was a 'aunting thought, being freshly divorced and caring for a young son alone. The idea of travelling four hours per day for one week every month was unappealing. Oh, and there

was the \$20,000 in tuition. John. With some gentle nudging and a pep talk on what a great Advanced Care Paramedic I would be, he convinced me. I took the plunge. Over the next two years of going to The Maritime School of Paramedicine distance program I spent many days wishing I had not listened to him; school was hard. I mean really hard. If I wasn't working I was travelling to school and then there were endless hours of studying. To take a week off each month I had to switch shifts with co-workers and pretty much beg, borrow and steal to make this happen. I worked every day for three weeks then spent a week going to school. I did this for over two years. Many of my drives home from school were spent crying. But me being me, too stubborn to quit, I tiredly went forward.

I finally finished and passed all required exams, tests, skills and scenarios. Then I was back on the truck for 460 hours of additional "ride time" training, on top of working a full time job and starting a new relationship. John Garth graciously accepted me back as a student and we were off. Again, I learned many qualities on how to become a great clinician as

well as a good person. Things were going great. I had the reassurance of him always behind me watching in case I ventured down a wrong differential diagnostic or treatment path. He epitomized mentorship.

## The Turning Point

The day was a typical winter's day in Nova Scotia; cold, some flurries in the air and I was down with the flu, another great side effect of pushing yourself to your limits ... your immune system finally says "we're done, time to rest." I texted John Garth and explained I was sick. Of course his reply was "stay home, get better, enjoy some time with your son". I took his advice, stayed home, went back to bed and hoped this wasn't going to last too long since I wanted to be so done with school and ride time.

I have replayed this day over in my mind a hundred, no maybe a thousand times. Would my going to work that day have changed the outcome? Would I have made a difference? This was the day my mentor fell.

As I carried on my normal life, John Garth



and his family were in their worst nightmare. All I knew was he was off and no one was really telling me what was going on. Finally I cornered a long-term friend and co-worker who told me "he's in a bad way, he's not taking phone calls, not accepting visitors and he's drinking heavily". I didn't have to hear those four abbreviated letters to know that he was suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Mental health disorders experienced by paramedics that result from work-related activities have been called operational stress injuries (OSI) (Carleton et al. 2017). OSI encompasses a set of disorders such as PTSD, panic disorder (PD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety disorder (SAD), and alcohol use disorder (AUD) (Carleton et al. 2017).

### A Plan to Help

While sitting at work one night I said to my partner "I can't believe there's nothing we can do to help him". We help people every day. That's what we do! Why can't I help John? It was at that moment I decided there isn't enough talk and awareness about this awful disorder (or OSI in general) that affects even the most veteran and strong

paramedics. I wrote John Garth a letter that night telling him he wasn't alone and that we are all here for him. I vowed that night that I would start doing education days strictly for the helpers. Until this point most of our local education days were primarily educational pieces on how to treat patients or on the newest interventions. These presentations were typically a power point presentation by a local emergency department physician. There were no education days for us!!! We needed something to "Help the Helpers" and that's when the hard work began.

I never in my wildest dreams thought I would get so much resistance from people I respected in my field. I had a supervisor ask me "how would you feel if someone attended this education day all about PTSD and went home and killed themselves?" I was so stunned at this, and was left speechless. How would I feel? It would destroy me but that's the whole reason why we need to do this so people can find out that they are not alone. I needed to show people that nobody is immune to this disorder but life doesn't have to end with a diagnosis. This education day is to show as many people as I can that there is life after a diagnosis. People are able to return to work with this illness and live each day with fewer

symptoms, through counselling, resiliency skills and support. I also got the very same question from a co-workers and a committee member.

As I started this journey of planning the first ever *Helping the Helpers* education day I found out pretty early that there would be obstacles. Initial struggles revolved around resistance to discussing this topic in such a public forum and a mismatch between my vision and preconceived ideas about the day's potential outcome. My vision was simple—that this day would raise local awareness, provide a forum for discussion and provide support to those in need. The day would also help create a network of local health-care providers who have experience dealing with PTSD.

Oh the smoke and mirrors. I am good at a lot of things but politics is not one of them. I cannot be diplomatic when I am so passionate about something and mental health is where my passion lies. I had to reassure certain keynote speakers not to offend other keynote speakers as well as reminding everybody all the time that I still work for this company and don't want to be fired over something they say or someone they may offend. I had to write objectives, then clinical objectives, then

## PLEASE JOIN US ...

Saskatchewan Emergency Medical Services Association's (SEMSA)



## 2018 Annual Convention & Trade Show

May 7-9 in Moose Jaw at Mosaic Place

Host Hotel: Temple Gardens Hotel and Spa.

