



# A-WAY EXPRESSIONS

A Newsletter for the Customers and Friends of A-Way Express Courier Services  
Published by A-WAY EXPRESS COURIER SERVICE ♦ [www.awaycourier.ca](http://www.awaycourier.ca) ♦ SPRING 2008

## Changes to Rates and Rate Zone Boundaries

By Rosemarie Gelineau

It's hard to believe that A-WAY Express is enjoying its 21st year of being Toronto's choice for a low-cost, carbon-neutral courier service, while providing supportive employment for survivors of mental health challenges. It continues to be a wonderful journey that could not be possible without our dedicated staff and of course, our loyal customers.

We know that everyone has a different reason for choosing A-WAY, but your direct contact with our couriers is the common thread. They are the cornerstone of our business, but unfortunately they have not received an increase in over a decade, while minimum wage and the cost of using the TTC, among most other things, have increased numerous times. Therefore, after analyzing our competitors' rates, we are implementing changes to our rates and our rate zone boundaries.

We discovered after researching 30 major competitors' rates on 200 actual customer orders that our rates fell far below the average. Upon reviewing those 200 examples with the new rates applied, we found the following changes in cost to our customers:

- 14% had no change in cost
- 44% had a \$1.00 increase
- 32% had a \$2.00 increase
- 8% had a \$3.00 increase
- 2% had more than a \$3.00 increase

Our new rates remain at or below our competitors' and we believe that they reflect a reasonable increase. We sincerely hope that you agree and will continue to support A-WAY. The new rates go into effect Monday June 2nd, 2008. Please see our website for more details. We appreciate all of our customers and welcome your comments and questions. From all of us here at A-WAY Express, thank you!

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## A-WAY CUSTOMERS RECEIVE GREEN TORONTO AWARDS

By Peter Bozoki

On Friday, April 25, the 2008 Green Toronto Awards were handed out at the Direct Energy Centre at Exhibition Place in conjunction with the Green Living Show. These environmental awards honour and celebrate the individuals, organizations and companies that lead the way to a cleaner, greener and more livable Toronto. A-WAY Express Courier was proud to have many of our regular customers sitting as judges for the awards as well as being nominees and award recipients because of their excellence in environmental leadership.



The Green Toronto Awards' panel of judges, which included the A-WAY clients: Green Enterprise Toronto, The Toronto Atmospheric Fund and Evergreen selected finalists from among more than 120 nominations. The finalists were selected on the basis of their environmental leadership, achievements and overall contribution to a clean, green and healthy Toronto.

To name a few of our customers that were selected: long-time A-WAY stalwart Brian Iler was in attendance to accept an award on behalf of the late Allan Sparrow, the founder of Community Air, an organization dedicated to stopping the Island Airport



expansion. Greenest City was nominated for their work in environmental awareness with marginalized youth. The regular A-WAY customer Planet in Focus took home the Environmental Awareness Award for their annual film festival that has been running for the past eight years. Local Food Plus won the Market Transformation Award for fostering a sustainable local food system and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation took home the Bob Hunter Environmental Achievement Award.



Congratulations to all of the A-WAY clients that have been nominated and received awards for their innovation in making Toronto a greener and more sustainable city. A-WAY hopes to continue to provide quality service for all of our customers in the environmentally responsible manner that this award show has honoured.

# The Promise of a More Responsive Mental Health System

*On the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office, Laurie Hall, Executive Director, A-WAY EXPRESS, looks at the progress achieved in the mental health system over the last quarter century.*

Twenty-five years. A lot has changed in 25 years – some for the good, some for the worse... and some things, well, they never seem to change. Congratulations to the Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office (PPAO) for 25 years of successful growth and change. As for the mental health system, well, it hasn't changed much.

I have been a survivor for over 27 years and have seen, and in many instances experienced, what has changed during that time. A visit to the hospital is very different now than it was 25 years ago. Medications have changed, some professional approaches have changed, there are fewer beds in the system and more money in the community (but not anywhere near what we were promised when they began to reduce hospital services and said they would move the money into community services). Instead, much of what we have seen added to the community is the latest, newest "best practices" almost always identified by professionals and academics – never survivors. We got "client centered care" and case managers up to the eyeballs (although I never seem to be able to get one for someone who desperately needs one). Then, we got community treatment orders and assertive community treatment teams – at the cost of another several million dollars. The promise that there is one position for a consumer/survivor on each assertive community team, in many cases, was diminished to a half-time position or even eliminated. During this time, government reports were written – increasingly with some input from consumer/survivors and consumer/survivor organizations.

