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?I Am Enough?: Orangeville production shines spotlight on Mental Health and rural communities

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A powerful new musical theatre production is coming to Theatre Orangeville (87 Broadway) early next month, bringing with it a deeply personal story of mental illness, resilience, and community care.

?I Am Enough? is the creation of performer and mental health advocate Sherry Garner, whose own journey through a psychiatric emergency room and a diagnosis of bipolar disorder led her to rethink how stories about mental health are told.

?In 2019 I had a mental health crisis,? Garner said. ?I found myself in a psychiatric emergency room, just completely at the end of my rope. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I never saw myself as the stereotype of somebody who would be suicidal and have mental illness.?

?Once I was in remission and doing better, I decided I wanted to tell my story to others,? she added.

Out of that experience, she crafted a show that blends concert-style musical performance with frank, accessible discussion about accessing help - especially in rural regions where stigma and isolation can be most severe.

?I decided that I was going to do a charity show,? Garner said. ?I'm going to put on a show, and I'm going to tell my story. I'm going to sing the songs that inspire me. I'm going to do it as a concert and get myself back on my feet. I just rented out a theater, and I wrote it.?

The evening, getting underway at 7:30 p.m. on May 9, is structured in two parts. The first half is a curated musical theatre performance in which Garner shares her life story through song and storytelling, touching on themes of rural life, first responder families, and parenting a child with Down syndrome.

?I grew up on a farm,? Garner said. ?I come from a big rural background. So ingrained in me is that rural ?suck it up.' We don't talk about things. I'm also a former police officer's wife, so I know what it's like for first responders to deal with their mental health and how difficult it is for families to support that person. I am also a mother to a child with Down syndrome, so I know the pressure of trying to raise a child in a world that's not built for them, that doesn't accept them. I want to break the stigmas surrounding all of those realities.?

These intersecting experiences are meant to help the production resonate with a wide cross-section of the community: farm families, first responders and their loved ones, caregivers, and anyone who has struggled with mental health or supported someone who has.

The second half shifts into a community-focused ?coffee talk? format. Local mental health providers are invited onstage for a guided conversation and audience Q&A. There is no expectation of participation, Garner said, meaning that those who are uncomfortable can just observe and learn.

?There's anonymity, you don't have to be the one asking questions,? Garner said. ?Or you can go and get a bit more information, or you just walk away with a bit more understanding of what the path is, knowing that you're not alone.?

The goal is not only to raise awareness, but to close the gap between recognizing a problem and finding practical support. Audience members will leave with concrete information about local resources and can interact with program and provider booths in Theatre Orangeville's lobby following the event.

In Orangeville, the production is being presented in partnership with Headwaters Health Care Centre, with proceeds supporting the hospital's planned renovation of its emergency department, including a dedicated, more dignified space for people in mental health crisis.

Garner has been particularly moved by Headwaters' vision for a welcoming, private environment that reflects the seriousness of mental health needs without making individuals feel criminalized or exposed in a small community.

?When headwaters came to me and they told me what their plans are for their new renovation. I was so inspired,? Garner said. ?The show's proceeds will go towards supporting the new emergency room, emphasizing the importance of having welcoming facilities for mental health patients... finding it when somebody is in crisis, they shouldn't have to feel like a criminal.?

The production brings together Theatre Orangeville, Headwaters and Garner's vision under a shared mission: using art, storytelling, and local expertise to foster lasting change in community mental health.

For more information and tickets, visit app.arts-people.com/?show=317585