

## **The Mental Health Illuminati**

In August 2018, six employees of the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General (“MAG”) met informally to discuss their first-hand experience with stigma and ignorance about mental illness in the workplace and what could they do to help end the isolation.

The group realized that through their own public speaking and willingness to speak openly about mental health that they were making a difference as individuals within their branches or more broadly within the legal profession. At that initial meeting, the group thought about why these talks were so powerful and beneficial. Someone commented that speaking about lived experience with mental illness was like illuminating people from the darkness of silence and stereotype. “Hey, we should call ourselves the Illuminati.” And so, they became the Illuminati.

Putting their collective heads and experiences together, the group decided to run events where people living with mental illness or who have cared for a loved one living with mental illness would speak to their peers and managers from a panel and then directly to small groups seated around a table to allow for discussion. This format became known as “Turning the Tables on Mental Illness”. The Illuminati has put on seven of these sessions.

The Illuminati has also put on programs on specific topics including anxiety, perfectionism, suicide prevention and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Members of the Illuminati have written highly acclaimed articles for MAG publications and beyond.

The Illuminati family has grown in size and influence as individuals have volunteered to speak about their experiences with mental health and illness at Turning the Tables events and panel events. There are now approximately 25 members of a speaker’s bureau who are willing to talk publicly about their experiences with mental illness.

The impact of the Illuminati has been so big that they were honoured with receiving the Deputy Attorney General's Award of Excellence, an award given to one team or person per year for their contribution to MAG.

The Illuminati are making an important impact on starting a more informed, humane and realistic conversation around mental health. It is through telling stories of lived experience and allowing room for an open exchange of information and ideas that mental illness is normalized. The Illuminati set out to show that living with mental health issues does not mean living a lesser life.