

## History in Practice Project

### Future: New Mental Health World/ Voices of Collective Empowerment

Title: **“Breaking Down Barriers”** by Cat Omura and branwen Willow

Venue: a cozy apartment’s kitchen table

Cast: Sue-Ellen and Liza, two mature women with lived experience of mental illness discussing their most recent work project

Sue-Ellen: “Hey Liz, how’s every little thing?”

Liz: “I’m feeling pumped – our “Healthy Community Forum” was so successful. How “bout you?”

SE: “Me too. I could tell the Business Association President thought I must have been one of the psychiatrists or therapists the way he kept leaning over and asking my opinion of all the other speakers –“

L: (laughing) “Oh – *that’s* why he was leaning over...”

SE: (laughing)” I do have my ways with the men-folk don’t I?”

L:” Oh you do!”

SE:” Seriously, I don’t think he was totally on board with the idea of all those people invited to the forum without knowing who was who, at first. He seemed like he was worried there might be some inappropriate, uncomfortable behaviors from the patients, but he couldn’t tell who the patients were. The mental health workers, patients, families, business leaders, spiritual leaders, politicians and neighbors all mixed up together – no experts, no labels – just people coming together for common cause.”

L:” He wasn’t the only one who was nervous in the beginning. The patients couldn’t tell who the staffers were either. It was great to see everybody really **get** it – that people **are** really all the same, the preconceptions evaporating...”

SE:” You could feel them relax without the authority hierarchy or feelings of intimidation – “

L:” You mean between patients and staff?”

SE:” Yes, and even between doctors and nurses, employees supervisors and bosses. No patients having to worry about revealing too much or complaining about the system that might have led to upsetting the people who controlled so much of their lives. No feeling that someone could report on a ”troublemaker” ending up with more meds or restrictions that seemed like retaliation.”

L:” Now they get why some patients would be inhibited from being truthful with the ones entrusted with helping them.”

SE:” Now they feel listened to, and free to be open about what would help with the mental health issues they share.”

L:”Yeah, stigma is still out there but these forums really do wonders for dispelling them and for letting people get on with collaborating on ideas for the whole community engaging in strategies for “Wellness for All.”

SE:” That gives me an idea for our next forum - Let’s call the next one “Breaking Down Barriers”

#### Keynote Questions for “Breaking Down Barriers”

1. Did you have any preconceptions when you first read that the cast had mental health issues? Did your view of the cast change during or after this scenario?
2. How did you relate to their discussion?
3. What barriers might be overcome when people living with mental illness partake fully in education about mental illness?
4. What do you think the interests of the various members of the community might include?
5. What did you think about the kind of services being talked about?
6. What are your feelings about people with mental illness?
7. What would your reaction be if a co-worker told you that they lived with a mental illness? What issues of trust and responsibility might you face if someone confided this to you?