"We have had too much of this sort of thing; we are not interested in it in this town anymore. The sooner you leave, the better." These hostile words were spoken by the mayor of Indian Head, Saskatchewan, in the spring of 1952. The "thing" to which he referred was an experiment designed to change the community's negative attitudes toward mental illness.

The mayor's tirade was directed at a member of the research team led by married couple psychiatrist John Cumming and social biologist Elaine Cumming. According to the pair, this exchange, which occurred near the end of the nine-month long project, marked the point at which Indian Head closed ranks against the study and against them. As if this rejection was not discouraging enough, the research findings showed that attitudes about mental illness did not change. The experiment, it seemed, had been a complete failure. Coming early in their research careers, this defeat had the potential to mar the Cummings' reputation and ruin their future prospects. In fact, the Indian Head study proved to be their making as respected, prolific, and powerful researchers in the field of social psychiatry. This project examines how the Cummings turned the failure of the Indian Head study into personal successes.

This project is part of a larger Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) funded project: Open Doors/Closed Ranks: Locating Mental Health After the Asylum

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Links to external websites

Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR)
Locating Mental Health After the Asylum

The University cannot accept responsibility for external websites.