

Margaret Trudeau brings message of hope to Midland

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MIDLAND – Margaret Trudeau spoke Thursday night in Midland about her struggles with bipolar disorder, bringing a message of hope and understanding for those afflicted with mental-health issues.

Trudeau, the ex-wife of former prime minister Pierre Trudeau and the mother of current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, addressed a crowd at the Best Western Highland Inn and Conference Centre. The event was a fundraiser for The Guesthouse homeless shelter.

Trudeau said she admires the work The Guesthouse does, which is why she responded to the invitation.

“It’s important to give the homeless hope because they’re the most unfortunate of our society,” she said. “They need shelter, food and someone to listen to.”

After struggling for many years, Trudeau announced in 2006 that she had bipolar disorder. She has since toured North America advocating for the reduction of the stigma associated with mental illness.

“I knew I could not win this battle alone,” she said. “I had to build up the courage to accept the help I needed.”

Trudeau was frank about her past, sharing details of running off with the Rolling Stones singer Mick Jagger, her time in a psychiatric ward and thoughts of suicide after the death of her son Michel.

“I wasn’t up to the task of living,” she said of the loss of her son. “I just wanted to die.”

There has been a significant change in people’s attitudes toward mental health in recent years, said Trudeau.

“People are starting to respond to mental-health issues in Canada,” he said. “I can see it across the country.”

The No. 1 message Trudeau said she wanted people to get out of her talk was that individuals with mental illness cannot go it alone.

“No matter how smart you are, no matter where you come from, you cannot fix yourself in a mental illness,” she said. “You need to reach out and get help.”

But Trudeau cautioned forcing someone to get help is not an option.

“You need to plant the seeds of hope in their mind,” she said. “You can’t force them to get better; they need to want to get better.”

The Guesthouse, formerly known as Midland Out of the Cold, offers shelter for the homeless in north Simcoe. Located at Knox Presbyterian Church in Midland, the shelter will soon relocate to a renovated building at 522 Elizabeth Street.

Guesthouse vice-president and treasurer Robert Sykes praised Trudeau’s courage, noting many people aren’t able to follow the path she has journeyed.

“It’s our job to help those people make those first steps,” he said.

Trudeau declined comment on the recent request by Sophie Grégoire-Trudeau for more staff, although she said she does give advice to her daughter-in-law on what to expect as the wife of the prime minister.



Margaret Trudeau speaks at a June 2 event in Midland in support of The Guesthouse homeless shelter.



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Guesthouse vice-president Robert Sykes said it is the job of places like The Guesthouse to get people to take the first steps they need to get help with mental-health issues.

“I told her that every little thing she does will be analyzed,” Trudeau said. “But she’s a pretty formidable woman.”

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Midland Mayor Gord McKay and his wife, Cathy, listen to Trudeau's speech, which occurred the same day McKay revealed he had been diagnosed with cancer.