There were very few consumer/survivor organizations 25 years ago – especially any that had funding. Twenty-one years ago, A-WAY Express was created and we often felt very isolated in our voice for change – it was the strong voices of a small number of consumer/survivors that lead the way for us. We owe those people and the ones who came before them a huge debt of gratitude.

Over the years, particularly in the early 1990s when the government used anti-recession funding to fund more than 20 consumer/survivor initiatives across the province, the consumer/survivor voice gained momentum. Government reports, such as *Putting People First*, about the future of mental health services cited consumer/survivor initiatives (e.g., peer support, alternative businesses) as an example of a "best practice" for supports in the community. We've read many reports since that one, each one more reflective of the government in power's agenda than what was actually happening in the community or the day to day lives of consumer/survivors.

Less than ten years after *Putting People First*, the conservative Harris government *began to talk about "putting patients first:* - we'd gone from being people to being patients in less than ten years!!

In the 1990's, empowerment was the word of the day, but over time it came to mean less and less as the established system used it to describe anything that they considered beneficial to their "clients." It became a meaningless "buzzword."

So, where are we now? We began the talk about a recovery oriented system where the focus was not on an illness. Many excellent articles have been written about recovery – many of which are from other countries and written by consumer/survivors. More and more, documents are being written here in Canada and Ontario about recovery from a consumer/survivor perspective. The mainstream mental health system is now, in some cases, also talking about recovery. It is a word that is often misused and misunderstood and is now in danger of becoming yet another buzzword.

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The stated goal of service providers, the Government and survivors has always been to make the mental health system more responsive to the needs and wants of people living with mental health issues. This was the rationale for moving hospital bed dollars to the community. The beds are gone – hospitals are operating in many cases with large deficits and have eaten up what mental health dollars they had. The services in the community are under-funded and constantly being asked to do more with less. Although grateful for any bone (or money) thrown our way, budget increases have not come even close to keeping up with inflation, let alone the huge increase in need and demand for our services.

The bigger organizations get bigger and the smaller ones are encouraged to partner or amalgamate with other organizations. Meanwhile, there are the consumer/survivor organizations. We have always done more for less – it comes from lives lived on limited incomes from Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). We know how to stretch a buck! When hospitals or traditional services have organizational crises, these are taken as par for the course; but when a consumer/survivor organization has a crisis, they are often either forced to close or their funding is moved to a traditional service provider. The discrimination against consumer/survivor organizations by not funding them as equal participants in the support of consumer/survivors in the community continues to be appalling.

We are accused of not knowing how to manage our organizations or our budgets. We have been asking for years for the money to access training, organizational development, leadership development but it doesn't come. There are finally some promising projects in the works but they are all relatively new and the outcome is as yet unknown. For the many consumer/survivor organizations that have been very successful, there is no money to research and document these successes and share this knowledge with our peers. Our cries to be included in the development of best practices goes unheard as research dollars pour into hospitals and universities.

Now, we find ourselves moved to a regionally based system – overseen by the 14 different Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) across the province. We are starting, in some cases, back at square one in terms of educating professionals about our needs and priorities. Some LHINs have made mental health a priority, some have not. Some listen to the voices of consumer/survivors, some don't. Some have us at the table, some don't.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care was proactive in ensuring that each LHIN region received money for a LHIN based regional network of consumer/survivor groups. These are in place and making progress. A new provincial voice has been formed with the creation of a provincial group made up of each of the 14 lead consumer/survivor organizations that received the money for their area. This provincial voice became a reality because we made it happen out of necessity and we used our very limited regional budgets to get together in person four times per year to address the myriad of issues facing us.

Two provincial membership based consumer/survivor organizations now sit at the table with the 'big boys' of mental health – the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Canadian Mental Health Association and Ontario Federation of Community Mental Health and Addiction Programs, to name a few. This is a big step forward and we hope that other consumer/survivor voices will join and be heard. The Federation is leading a project that will research the needs of consumer/survivor organizations with the aim of building our capacities.

While several consumer/survivor organizations have disappeared, some have grown and developed incredibly successful initiatives based on the stated needs of their communities and memberships. We have consumer/survivor organizations providing mental health services that were previously delivered only by the traditional service providers. These initiatives are much more reflective of the needs of the consumer/survivor and based on peer support principles.