For Convention & Trade Show information contact the SEMSA Office at [semsa@semsa.org](mailto:semsa@semsa.org)

**SASKATCHEWAN EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES ASSOC.**

283A - 2366 Avenue C North, Saskatoon, SK S7L 5X5 | Phone: 306-382-2147 E-mail: [semsa@semsa.org](mailto:semsa@semsa.org)

phone interrogations and get keynote speakers power points so it could be approved. This went on for about nine months. The first education day was successfully held in November, 2014.

## Helping the Helpers Education Day

We use an open form of communication that focuses on creating awareness of the signs and symptoms of PTSD. We promote getting help early and help those identify resources close to them. The earlier we start treatment, the more productive we can be in our communities, at work, and most importantly, to our families. We want to catch these frontline professionals before they become such high acuity that most services in place are limited when the acuity reaches a point of crisis. In Nova Scotia inpatient mental health care has been replaced by outpatient care. John Garth was one of the lucky ones. He had the support of his wife who wouldn't give up on him and fought for him to go to Halifax and receive the long-term care he needed. This option is not available to everyone. Many people affected by these illnesses return home sometime feeling isolated (Dr. John Whelen). In rural areas, treatment often involves being seen in the ED by a physician who has limited experience treating OSI. This day is truly an educational day to educate us about us. What we excel at in our everyday lives in recognizing signs and symptoms in our patients, we overlook in ourselves, our colleagues and co-workers. We sometimes suffer in silence or watch our partner suffer because we don't want the world to know "WE NEED HELP." Three small little words with so much power. It's time we took the power away from those words and build resiliency within our profession.

These education days spark strong emotions in our fellow frontline professionals. How could it not? These are our mentors, heroes, friends and co-workers telling their horrific story of their struggles to become "better". If we didn't spark that strong emotion then we wouldn't be getting the strong and memorable message across that "It's okay not to be okay, it's okay to ask for help". It is not our intention to upset audience members so much that they cannot continue their day or cause any unnecessary anxiety, but sometimes the truth is messy, uncomfortable and upsetting.

OSI is devastating to people going through it, as well as their family members and co-workers who feel helpless. It is my hope that these education days are truly a day of discovery and may get people to think about accessing help early and stop suffering in silence, to talk to people who have been

to hell and back and find out what resources are out there for them. The best case scenario is that these disorders will be prevented by raising awareness and providing supports.

Coping and resiliency skills are necessary for prevention and for those afflicted. They are key to getting back to living life again. As our education days became more polished and we reached more and more people we decided to have a psychologist on site at all times to help with anyone struggling with triggers or just needing to talk. As we approach our fourth year we have many psychologists volunteering to come for the day to help. The education day is typically held at the Schwartz Auditorium at St. Francis Xavier University at the end of October. We had 278 people attend the last education day. In previous years we had mostly frontline professionals attending but we have seen a change. More and more family members and people who are not frontline professionals are attending (i.e. sexual assault survivors, people who we never think of as being on the front lines like tow truck drivers, snowplow operators, correction officers). In total, we have reached almost 1,000 people directly or indirectly through *Helping the Helpers* education days.

The biggest benefit of the day is talking to these people who have been struggling and just need to talk to John Garth or one of the other guest speakers who have been there and understand the struggles associated with getting help. They want to know what has worked for them and what options are out there, whether it is medication, therapy dogs, equestrian therapy, cannabis, a naturopath, physiotherapy, a psychiatrist, or a psychologist. At least it's a starting point.

