



**EMBARGOED UNTIL 4:00AM
TUESDAY, APRIL 20, 2010**

Contact: Laura Ballance
Courage Media Chair
Cell: 604-771-5176
laura@lbgm.ca

**Coast Mental Health Announces
Fourth 2010 Courage To Come Back Award Recipient
CINDY THOMSEN named as recipient in MEDICAL category**

VANCOUVER, B.C. April 19, 2010 – Coast Mental Health announced the fourth of six award recipients of a 2010 Courage To Come Back Award. **Cindy Thomsen of Chilliwack** has been named as the 2010 Courage To Come Back Award recipient in the Medical category. The remaining recipients will be announced over the next two Mondays, leading up to the awards gala on Thursday, May 6th.

Over the course of only one day in February 2006, Cindy Thomsen went from feeling a little unwell to having her world turned upside down. She had been under the weather for a few days but had put it down to stress and carried on. Her husband, whom she had met in sobriety 6 years prior, had, after suffering a serious workplace injury himself, relapsed into using drugs and alcohol. This had put huge emotional and financial strains on their family, Cindy in particular who was still working to maintain her sobriety. She had felt tired that day; by dinner time was quite delirious. Her husband took her to emergency. All she remembers was answering a few questions before losing consciousness. She had fallen into a coma.

Cindy had contracted a rare strain of pneumonia. Because her spleen had been removed many years prior, her body wasn't able to fight the virus easily and she developed septicemia – blood poisoning. Her chance of surviving that first night was put at only 10%. Her family gathered at her bedside, not knowing if she would awaken. Within hours Cindy's hands, feet and face had become "bacterially burned." The tissue was blackened and dead. Doctors weren't sure how far the septicemia had travelled – there was a serious risk of organ damage, even brain damage.

Attentive hospital care and medication began to work. Ten days later Cindy regained consciousness, but awakened to an entirely new world for herself and her family. She was transferred to a burn unit as her wounds required the same gruelling, painful care as any severe burn. Because of the bacterial burning, Cindy's hands and feet were amputated, she had lost most of her nose and lips because of the severe tissue damage. She was unable to talk or eat. Thus began long months of rehabilitation, prostheses, learning to walk and talk and eat again.

Returning home, Cindy was reliant upon home care aides to help her with the most basic daily activities. Unfortunately, her relationship further disintegrated and she made the difficult decision to leave her marriage. Despite everything, Cindy was determined to recover and to overcome these devastating setbacks. She started attending her AA groups again, and began to volunteer on the very burn ward where she had spent so many weeks. Who better to understand the trauma patients were undergoing? Cindy modeled strength and perseverance despite her physical, emotional, spiritual and mental setbacks.

Four years on from that night, Cindy has a passion for life and courage that are an inspiration to all who know her. She continues to have a positive attitude and gives back to her community in a wide variety of volunteer capacities, including her work with burn victims and amputees. Currently she is training to walk in the Burn Fund Walk/Run.

Coast is proud to have Cindy Thomsen accept this Courage To Come Back Award. Cindy says, "I am humbled and truly honoured to be receiving this award. Thank you for the opportunity of telling my story, so it may give others the faith and courage to carry on."

Cindy Thomsen named as recipient in CTCB Medical category

Cindy will receive her Courage To Come Back Award at the 12th Annual Gala Dinner at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Vancouver on Thursday, May 6th. 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: addiction, medical, mental health, physical rehabilitation, social adversity and youth. Recipients are chosen by volunteer panels of community leaders and category experts.

By 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 demonstrate that all people have value and dignity. At Coast, our clients with a mental illness show tremendous courage in their daily lives. In our housing facilities and service centers, a community of people strive to overcome illness, adversity and stigma, and we strive to support their recovery. Their triumphs, like those of the Courage Award recipients, motivate and inspire us.

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. We know that people with a mental illness can and do recover. Our services include:

- Mental Health Resource Centre – 500 Active Members, 220 meals served daily
- Homeless Outreach program serving approximately 60 people per month
- Coast Clubhouse - 400 Members, 80 Meals Served Daily, 80 Jobs Weekly
- Community Homes – 12 Houses, Over 120 Housed in Vancouver and Burnaby
- Supported Housing - ~650 Housed
- Coast Cottages - 50 Housed
- At Home/Chez Soi - 100 Housed by 2011
- Coast Transitional Housing - 44 Housed
- PACT Employment Services - 160+ Served Annually
- Coast Social Enterprises - 20 Employed
- Financial Trust Program - 350+ Served

###