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# A-WAY PEOPLE

## Introducing Michael, Tom & Bonnie

**Michael McLaughlin**

By Rosemarie Gelineau

Michael (or M.J., as he's often called) was born in Toronto, at the now demolished Wellesley Hospital. He has held many part-time jobs, one being at the Metro newspaper, where he worked with a friend. When that friend left to work at A-WAY for a year as a courier, Michael was motivated to do the same. He was hired in Oct. 2001. Since then, A-WAY has proved to be his longest running job for many reasons. Besides the extra income, the office is located close to his home and being a courier fulfills his love of exploring the city; literally visiting every neighbourhood within Toronto.

Outside of work, Michael has so many interests that it's difficult to believe that he has time for work! He writes poetry, short stories and songs and is a singer and musician. Some of his songs have been recorded for his own enjoyment, but he is developing a plan and forum such as a "My Space" page, so that others may share in his creativity. He is also interested in model trains and other miniatures, which he collects. Some folks here at A-WAY are also familiar with his love of photography and his unique, whimsical shots of his figurines (which he calls his 'little friends') taken at various Toronto landmarks. They are analogous to the Travelocity gnome and have been photographed at the Island Ferry, Casa Loma, Ontario Place, the subway and the Beach boathouse, to name a few.

My next few questions were a little more uncommon, but Michael was very obliging.

What are people surprised to learn about you? –That I'm 56! I have no gray hair!

Who is your favourite fictional character? –Hawkeye from M.A.S.H. I really enjoyed the camaraderie of the characters, the brotherhood or fraternity- type atmosphere. I was never in the armed forces or university, but I can experience it vicariously with a program like that. I really don't enjoy solitary activities.

What is your favourite Toronto neighbourhood? - I would say where I live now: the Beaches. Second would be the Toronto Islands, where I've had many picnics.

What is the most daring thing you've ever done? I hitchhiked across the U.S. with two friends to California, with only \$35 in my pocket. It was wild! We were attacked by cowboys in Colorado!

If you could meet any celebrity, who would it be? – I don't know about a celebrity, but I would like to see my grandparents again, to learn more about their lives and experiences as immigrants coming to Canada.

If you could vacation anywhere, where would you go? – Jerusalem

If you had to describe yourself in one word, what would that be? - Complex!

# Tom Allen

By Myrna Schacherl

This year, A-WAY has one new outside board member. His name is Tom Allen. Over the last 26 years, Tom has worked for a lot of different mental health agencies in Toronto. He currently works as a peer facilitator at "What Next" (a program of the Canadian Mental Health Association). He has worked as a harm reduction co-ordinator at Dixon Hall, the Business Manager at Parkdale Green Thumb, COTA, PARC and Madison Avenue Housing. His previous experience as a board member occurred a number of years ago with the "761 Community Development Corporation", an organization which facilitated the start-up of various psychiatric survivor businesses.

Tom grew up in Windsor, ON. He studied at the University of Windsor for his Bachelor of Social Work, which he never completed. Tom says he has always had "wanderlust" and was "keen to go to different places in Canada". He has lived and worked all over Canada. In the 70's, he was in a day treatment program in Ontario and later hospitalized at Alberta Hospital Ponoka. The hospital had an in-house work program and he was put to work on the geriatric ward as a "patient helper". He said that it "saved his bacon" because "instead of sitting around watching T.V. all day, smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee, etc, I was actually able to interact with people." A year later, he returned there seeking employment, landing a position as an institutional aide.

In 1982, he parlayed his volunteer work at a boarding home in Parkdale into a paid position, thereby launching his career in mental health services in Toronto.

Tom has initiated a number of projects for psychiatric survivors including: landscaping businesses (From the Ground Up and From the Root), the Metro Voice Mail Project, an art collective known as PARC Art, and an exercise group known as PHACS. How had he initiated so much? "One does not do these things alone. There are always other people...even though I had some ideas in my time, I could not have done them alone ... people were supportive, added their own expertise and knowledge."

In the late 80's, he was working for COTA, going into boarding homes in Parkdale, when the landscaping business was born. They "talked it up" at a number of boarding homes, inviting those interested in work to come to a meeting at the 519 Community Centre. They discovered that "folks were really interested in working outdoors". Someone knew a private landscaper who offered to hire people from the boarding home to do landscaping, if Tom were to supervise. Tom was so impressed that people showed up on time at 7:30 a.m. He was "blown away" by their enthusiasm and work ethic.

In 1991, the Metro Voice Mail project was started when Tom was working at Central Neighbourhood House. He spoke to a client who wanted to work, but could not rely on others at the boarding house to give him his messages, not to mention the stigma of living there. Tom said "How about voice mail?" The executive director jumped on it. They got funding to do a year-long voice mail pilot, known as "Metro Voice Mail". The project is still running.