## Conclusion

I feel an overwhelming obligation to continue with the *Helping the Helpers* education day. People who have attended *Helping the Helpers* education day state that they take different messages away from the day. I believe that having keynote speakers with different backgrounds and experiences with PTSD lets us provide for a more diverse audience. I've been an ACP for eight years now. My mentor, John Garth, provided many lessons in paramedicine that I now share with others new to this profession. One of the most important lessons has been that we need to support each other, we need to be open about talking about mental health within our profession, and we need to be able to pick each other up when our mentors fall. The *Helping the Helpers* education day was my way of starting this process. John Garth is still an important part of my life and continues to be my mentor. He is a great inspiration to me and others as

he now talks about his struggles with PTSD and how he lives with it every day. I know that through this process we have both grown personally as well as professionally. ☺

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



In 2005 Tanya Snow, at the age of 32, decided to fulfill a lifelong dream and become a paramedic. She took her training at The Maritime School of Paramedicine in Dartmouth Nova Scotia. After being on the trucks for three years she decided she wanted to do more and in 2010 became an Advanced

Care Paramedic, graduating with honours from The Maritime School of Paramedicine Distance Program in Sydney, Nova Scotia. She continues to work in rural Nova Scotia. Tanya is a certified instructor for St. John Ambulance as well as The Heart and Stroke Foundation. In her spare time she volunteers with a team of OBGYN's doing medical missions in the Philippines. She is one of the founders of "Helping the Helpers" an annual education day for frontline professionals coping and dealing with PTSD. She is an elected council member in the Town of Mulgrave, as well as a council member for the College of Paramedics of Nova Scotia. She is happily married to her soul mate, Mark, who has helped raise her son Clayton, now a student at Dalhousie University. She is an all-terrain vehicle enthusiast and loves taking the boat out to catch a big trout with her dad. She is probably best known by her peers for decorating the base for every occasion and season.

## Contact Information

Facebook: Tanya Snow-keeling on Facebook and Helping the Helpers Facebook page

Twitter: @TannyDragon

Instagram: snowkeeling

Email: t.snow-keeling@hotmail.com

Address:

Tanya Snow

P.O box 313

Mulgrave, Nova Scotia

BOE 2G0

## References:

1. Carleton RN, Afifi TO, Turner S et al. Mental disorder symptoms among public safety personnel in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*. 2017; published online ahead of print.
2. In-patient PTSD centre needed in Atlantic Canada, advocate says, CBC. [https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEvjYzpnZ5ZvYAhWoxYMKHZ3B-sOFggpVAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Ftechnet.ck12.org%2Fthe-novascotian%2F1274797-whelen%25E2%2580%2599s-nov-el-puts-spotlight-on-ptsd-in-armed-force&usq=AOwaw1b90aZu8cFteXJhs1](https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=8&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEvjYzpnZ5ZvYAhWoxYMKHZ3B-sOFghsMAc&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cbc.ca%2Fnews%2Fcanada%2Fnova-scotia%2Fin-patient-ptsd-centre-needed-atlantic-canada-1.4349974&usq=AOAw0icN8kM-qJxjY9J3Mfml-https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEvjYzpnZ5ZvYAhWoxYMKHZ3B-sOFggpVAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Ftechnet.ck12.org%2Fthe-novascotian%2F1274797-whelen%25E2%2580%2599s-nov-el-puts-spotlight-on-ptsd-in-armed-force&usq=AOwaw1b90aZu8cFteXJhs1)



NOV12clb

**Headline:** Helping the Helpers

**Subhead:** Workshop for those coping and dealing with PTSD

**Cutline:** Paramedic John Garth MacDonald lives with PTSD. He encourages people who think they may have it to get help and not "suffer in silence."  
PHOTO: Corey LeBlanc

by Corey LeBlanc  
[coreyleblanc@thecasket.ca](mailto:coreyleblanc@thecasket.ca)

After more than two decades helping others, the tables were turned for John Garth MacDonald.

The veteran paramedic from Antigonish knew he needed help; a lot of help.

"Years of death," MacDonald said, when asked about what brought on the post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, he lives with each day.

The suicides, motor vehicle collisions and "sudden deaths" – the loss of so many lives – infants and babies included, became unbearable for MacDonald.

"I shouldn't say we were taught – I don't know if taught is the right word or not – we were always led to believe that you suck it up and go back to work," he said of his work in the healthcare profession.

When you 'suck it up,' you find ways to deal with the pain. MacDonald said his "coping mechanism" – like that of many others – became "a bottle of rum."

"Something to help you sleep and you go back the next day and do it. There's no such thing as being able to cry or say you need help, or that things were bothering you.

"It was just years of suck it up and go back to work," he added.

In 2010, the nightmares started; there were also hallucinations. Sleep, now a luxury, also became a source of anxiety and pain.

"I was having dreams of a couple of previous patients that died quite tragically – one in a fire and one from anaphylaxis.

"They were just haunting me every night – the nightmares, so I started to drink heavily then to medicate myself so I wouldn't have the dreams," MacDonald said.

