

## Mental Health and Well-Being Belongs to Us!

### First Annual Secondary School Student Symposium

In a society where talking about mental health is practically taboo, this symposium brought to light the stigma surrounding mental health and how essential it is that stigma be eliminated. One in every five people will suffer from a mental illness at some point in their life. Mental illness is the silent plague of human society and it's not going to get any better unless we start talking about it.

So, let's talk. It might be uncomfortable or painful, but we really need to talk and at the symposium, talk we did. Covering everything from how to raise awareness, to our own personal experiences with inner demons, to body image issues, no subject was left off the table. Nervous as everyone was, we took a leap of faith together.

Introductions are usually slow and a tad awkward, but this one wasn't. The presenters jumped right in and got everyone involved, powerful speeches and moving videos coupled with startling facts about mental health really brought home their message: **nothing is going to change unless we change it; we can be the generation to end stigma.** It was so empowering to sit in a room full of like-minded and passionate people with so much dedication and potential knowing that they would do anything to make a positive change. It was beautiful and inspirational to say the least.

The two workshops we attended were "Mindful Heart and Mind" and "Am I Pretty?". The first workshop taught us how to recognize and deal with whatever problems we may have instead of pushing them away. This is useful for high school students because at times we do not have the emotional maturity nor the resources to deal with these problems, causing avoidance or a feeling of being overwhelmed. We also learned how to de-stress and clear our mind, so we can focus on what's in front of us, one task at a time. The second workshop was about gender stereotyping and how the media overtly sexualizes the female gender. It taught us to think critically about the advertisements we see and that you don't need to look like the girls in the magazines, those girls don't even look like themselves!

If I were to ask you about the things that you love, the answers would just come to you. You love to read, to paint, to bike, you love your dog, your mom, your sisters, you love movies, but how long would that list go on until you say,

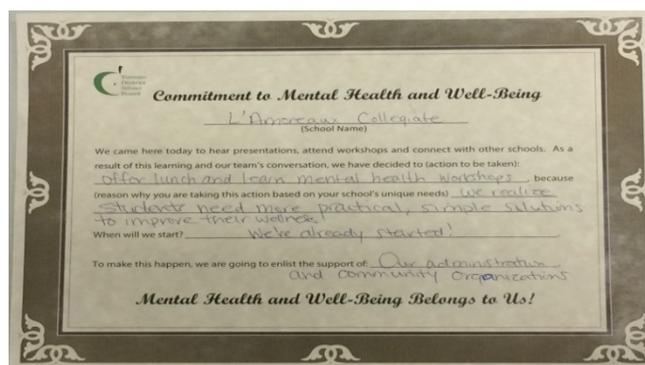
"I love myself." The symposium preached self-love and respect and confidence - we need to be comfortable with who we are and to take care of ourselves. Not only do we need to take care of our physical health, but our mental health as well. We need to be the generation to end stigma, and to do that, we need to educate people and tell them about mental well-being.

### Go ahead, start the conversation.

(By: Rifah & Renis - SATEC W.A. Porter Students)



Students at the First Annual Mental Health and Well-Being Secondary School Student Symposium



"Commitment Card" by students from L'Amoreaux CI at the Student Symposium. "We have decided to offer 'lunch and learn' mental health workshops...to give students more practical, simple solutions to improve their wellness."

For a transcript of the social media content from the Symposium please visit: <https://storify.com/tdsb/first-annual-secondary-school>

Remember to view the "Foundations of Children and Youth Mental Health and Well-Being" online training module on KEY to Learn. This module has been loaded onto everyone's Learning Profile - click on the "MyLearning" tab to get started.

*Surround yourself with the dreamers and the doers, the believers and thinkers, but most of all, surround yourself with those who see the greatness within you, even when you don't see it yourself. Edmund Lee*

## Student Symposium Reflections

Mental wellness is at the forefront of East York Alternative's approach to education, both in the classroom and through community engagement. The Symposium on Thursday, November 27, 2014 prompted students and staff to begin thinking about a deliberate, whole-school initiative to remove the stigma around mental illness and to promote resilience. Three students and two teachers/guidance counsellors attended and were impressed with the events, particularly with the demonstration of youth leadership throughout the day. A community atmosphere was created when participants were asked to respond to a series of questions by a show of hands, revealing the number of people who have been personally impacted by the stigma of mental illness. EYA students were inspired by the initiatives that other youth have implemented in their schools. For example, two of the students attended the "Exercise to Success" workshop and were happy to see that a holistic approach to mental wellness was promoted, emphasizing the connection between a person's physical and mental health. This was also emphasized by the variety of speakers who shared their stories with the larger group. In particular, an Elder from an Indigenous community highlighted spirituality's role in our overall health, an element that often gets ignored by the Eurocentric perspectives that dominate North American society. Students also walked away with a sense of satisfaction knowing that there were people in the TDSB community that were aware of the topic and were actually addressing the issues by making change in their schools. The day concluded with the opportunity for students and staff to collaborate, ready to take their first steps once back at school. Since then, our team has already recruited several more students to join the effort. The goal is to begin small, eventually branching out to lead activities in local primary schools that promote overall wellness and resilience.

