



**Communities Addressing Suicide Together
Canadian Mental Health Association – NS Division
63 King Street
Dartmouth, NS
B3K 2R4**

Thursday, December 1, 2011

Mr. Scott Chisholm
Collateral Damage
1085 Carrick Street
Thunder Bay, ON
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Mr. Chisholm & Colleagues:

It was blustery day in late October 2009 when my path crossed with Scott Chisholm's on a bus ride across Manitoba following the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention National Conference in Brandon. We were first connected by Carol Rolfe, a survivor of suicide from here in Nova Scotia who had heard about the Collateral Damage Initiative at the conference, and felt that there were opportunities for the project in our province. It was one of those conversations that does not happen often in one's lifetime, full of shared understanding and vision, despite the fact that we both were coming at the issue of addressing suicide from very different directions.

As the Manager of Communities Addressing Suicide Together (CAST), an initiative of the Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division, my job is to bring communities together to create plans to address suicide. We use a public health approach and act as a catalyst to spark action in communities across our province.

What Scott told me about his vision for Collateral Damage inspired, excited and encouraged me. Since embarking on the CAST movement here in Nova Scotia we had interacted and/or worked with many individuals and families who had been left behind by suicide. With each and every conversation we had with survivors of suicide loss, it became ever more apparent that there was a dearth of resources for survivors, most of whom faced a great deal of stigma in the aftermath of their loss. Collateral Damage represented a means of providing voice, and even more importantly, a face, or many faces, for those left behind by suicide.

It was at this point that I mentioned our provincial Communities Addressing Suicide Together Provincial Conference, which was coming up in March 2010, and I asked if Scott may be interested in speaking at our event. It so happened, that Scott was the keynote speaker for our event that day. It was a first for the event to have a survivor voice as the keynote. This was an incredible opportunity for us to formally open the door for survivors of suicide loss to begin to speak in an acknowledged and organized fashion. Of special note: We had survivors travel in from other provinces to hear Scott speak.

While in Nova Scotia during that week, Scott also took the opportunity to connect with numerous survivors, several of whom he photographed and captured the stories of. For some of these individuals and families it was the first time they had ever 'taken their story public'. The feelings expressed about participation in this process were many: catharsis, relief, fear, grief, hopefulness, discomfort, a sense of moving on... in essence most felt that sharing their story and their photograph helped them to heal, regardless of where they were in that very personal process.



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CMHA NS was the organizer and host of the 2010 Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention National Conference, which took place in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. As the lead on planning this event I felt it was important that Collateral Damage in Nova Scotia did end there. Scott and I spent much time in discussion, and created an idea for a photo exhibition. It was our belief that this exhibit needed to reach an audience beyond the conference delegates, most of whom were already aware of the impacts of suicide. We needed to go public. We were able to secure an exhibition space on the exterior wall of the Craig Gallery, which is located in the Market area of Alderney Landing, on the Dartmouth Waterfront. This was the same building in which the conference was taking place, but the Craig Gallery exterior wall is a public part of the space, with ferry commuters, farmer's market participants and many others passing through it each day.

Scott planned and installed the exhibit with great love and talent. It was a well received component of the conference, with our I Will... Walk, in memory of those who have died by suicide, concluding in the space near the Exhibit. The comments left behind in the journal expressed many things: personal experience with suicide loss, as well as attempts, commendation of the bravery of the survivors, new understanding of the impacts of suicide, and most especially a sense of community that was coming together to reach out in love and support to all of those impacted by suicide, and to do something to prevent further suicides. The Exhibit stayed up at the Craig Gallery for a full month, until early November 2010.

Collateral Damage has allowed CMHA NS the incredible opportunity to continue to host the Interim Exhibit, and to circulate it through communities across our province. Since April 2011, the interim Exhibit has travelled to seven areas of Nova Scotia and many more communities. So far it has been hosted by:

- The Human Services Class of the Nova Scotia Community College, Stellarton Campus, in Pictou County, where it stayed in the Student Commons for a week in April 2011
- The Colchester County Communities Addressing Suicide Together Coalition and CMHA Colchester East Hants hosted the exhibit in Truro and surrounding areas in Colchester County, where it travelled to over 10 locations during the month of May 2011, including Millbrook First Nation, the local Farmer's Market and Tatamogouche Health Centre
- Member of Parliament Megan Leslie in her Gottingen Street, Halifax office
- CMHA - Annapolis County at the King's Theatre, Annapolis Royal in connection with the play 'Night Mother'
- The East Hants Communities Addressing Suicide Together Coalition at the Lloyd E. Matheson Centre in Elmsdale, Hants County during the week before World Suicide Prevention Day
- Indian Brook First Nation Health Centre hosted the Exhibit during the week following World Suicide Prevention Day
- Nova Scotia Community College Yarmouth Campus who hosted it during Mental Illness Awareness Week and hosted two events, one for students a second for the general public

The response to the travelling Collateral Damage Interim Exhibit has been strongly positive. Community requests continue to come in, and feedback in the journal and anecdotally is all positive. In many of the smaller communities especially the media has picked up on the Exhibit and done some excellent and responsible reporting on the Project and suicide prevention at large.

The Collateral Damage Project in all of its various aspects brings a great deal to the realm of suicide prevention in our country. Through this work Scott is a great advocate for the destigmatization of



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suicide and most especially of those left behind. He has helped add a very public face and voice to the debate about our need for a National Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Through Collateral Damage Scott has created a mechanism with which to begin the all important dialogue about suicide. As Collateral Damage so aptly states: Not Talking About it Isn't Working. I applaud Scott, the Advisors of the Collateral Damage Project and most especially all of those survivors who have had the courage to face the stigma head on and to be a visible part of this all important initiative.

Congratulations on starting a dialogue that will promote healing and save lives here in Canada and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Angela Davis'.

Angela Davis
Manager, Communities Addressing Suicide Together