"It didn't work," he added.

MacDonald remembers the date – Dec. 27, 2010 – "the final call that kind of broke my back."

"Too many shoeboxes in my head – there just wasn't enough room for anymore, and it just escalated from there," he said.

MacDonald was diagnosed with severe PTSD, depression, mood disorder and hyper-vigilance.

"You name it – I had it," he said.

"It was brutal."

The nightmares haunted his nights, the hallucinations controlled his days.

"I didn't want to see the daytime come because I knew I was going to have the hallucinations, the flashbacks and the triggers."

He dreaded the night because "I knew what would happen."

"I was waking up in the middle of the night with vomit all through my throat and all over the bed, and crawling around in the night trying to get away from people," he said, the words becoming tougher to deliver.

"They would be coming at me from my ceiling saying 'we got you again John Garth, we got you again.'" The people were laughing at me and taunting me.

MacDonald said there were "triggers everywhere" he would go.

"I did my whole career in Antigonish [so there were always reminders]," he said. "It didn't matter where I was going or what I was doing."

His wife, Michelle, would receive calls, people telling her he was down-town – drunk.

"Because there were so many triggers – I knew where I parked my car, but everything was coming at me and I just couldn't focus.

"I wasn't drunk – it was the effects from the PTSD," MacDonald said.

At one point, he was taking up to 15 pills a day to help deal with his diagnosis. There was one 3 day admission in OPD. It was suggested shock treatments three times per week could help, but his wife resisted.

"She said this guy has given 23 years of service – you give him the help that he deserves. He was heavily medicated and unable to advocate for himself.

If it wasn't for his wife – a nurse with years of experience in mental health, he said he "probably wouldn't be here today."

"If it wasn't for her, I would probably be dead right now, because what I put my family through no one should have to go through.

"If she didn't understand it, they would have been gone – no question," he added.

MacDonald said his wife became the mother, father and caregiver for the family.

"She is truly my hero," he added.

At the time his illness had consumed him, MacDonald described himself as completely detached and out of control.

There were points during his illness when he admitted he contemplated suicide.

"Some days I thought it was my only option. It was thinking about hopping in the car and going to find a tractor-trailer to pull under," MacDonald said.

Thoughts of and his love for his wife and children stopped him.

"I can see how people get to that point because I just wasn't getting better; I was just getting worse and worse and worse, and I didn't see a way out," MacDonald said.

#### Seeking help

Treatment options were explored, including in-patient care. The closest facility dealing with PTSD, which is located in Ontario, carried a \$10,000 price tag. Although friends and family offered to help with the financial side, MacDonald said it was not the right option at the time.

"I was just so heavily medicated that there was no way that it would have been beneficial to me," he said.

Eventually, his wife and co-workers found Dr. Allan Abbass, a Halifax-based psychiatrist, who specializes in PTSD treatment.

"It took him a year to get me off my meds and he got me down to the root of things," MacDonald said.

He remembered there were days he told the doctor 'where to go' because "I hated him."

"He was making me relive all this stuff again," MacDonald said.

He added his doctor said he would give him the tools but "I am not doing it for you."

"He said if I was going to get better I was going to have to do it. I am here to support you, but it is up to you," MacDonald recalled.

"That's not what I wanted to hear, but that's what I needed to hear. I didn't need someone to pat me on the back and tell me that everything was going to be okay.

"I needed someone to tell me what I needed to do," he added.

Nevertheless, that message did not necessarily resonate at the time, with MacDonald heading home after the sessions to tell his wife he was not returning to the doctor.

With that proclamation, MacDonald said his wife gave him two scenarios to consider.

"You can stay medicated the rest of your life and have no contact with your kids or your friends – and not be able to function in society – and we will stand by you," he recalled her saying.

"Or, you can work hard and get better," MacDonald added.

He chose the latter, although he described the first six months of treatment as "horrible."

"It was a rough go," MacDonald said.

He said, once he started to "get his head clear" from the medication and got to the root of his issues with his psychiatrist, he could see progress.

"I have learned to breathe properly and my train of thought is totally different," MacDonald said.

"I am not holding that anger or grief, or sadness, I held for years. It is all gone. I shouldn't say it is all gone, but I am at a level where I can deal with it."

MacDonald said he will always have triggers.

"But I have learned these things are not my fault – I didn't create them; I didn't cause them and a lot of them I couldn't cure.

