

Healthy mind messengers pay visit to Jasper

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An uplifting message about depression is what Kelly Reinhardt, Bridget Howarth and Angela Bischoff have been sharing with people all across Canada during their Healthy Mind-Body-Planet tour that stopped in Jasper last week (March 23).

“In a nutshell, we’re talking about depression and anti-depressant pharmaceuticals,” said Reinhardt in an interview following the presentation. “It’s a dual stream going on. We’re trying to educate people about alternatives and the influence of Big Pharma, but at the same time we are learning from people’s stories and sharing those experiences.”

The three travelers are all activists by trade, and have been on a mission to promote alternative methods of treating depression thanks to a personal and tragic circumstance that motivates them every day. Tooker Gomberg, the noted activist and former member of Edmonton City Council, was Bischoff’s husband and a good friend of Howarth and Reinhardt. Gomberg took his own life in 2004 while taking anti-depressants.

“Tooker was very agitated when he was on those drugs,” Reinhardt recalled. “Here’s a very bright man, a very involved man who was agitated out of his own mind.”

According to Reinhardt, Gomberg visited his psychiatrist the day he committed suicide, complaining of the agitation he felt and rather than recognizing this a problem, his doctor simply prescribed a tranquilizer. Hours later, Gomberg jumped from a Halifax bridge.

While Reinhardt doesn’t claim that all anti-depressant users are at a higher risk for suicide, he feels that the medical establishment puts too much faith in pharmaceutical solutions.

“There’s no study anywhere that shows these drugs reduce the risk of suicide at all, and that’s deadly ironic, I think,” he said. Rather than battling against Big Pharma and federal regulators, Reinhardt and his fellow travelers have decided to take their message directly to the people.

“Quite simply there is industry influence and interference at the highest levels,” he said. “We’ve decided to take the grassroots angle because it’s the most practical and the most effective...”

“It’s been very good, very encouraging. I’ve been surprised at the breadth of people involved and affected by this, either directly, or through their friends and family.”

Their message has been challenged on more than one occasion, but Reinhardt makes no apologies for the tour’s standpoint.

“People have said, ‘you’re not offering the whole picture’ but neither is Health Canada or the pharmaceutical companies. If it weren’t for grassroots activism, you wouldn’t hear this side of it. We’re openly biased and we’re very upfront about it.”

The tour continues in British Columbia this week, before returning to Alberta for the final two presentations later in June. For further information about the Healthy Mind-Body-Planet message, Reinhardt recommends a visit to www.greenspiration.org, where a digital copy of “Depression Expression” a special publication prepared by the group, is available.

The tour stop in Jasper was sponsored by Jasper Adult Learning.