Around 1992, Tom was working at PARC (Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre). He felt the art work being done there was "truly amazing". He approached the executive director, David Littman and they applied for funding. They produced t-shirts, coffee mugs, and other marketable items from the members' artwork. PARC members made money and increased their self-esteem. This project has continued in one form or another since then.

In 2002, Tom made some lifestyle changes and found that "exercise was really beneficial" for his mental health....I started walking every day, it turned into a walk/run and then running." He thought others might be interested and many were; PHACS resulted. (He recruited some employees from A-WAY). Tom has run four marathons and still runs.

Tom is very pleased to be a board member at A-WAY, which he describes as "a wonderful, wonderful organization. For people with mental health issues "having something productive to do during the day, whether it's two hours a week or 20... makes a world of difference in the quality of one's life. I've known about A-WAY for years and it is a positive and practical business".

# Bonnie Holmes

By: Peter Bozoki

Bonnie is part of a group of long-serving A-WAY employees that have been with the company for almost 20 years. Like most of the A-WAY staff, Bonnie started out as a courier and quickly felt comfortable with the job and her co-workers and was pleased with the encouragement, kind understanding and support she received. Given the relaxed atmosphere and warm greetings she would receive when coming to work each day, Bonnie knew A-WAY was more than just a job, but a place that was and still is, like a second family.

Over the years, Bonnie has worked in several departments at A-WAY including marketing, accounting and phones/reception. She likes the variety of the different work environments. The jobs vary in nature from working with computer programs in accounting, to working as a team with the dispatchers when taking customer orders at phones and reception, to working largely on her own when she works as a clerk doing invoicing, filing and reconciling of the waybills. The office staff has always been impressed with Bonnie's flexibility and strong work ethic, which makes it possible for her to commit to performing all these jobs as part of her regular schedule.

In her spare time, Bonnie volunteers at a seniors' home where she helps with activities, organizes bus trips, or simply plays scrabble with the old folks and finds this to be very rewarding. Friends describe her as an honest and sincere person, with a great sense of humour. Bonnie always finds time during the day to reflect on the ups and downs in life and has found a spirituality to call her own.

Over the past two decades, Bonnie has been an exemplary veteran of A-WAY, showing tremendous dedication to the company. Her contribution to the team is prized by all of her colleagues.

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But, what is the reality for people living with mental health issues today?

We continue to live on ODSP rates which are below the poverty line. In 2006, the poverty line cut-off for a single person living in Toronto was \$21,202<sup>2</sup> In 2007, a single person making the maximum on ODSP had an annual income of \$11,998<sup>3</sup> Although recent changes have been made to allow people to keep a little more of what they may earn by working, there are still huge barriers to both living on ODSP and trying to get off it. Housing shortages are a national tragedy. Employment opportunities are slowly increasing, many through consumer/survivor organizations and alternative businesses but at wages so far below the traditional service providers that it should be an embarrassment to the system. Consumer/survivors say they want housing, a job and a social network (a home, a job and a friend). We may be closer to that goal than we were 25 years ago but we still have a long way to go. Our funders and supporters (which should include traditional service providers) need to wake up and take our demands seriously. We've tried pleading. We've provided the data, and we keep on doing what we're doing – more with less. We need to be funded on parity with the rest of the system if we are truly valued as equals.

We have a provincial partnership to strengthen our voice, the Mental Health Commission of Canada that is taking a strong leadership role with regards to the importance of the voices of consumer/survivor and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care recently announced a 2.5% increase to all mental health budgets for this year. These developments provide hope but it has taken 25 years. Let's just hope it doesn't take another 25 years to gain parity within the system that wouldn't even exist without us as "clients."

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Health, *Putting People First – The Reform of Mental Health Services in Ontario* (1993).

<sup>2</sup> Source: Prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using Statistics Canada's Catalogue # 75-F0002MI

<sup>3</sup> The Income Security Advocacy Centre

## Recognizing Our Customers

There are more than 1,500 A-WAY customers, and while we can't list them all here and now, we do want to recognize them for their support and use of A-WAY. In each issue of our newsletter, we will introduce you to a few of our customers. Some new, some old, some very big and some very small – all of them are important to us and we recommend them to you. In this issue we recognize the following A-WAY Customers:



East York East Toronto Family Resources

TEXTILE MUSEUM of CANADA  
connecting cloth, culture & art



**BTL**

BETWEEN THE LINES



Canadian Cystic  
Fibrosis Foundation



**Fred  
Victor  
Centre**