"Things were beyond my control, but when you have family members at scenes crying and pleading at you to save them ... it is tough," he added.

Although there was help for him, MacDonald there wasn't any for his family.

"I finally got the help I needed, but my wife didn't get any help, my son didn't get any help, my daughter didn't get any help," he said.

"It doesn't just affect the first responder – it affects families, it affects society, it affects your peers.

"It affects everybody not just the person with [PTSD]" MacDonald added.

#### **Delivering the message**

With the help of many, including his wife and family, co-workers, his psychiatrist, family physician, others and his Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) Case Manager, MacDonald continued to make progress.

"It is not all negative," he said of living with PTSD.

"Look at me now – I am a productive member of society again. I am still doing what I love to do, just in a different environment. [He is Clinical Coordinator for Industrial Paramedic Services, an Alberta company.]

"So, there is a positive from the whole PTSD that I went through and still have. It is something I have to work at every day."

With that support, and as part of his recovery, MacDonald has started to speak about his illness – the sometimes tough road he continues to travel to recovery.

Through the support of a Senior Manager who MacDonald described as a "huge help to me," he met Vince Savoia, founder of the Tema Center Memorial Trust.

Created in 2001 by the former paramedic, who suffered for years with PTSD after working the scene in Toronto of the murder of Nova Scotia native Tema Center, the organization helps raising awareness of PTSD amongst emergency responders.

Since then, he has told his story in locations such as Yarmouth and New Harbour and Sherbrooke. "I find it is very therapeutic for me. I get emotional, of course, but it is not tears of pain anymore," he said.

#### **Helping the helpers**

MacDonald will be one of the speakers at an upcoming workshop in the Strait area. Helping the Helpers Education Day – Coping and Dealing with PTSD – will take place Saturday, Nov. 29, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the SAERC Auditorium in Port Hawkesbury.

Along with MacDonald and Savoia, who is the keynote speaker, the day will include sessions with Dr. Jane Anne Howard of St. Martha's Regional Hospital; Amber Humes, communications centre dispatcher; Corporal Kate MacEachern, The Long Walk Home; RCMP Constable Deepak Prasad and a representative of Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority (GASHA) addiction services.

There will also be offerings in critical incident stress management, along with peer and family support.

MacDonald noted the gathering is open to the public.

"The problem in the past has been it is all focused towards first responders. But, like I have said, it doesn't just affect us," MacDonald said.

"It affects everybody," he added of the focus for Helping the Helpers.

Seating is limited, and there is a \$10 admission for cost recovery.

For more information, including to register, email t.snow-keeling@hotmail.com

#### **Ask for help**

Going forward, including at the upcoming Helping the Helpers event, MacDonald said he wants to continue to dispel a misconception shared by many first responders – that the stresses are "what we sign up for, are paid for and it is part of the job."

"Well, I didn't sign up to use alcohol as a coping mechanism, I didn't sign up for my child to be told by her peers that her father was going to kill himself. I didn't sign up to be crawling around on the floor and throwing up all over the place every night with night terrors.

"I signed up to help people and to make a difference – not to be like that," he added.

MacDonald encouraged people to not "suffer in silence."

"If you think you have it or you are having issues – your daily routine has changed – ask for help.

"Don't be scared to say that you need help. It is OK to be human and cry, or ask for help, say that you need someone," he said. First Responders shouldn't have to 'suffer in silence'.





