



## *The Evidence* (transcript)

### *Season 1, Episode 1*

#### **Topic: Stigma**

[00:00]

[music]

[00:07]

[ANNOUNCER:] You're listening to *The Evidence*: knowledge that inspires.

[music]

[ANNOUNCER:] *The Evidence*: produced by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

[LEE ARBON:] Welcome to the premier episode of *The Evidence*, a brand-new podcast created by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. We're your hosts, Lee Arbon-

[AMANDA DESEURE:] And Amanda Deseure. This podcast is a place to connect evidence and research on substance use and addiction in Canada with other organizations, researchers, parents and the people who matter most. Today, we're discussing stigma, the biggest barrier to recovery from any substance use disorder.

[LA:] Stay with us, and we'll be right back with today's guest, who now devotes *his* life to helping people with substance use disorders.

[music]

[ANNOUNCER:] This is *The Evidence*. If you find today's topic interesting, be sure to visit [ccsa.ca](http://ccsa.ca) for more information.

[music]

[AD:] We're back, and joining us is Gord Garner, whose community role is as executive director of the Community Addictions Peer Support Association, known as CAPSA. Uh, good morning, Gord. Thank you so much for joining us.

[GORD GARNER:] Uh, Amanda, it's really nice to be here with CCSA today and yourself, having this conversation. It's really meaningful to me.

[AD:] We're so glad to have you. So Gord, I thought we could start off, um, by you telling us a little bit about yourself and the work that you do.

[GG:] So, for myself, personally, I'm somebody with a substance use disorder diagnosis. I really struggled with my well-being for many many years in part because I rejected the diagnosis because of who I felt that made me be.



[AD:] And and when you say that, what do you mean?

[02:00]

[GG:] Well, there was images on TV, there was newspaper articles, a friend of mine when I was 24 turned to me and said, “You know those addicts in the newspaper? That’s you and I,” and so we had become something other than ourselves, [we?] we had become things instead of people. And it was very difficult to think of myself in those terms—the images that I’d seen, and, uh, the perceptions that I embedded in myself.

[AD:] Of course. And what can you tell us about CAPSA and the work that CAPSA does?

[GG:] CAPSA is a community-based organization that believes that we need to respond to substance use issues as a community, that there are no strangers, there are no others, there are no outliers, we’re all part of one community. Substance use disorder has no boundaries, and, uh, we need to break the silence about that. And so we have community engagement activities, we go out to colleges and campuses at the first of the year, participate in their harm reduction program. We have a large day, Recovery Day Ottawa, where people come out and support all pathways to well-being. That includes your harm reduction, uh, moderation, abstinence... We just are interested in having people have better lives. And of course, we want the community to be there. This isn’t a party for people that are [unintelligible]. This is a celebration for the city of Ottawa and *its* support for people who are suffering.

[AD:] That’s incredible, that’s incredible work you do, Gord. So today we wanted to talk to you about stigma, and maybe you would be able to tell us what stigma is.

[GG:] There’s a lot of sort of clinical definitions about stigma. I guess I like to really simplify it. It’s the way society harms its own members through attitudes, behaviours and languages, often unconsciously, often without malice. I think the biggest stigma is [unknown?], when I just believe something that isn’t true, act as if it is, towards another person.

[AD:] And what does that look like?

[04:03]

[GG:] That looks like somebody lying on the floor at the hospital in the emergency room. Maybe they’ve been diagnosed with a substance use disorder, maybe alcoholism specifically, they’re a frequent visitor to the hospital. They’re seen as being drunk. They’re seen as seeking shelter. They’re allowed to lie on the floor, and if they don’t go into seizure, they’re discharged. They’re not seen as suffering. They’re not seen as somebody who’s got a diagnosis that says “if I drink, I’m harming myself.” And so, that’s the end of the treatment, you know, they’re seen as shameful. And, you know, when I go to the emergency room and someone’s lying on the floor, right? That wouldn’t happen if I had a broken leg. We get articles in the paper, people who are lying on beds or sitting in chair, and the great wait for that. How would you feel if you were just told to lie on the floor and leave if you could get up again? That’s active stigma.

[AD:] And, so, how would you say that stigma affects people living with or in recovery from substance use disorders?

[GG:] Well, I don’t think it’s always safe for people to say “I got better.” And so, there’s this fear: if I tell you that I’m well, I also have to tell you that I was sick, and if I tell you that I had a substance use disorder, will you trust me? Can I still keep the books? Do I get the key to the office? Am I red-lined in my job? Am I- people walk on tippy toes around me, don’t give them too much stress, they’re not very good at that? And what does that mean to society? I think one way to judge that is often when I



speaking publicly—and I know other friends have the same experience—people come up to us and they tell us how courageous we were to tell our stories, right? And in that, I had this moment of clarity this fall. I spoke at a Recovery Capital Conference. This man from Australia came up and he put his arm on me, looked straight in the eye and he said to me, “You’re so courageous to tell such a humiliating story.” [Pause] And see, he added the line that nobody else adds in: Why is it courageous for us to tell people we got better, unless you think it’s shameful that we were so sick?

[06:20]

[AD:] And in your opinion, what can we do to end stigma, whether systemically or personally? What are some tangible steps, or, maybe, not-so-tangible steps, that people can work on?