(By: Harriet Whiteman & Kristin Kniehl, Teachers at East York Alternative)



Emery CI and Thistletown CI Students lead the Physical Activity Break

## Youth Mental Health and Addictions Champions Project

The Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YMHAC) Project is an initiative between the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario and six public health units in Ontario. The program supports students to become mental health champions in their schools. Toronto Public Health has partnered with the TDSB to implement the YMHAC project in selected schools.

On November 4 and 5, a very enthusiastic group of students from across the TDSB along with their staff leads attended the 'Teen Ranch'; a camp just north of Caledon to discuss how they will work to improve the health and well-being of their school community through promoting mental wellness initiatives, working to reduce the stigma about mental illness, and discouraging the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances. Eight TDSB schools attended: Birchmount Park C.I., Danforth C & T.I., Riverdale C.I., Lawrence Park C.I., Vaughan Road Academy, Victoria Park C.I., East York C.I., and Albert Campbell C.I.

Facilitators from the Centre for Excellence in Mental Health led the day with some icebreakers and a discussion about Mental Health and the issues that cause stress for teens. Day Two had presenters from 'mindyourmind' who presented the initial phase of an interactive reach-out tool called the "Network of Champions". The Student Champions can utilize this back in their schools to help educate the student body about Mental Health and Well-Being.

At the conclusion of Day Two, students worked with their staff leads to come up with an action plan on how to proceed at their schools. Students were excited about the possibility of creating change at their schools.

(By: Claudine Tyrell, Guidance Instructional Leader)



Staff and students of the Youth Mental Health and Addictions Champions Project at the Teen Ranch

*We Want to Hear from You!*

*Do you have great Mental Health and Well-Being initiatives in your school? If so, send us pictures, student written work, or art work that you would like to highlight. Please email submissions to: [saleem.haniff@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:saleem.haniff@tdsb.on.ca)*

## Tips for Dealing with Holiday Stress

Although the coming break is supposed to be about rest and fun, the reality is that it will also probably bring you and your family some stress. Part of that comes simply with the change it will bring to your family's routine: your children will be home all day, and you will probably spend more time at home, as well. You may have more social events to attend than usual, and dealing with family and friends can be complicated—and therefore stressful. If your winter holidays include hosting celebrations, you'll have more cooking and cleaning to do. And if your traditions involve gift giving, you will have lots of shopping to do, which takes time, decision making, and money. How to cope?

1. **Avoid over-commercialization.** If you have a tradition of giving presents at this time of year, remember *and remind your children* that the holiday isn't only—or even mostly—about expensive gifts. Although there is a real joy in seeing your children's faces light up as they open your gifts *and love them*, taking on extra debt can ruin your enjoyment of the holidays. Research shows that children often worry about money more than their parents think. Remind your children, and yourself, that this can be mostly a time to celebrate relationships between family and friends. It can also be about giving to *strangers*—donating gifts, money, or time to people less fortunate than yourself. Research shows that people who help others feel more contentment and satisfaction with their lives. Families who volunteer their time to support the needy can put their own difficulties in perspective and strengthen family relationships.
2. **Look after yourself.** Try to eat and sleep well, and take time to do some things you really enjoy, like a hobby. Although nutritious eating is, of course, good for you in many ways, *overdoing* holiday eating can add stress to your life, especially if you are trying to stick to a healthful lifestyle. *Active fun*, like tobogganing or skating, actually gives you more energy and clears your mind, and activities that aren't too demanding on your body, like walking in a park, can also allow you to reflect on your life, especially on the things you're thankful for.
3. **Have realistic expectations...and seek help if you need it.** Realize that there will always be stress in your life, but you can learn to deal with it better. Something as simple as "stepping back" from a stressful situation, breathing slowly and deeply, and counting to ten can be hugely helpful when stresses start to mount. Talking about holiday-related stress with friends and family is a healthful way to cope. If that doesn't help enough, however, consider talking with a mental health professional in psychology or social work. Many well-researched techniques have proven effective in managing stress and increasing coping skills. A professional will tailor the help to your individual situation. (By: Paul O'Connell, Chief of Psychological Services Area A and Paul Legzdins, Chief of Psychological Services Area C)



### Lanor Junior Middle School – Health and Wellness Room Grand Opening

Congratulations to Lanor Junior Middle School on the Grand Opening of their Health and Wellness Room on December 2, 2014.



Ribbon cutting at Lanor Junior Middle School with Trustee City Councillor, Principal, Staff and Students

### Upcoming Events

Children's Mental Health Week: May 3 – 9, 2015

Parent's Mental Health and Well-Being Awareness Symposium: May 9, 2015

#### **Mental Health and Well-Being Core Leadership Team**

Heather Johnson & Saleem Haniff, Social Workers, Mental Health and Well-Being – System Support

Rose D'Alimonte – Chief of Social Work/Attendance – Area D

Marcia Powers-Dunlop, Interim Senior Manager – Professional Support Services

Sandy Spyropoulos, Executive Superintendent – Student Support Services and Care