

Why the CMHA's Ride Don't Hide is Important to Me

This past weekend (June 25, 2017), I participated in the 4th annual CMHA Lambton/Kent's Ride Don't Hide, a bike race along the St. Clair River. The purpose of the event is to raise money and awareness for mental health issues and 275 riders and sponsors raised \$35,000 for the cause. I myself did not raise any money other than my entrance fee, but for me, this event has never been about money. As a CMHA member with bipolar, I have been receiving support from this wonderful organization for many years. From the housing program and ongoing counselling to cooking seminars held in conjunction with the West Lambton Community Health Centre. The CMHA is great and I would not be in as good a place as I am in today without them.

As for the event itself, it is one of my favourite activities of the year. I take pride in being a good cyclist and in my 4 years of riding the 50km course, I have finished near the top each year. It's not a timed or placed race, yet I still push myself to do my very best. This is a philosophy which I take from the CMHA's principles, try your best with whatever limitations you may have and you will always win! The race can be gruelling and most years I end up fairly exhausted at the end, but it is rewarding to know that I put my best effort forth. Plus, the Lambton College massage students are on hand to coax out that built up lactic acid from sore muscles! Not to mention the BBQ, door prizes, entertainment from a youth group who are exceptional, supporting messages from political figures and personal stories from people with mental health issues. I am strongly encouraged that local politicians come out and was able to thank MP Marilyn Gladu personally. And, my local bike repair shop, Blackwell Cycle was there. How cool is that! Perhaps one day I will take to the stage to share my personal story.

The organizers and volunteers must be thanked. The event is professional and everyone is friendly and encouraging. CMHA staff in droves help out with organizing and running the event. My own friend and fellow Camlachie Church member, Scotty Winch, is very active in promoting Ride Don't Hide. The name is great for one thing because it rhymes, and the simple message is personal to me, someone who struggles with anxiety and "getting out there". I even had one CMAH staff member approach me outside my apartment to inquire whether she would see me at this year's event!

In conclusion, I want to strongly thank everyone involved with Ride Don't Hide. You are all great people and I thoroughly enjoy this event. It inspires courage and strength in the face of adversity and the message is one of personal achievement, rather than limitations of an illness. Thank you, thank you, thank you to the CMHA for being strong advocates in our community and keep up the great work!

Your friend,

Russell Luyt