

I'm still your mom

by Dena Kent-Esbjerg



Debb Pitel

It's normal at various times in our life to feel sad, stressed, angry or anxious. But when these feelings last for longer than usual and start to affect your everyday life, it's important to find out what's going on and what you can do about it.

For Debb Pitel, author of "I'm Still Your Mom", the struggle has been real. In 2001 Debb lost her son, Tyler, who struggled with mental health issues. But for Debb it took many years to accept, learn, and find the resources to speak about mental health rather than suicide.

Breaking free of heartache, healing, and wanting more than to just survive the loss of a child, is what encouraged her to write her book. The possibility of bringing change to a broken system that needs help, and bringing support to those families in crisis, it was the hope that it would touch even one family in a positive light in Tyler's memory.

The book shares a journey, touching on growing up and the struggles of a young girl navigating at home and at school, facing challenges in love and life. The need to find strength to succeed, becoming a mother who seeks to find help for a child in crisis.

It touches on the struggle and fight for help, for the loss, and grief, and back. It talks about mental health and the depth that effected a family and the journey.

"Everyone has a story," says Pitel. "I think everyone will connect with something shared in my book. Not everyone writes a book to talk about it, but there are many ways to talk, share, heal and move forward through the past."

Many Canadians of all ages will experience mental illness at some point in their life. The most common conditions are anxiety, affective disorders, depression and substance use disorder and especially alcohol use.

A person's mental health affects how they feel, think, behave and relate to others and covers a spectrum of disorders that vary in how severe they are and how long they last.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, physical distancing and isolation have made us feel anxious, stressed and worried. Research is showing social isolation impacts people's health much like chronic disease and now the ability to assist those who need it is becoming more and more difficult.

"It's beyond frustrating", states Pitel.

As a society, mental health has staggering numbers and we are constantly challenged to increase opportunities and reduce wait lists. "Having a live voice answering crisis calls, while dealing with limited resources were a challenge, but we were making great strides forward", says Pitel, "Then bang Covid hit and pulled the rug out from beneath everyone, increased numbers in mental health and crisis and little to ability to offer support."

In Ontario we are working to develop a better mental health system that improves the lives of people with, or at risk of, mental illness. However, with the current pandemic the system seems to be struggling more than ever.

In a world that has record number of unemployment and many people looking for additional work, Pitel would love to see immediate training available that gets people back to work, trained and answering the hotline phones across the country so that NOT ONE PERSON ever gets a recording when they are finally brave enough to reach out and use the system.

Adding two trained staff to every school to support our teachers and give them the free training would be of great help. This would help teachers recognize issues before it is too late. Having more staff and more resources to get families off the long wait list, along with an easy to read printed guide available to all Canadians could save lives.

Pitel supports many organizations through Lambton County and Chatham-Kent. Her main focus over the past five years has been fundraising and she is an advocate for SafeTalk workshops. For every copy purchased, \$2.00 is directly donated to support mental health, workshops and resources in each community.

'I'm Still Your Mom' is available on Amazon and Kindle and is also sold currently in Petrolia at Western Boot Corral, 4207 Petrolia Line.