[GG:] So, I’m a person with a substance use disorder. I myself have stigmatizing attitudes and beliefs about people who use substances that I’m still unlocking, still participating in unconsciously. And I think that personal ownership, the, our workshop is titled “Stigma Ends with Me.” That’s a euphemism for “stigma [chuckle] is in me,” eh? That’s how we’re gonna deal with it. On a personal basis, I’m gonna examine my thoughts, my belief, question my understanding of substance use disorder, change my language, change my stance. And I can do that through education, through support from my community and through an agreement in the community that this isn’t about being politically correct, this is about not harming my friends and my family and my neighbours, and that I must take action, and it begins with me by taking ownership. And we’ve done that with HIV, we’ve done that with social causes, we’ve done that will all sorts of injustices. And I think the biggest thing about substance use disorder is that that’s the last on the list.

[AD:] So you’re saying that ending stigma really starts with each of us, and actively thinking of our behaviours and our actions, and working towards adjusting them.

[GG:] Well, and giving each other permission to challenge ourselves, you know, when you’re driving down the street and looking out the window and you hear somebody using language that’s inappropriate, do you still sit there? You know? What are you gonna say? How are you gonna say that? And understanding that I’ve seen a lot of change in my life and, myself personally, I find it’s not about malice, it’s really born in ignorance. My own stigmatization of myself, my own self-hatred was based on a lack of understanding of the issue I was confronted with, the effects on my mind and my neurological ability to make good decisions. Brought a lot of self-shame and stigma because of the decisions I made. I didn’t realize I wasn’t capable of making a different decision at that time. How do I know that’s true? Well, I’m well now and I don’t make those decisions anymore.

[08:38]

[AD:] Thank you so much for joining us, Gord, and for sharing all of your wealth of information, uh, and for your service to our communities.

[GG:] Yahoo!

[BOTH:] [laughter]

[ANNOUNCER:] Addiction News Daily delivers a news scan of relevant articles, events and resources related to substance issues directly to your inbox, Monday to Friday. Join our almost 3,000 subscribers in receiving news that’s relevant and interesting. Sign up today by visiting [www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca).

[music]

[LA:] And we’re back with our big announcement on where the 2019 Issues of Substance Conference is going to be held.



[AD:] Finally. I have been waiting so long to figure out where it's gonna be this year.

[LA:] Well, this is radio. This is where our technical producer would put in that cheesy drum music.

[drumroll]

[LA:] And IOS 2019 is coming to the nation's capital in Ottawa. It's gonna be housed at The Westin from November 25th to 27th, 2019, and is all part of National Addictions Awareness Week.

[AD:] And what's this year's theme?

[LA:] The theme this year is going to be Evidence and Perspectives. Compassion. Action.

[AD:] Sounds like a pretty busy conference.

[LA:] Well, it's going to be filled with a number of concurrent tracks. But right now they're putting together the program. I know they're working really hard on that, it's going to be a full choice of speakers for whoever attends.

[AD:] What exactly is IOS? What happens there?

[LA:] Well, IOS is a biannual event where the experts in substance use come together to present the current state of the field of substance issues.

[AD:] Looking forward to seeing the full program.

[10:30]

[LA:] Yeah, they're working re- really hard on it, you know, we're gonna have some, uh, updates coming in the next few months as the finalized program comes together. We hope to have speakers early in the new year, and, you know, we're trying to get someone hopefully from the program committee who can come on this podcast, uh, every month and speak on the developments going on with the conference.

[AD:] I can't wait. I'm really looking forward to it.

[LA:] Yeah, it's gonna be really cool and make sure, you know, you follow us on social media: IOS 2019's gonna have its own personal Twitter feed, and the hashtag is @IOS\_QDS and all news from the conference is gonna be posted here *first*, so that's where you're gonna find out everything that's going on in the conference first hand.

[AD:] Awesome.

[LA:] Yup. We'll see you guys in Ottawa next year.

[ANNOUNCER:] Like our show? Have a comment or a question? Want to suggest a guest for *The Evidence*? Email us at [podcast@ccsa.ca](mailto:podcast@ccsa.ca) and let us know. We want to hear your take on *The Evidence*.

[LA:] And that brings us to the end of the very first episode of *The Evidence*. Amanda, how do you think it went?

[AD:] I think it went pretty well. Gord was an excellent expert for us to have on.

[LA:] Oh, I agree. Listening to Gord, I just learned so many things I didn't know before.

[AD:] Me too, and I think it's given us and all of our listeners some tangible actions that they can bring back to their personal lives and their work lives.



[LA:] Absolutely. Well, we'll be back before the end of the year, we've got one more episode before 2019, that's scary to say. Ah, we'll be talking about, uh, low-risk drinking guidelines, especially with the holiday season coming up, so we don't want you to miss that. Thanks for everyone who tuned in, and we'll see you next time.

[AD:] See you next time.

[ANNOUNCER:] This is *The Evidence*. If you find today's topic interesting, be sure to visit [ccsa.ca](http://ccsa.ca) for more information. Technical and editing support for the podcast is handled by Christopher Austin. *The Evidence* is owned and produced by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. Copyright 2019.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT 12:45]



Canadian Centre  
on Substance Use  
and Addiction

CCSA was created by Parliament to provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we provide national guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives.

CCSA activities and products are made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views of CCSA do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada.