



**EMBARGOED UNTIL 4:00AM
TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2009**

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**Coast Mental Health Announces
Sixth 2009 Courage To Come Back Award Recipient
LORI SLATER named as recipient in MEDICAL category**

*VANCOUVER, B.C. April 27, 2009 – Coast Mental Health announced the last of six award recipients of a 2009 Courage To Come Back Award. **Lori Slater of Fort St. John** has been named as the 2009 Courage To Come Back Award recipient in the Medical category. Recipients will receive their awards at the Courage gala on Thursday, April 30th.*

Lori Slater says, "I don't consider myself disabled because there are so many things I am able to do. I don't dwell on the 'cannots', I concentrate on the 'cans'. Life is good." Remarkable words from a remarkable woman.

Born with spina bifida, Lori required surgery at just 10 days old. With the exception of a lump on her back and some numbness and weakness, she was much like other children her age. She certainly didn't consider herself "disabled." As an adult, however, Lori discovered the lump on her back had grown and, just prior to the birth of her second child, she underwent the first of many surgeries to remove scar tissue that had formed around her spinal cord. In her late 30s, the debilitating numbness and weakness in her legs returned, and Lori once again faced surgery. Even though the operation wasn't wholly successful, the doctors recommended no further operations and Lori and her family tried to accept the realities of their new life.

Within five years, her condition had worsened, and another surgery was undertaken in a hospital hundreds of miles away from her husband and children. The distance and the pain began to take their toll and Lori started into a downward spiral as she struggled to come to terms with her increasing disability. This operation was unsuccessful and she was put on medication to dull the pain in her legs. The medication made her dizzy and she began to repeatedly fall, sometimes very seriously. She remembers this time as a blur of doctor visits and trips to Vancouver until finally, in 2004, she was told no more surgeries were possible, and she must spend all her time in a wheelchair. She had to re-learn how to cook, take care of the house, transfer in and out of her chair, get in the bathtub, and get dressed. Depressed, she just wanted to forget about life.

In Vancouver, she spent a week as an outpatient at a rehabilitation hospital. Seeing the struggles of people there, Lori saw herself and decided that she wanted to make a difference in their lives in a way professionals couldn't: she wanted to be a peer supporter and share her experiences with others. Back home, she got involved in fundraising, and soon was volunteering nearly full-time – 1600 hours a year! – to improve the lives of people living with a spinal cord injury.

And make a difference she does: Lori holds down eight volunteer positions in Fort St. John, unselfishly focusing her passion and energy to make her community more inclusive to people with disabilities. People who know Lori well will tell you that on or off the job, she is always helping others, going out of her way to engage and encourage people one-on-one, wherever she goes. Despite living with chronic pain and limited physical ability, Lori has made a dramatic difference in her community.

Lori says, "Receiving a Courage To Come Back Award is an honour and I feel very humbled to be chosen. I hope that my story can inspire others to never give up on their dreams."

Congratulations, Lori. Coast is proud to have you as our 2009 Courage To Come Back recipient in the Medical category.

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Lori Slater named as recipient in CTCB Medical category

Lori will receive her Courage To Come Back Award at the 11th Annual Gala Dinner at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Vancouver on Thursday, April 30th. For tickets, call 604-675-2328 or purchase online at www.coastmentalhealth.com

About Courage To Come Back:

The Courage To Come Back Awards celebrate people who have inspired others as they have courageously battled back from illness, adversity or injury. Through Courage, British Columbians are acknowledged for their accomplishments, positive attitudes and willingness to give back to their communities. Awards are given in six categories including: mental health, physical rehabilitation, medical, addiction, social adversity and youth.

About Coast Mental Health:

Since 1972, Coast Mental Health has been providing high-quality housing, employment programs, social opportunities and other community mental health services for people with serious and persistent mental illnesses.

Through presenting the stories of six amazing recipients each year at The Courage To Come Back Awards, Coast Mental Health strives to offer hope to all those suffering from illness, adversity or injury and demonstrates that all people have value and dignity regardless of the illness, adversity or injury they have faced.

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