# Helping the Helpers: Goals

- Goals
- Mission
- Values

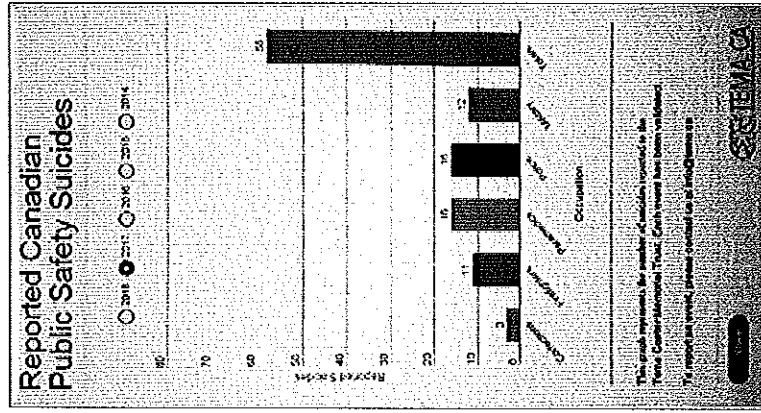




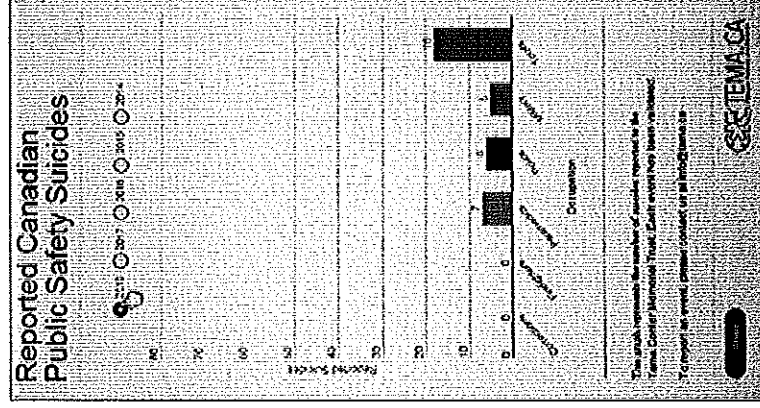
# Statistics on PTSD

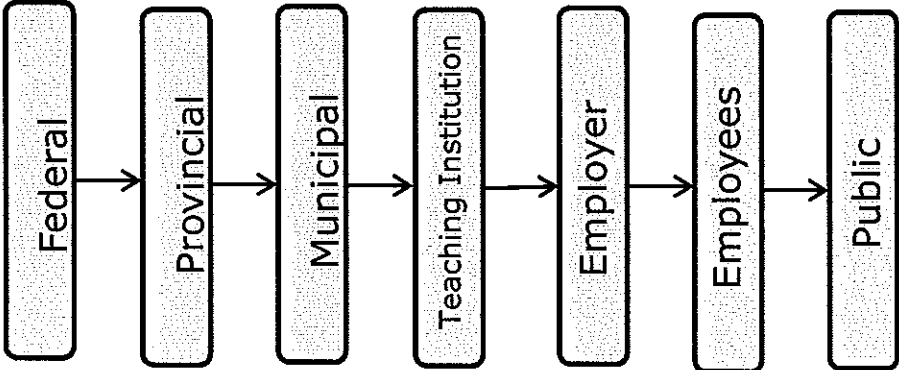
- Talk about stats and who is involved in these stats
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2017



2018 (to date)

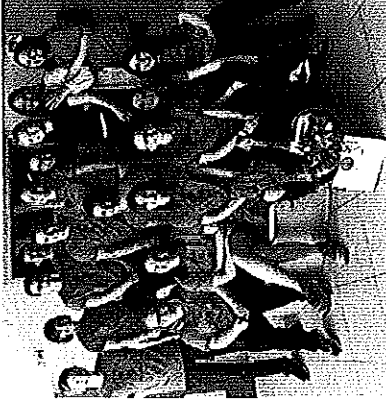
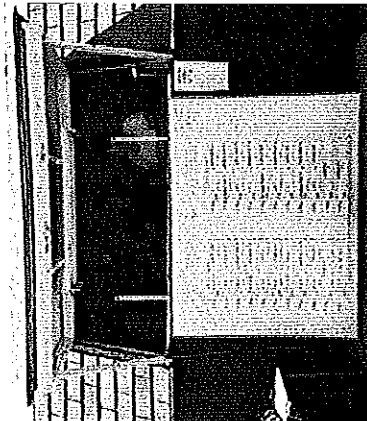
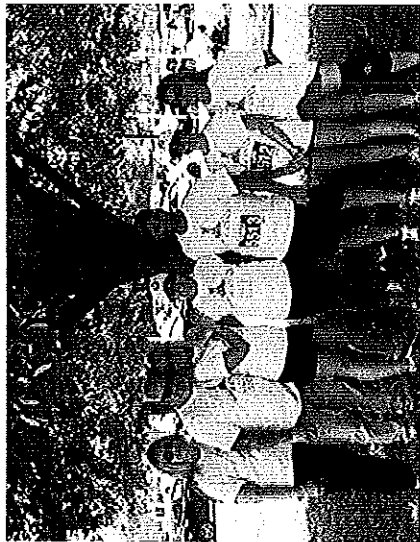




# Who can make a difference?

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# Where we are today



- Annual Education and Awareness Day
- Recognized Nationally