

# Mental Health and Well-Being Belongs to Us A Lens on Wellness...Through a Growth Mindset

## Year End Edition



JUNE 2015

Issue #10

### The 5 Pillars of Well-Being - PERMA

In his book: *Flourishing* (2011), Dr. Seligman, describes the five essential elements of well-being under the acronym *PERMA*.

**Positive emotions** create the building blocks for greater resiliency, happiness and well-being. Happy people look back on the past with gladness; look into the future with hope; and they enjoy and cherish the present.

**Engagement** or being fully immersed in the moment allows you to focus and be “present”. The more you live in a state of engagement, the more you will be able to maintain a sense of emotional balance.

Strong **Relationships** are a significant predictor of our well-being. We are hard-wired for connection with others. Exclusion from a social group actually registers as pain in the brain in the same areas as strong physical pain. Everyone needs someone.

Having a sense of **Meaning** in one’s life gives us purpose that we are contributing to something larger than ourselves. Showing kindness to others, for example, leads to greater happiness.



Gledhill Junior Public School students with their wellness poster

**Accomplishments**, such as mastering tasks, achieving important goals and fulfilling your aspirations, lead to greater happiness. As human beings, we are continually trying to feel competent in what we do.

**Positive emotions**, **engagement** in the moment, **relationships**, **meaning** and a sense of **accomplishment** are the five pivotal elements of greater well-being. (Adapted from: School Mental Health ASSIST, Wellness Committee)

### Positive Steps to Well-Being

- ❖ Be kind to yourself
- ❖ Connect with others
- ❖ Be active
- ❖ Take up a hobby
- ❖ Keep learning
- ❖ Help others
- ❖ Eat healthy
- ❖ Balance sleep
- ❖ Relax
- ❖ Have fun



### York Humber HS Collaborative Caring and Wellness Blanket



This artwork represents York Humber High School’s awareness of mental health and wellness. Our paper blanket will hang as a symbol of our collective attitude of caring and concern for those struggling with mental health challenges and their hopes for recovery. Students and staff produced individual strips which woven together represent an important community conversation. Together we state our aim to be allies and to maintain a safe, kind and caring school atmosphere for all.

(By: Alison MacLachlan, Principal, York Humber High School)

### Fixed vs Growth Mindset

*Mindsets are beliefs about yourself and your most basic qualities, such as your intelligence, your talents and your personality.*

In a **fixed mindset**, people believe their basic qualities are fixed traits, whereas in a **growth mindset**, people believe that these qualities are not pre-determined, that they can be developed through dedication and hard work.



Teaching a growth mindset creates motivation and productivity in the world of business, education and sports, and it also enhances relationships. People with a growth mindset see the value in learning as a journey. They embrace challenges and view these as opportunities for learning.

Those with a growth mindset see effort as a path to mastery, i.e. a necessary part of success. They understand that even geniuses and star athletes have had to work hard for their achievement and they admire effort, for no matter what your ability is, effort is what turns that ability into accomplishment. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. (Adapted from: School Mental Health ASSIST, Wellness Committee)

## Balance in Education – The Growth Mindset & Well-Being

An open to learning stance coupled with a growth mindset (Dweck) is at the heart of being a balanced educator, one able to maximize the potential of all learners. Please take a moment to look at the photograph to the right. It was taken at the entrance to the garden at John Polanyi SS located at Lawrence Ave. West and the Allen. In School Effectiveness we use this as a metaphor for learning and well-being for staff, students and families.



When we ask participants to share what this photograph suggests they invariably focus on the invitation suggested by the open gate. The idea that we all need differing approaches to learning and understanding is represented by the different plants, shrubs, herbs and flowers; different support and nurture. Moreover, the paths take one to areas not seen from the entrance; there are hidden treasures and opportunities; hidden in plain sight/site. Until people know the exact location it is often assumed that this is a rural setting, not one close to high-rises or highways. So, immediately we are reminded to check our biases and assumptions.

Part of this garden is dedicated to an outside classroom with large tables to accommodate student work. This is an integrated learning space that honours experiential learning and sharing. Being outdoors in nature is affirming for many. In addition, there are entrepreneurial opportunities for produce to be marketed.

The community has respected this garden and takes pride in its relevance to their lives as well as for the school. The urban farm is an enterprise in partnership with P.A.C.T., a Rotary Club initiative. There are a total of 7 in the TDSB with the original ones in North West Etobicoke at West Humber Cl, Elmbank JMA, and Thistletown Cl. In all these learning spaces youth are participating in healthy ventures related to food, nature and personal growth and reflection on the interconnectedness of life.

At Central Etobicoke High School we were introduced to the large mural created by the students to reflect the NAC 10 participation: the Turtle, the roots (7 for the Grandfathers' Teachings), the medicine wheel and many coloured leaves representing diversity. This mural depicts the depth of understanding promoted within the student body. Attached to the mural is the plan to beautify the courtyard and continue with the horticulture program in order to enhance wellness amongst both staff and students. All contributing to a growth mindset. (By: Annie Appleby, System Superintendent, School Effectiveness)



### The "A" for Effort is the One that Counts! A.K.A. The Power of "Yet"!

A child does well on a test or gets a good report card, and you want to provide some positive feedback. What should you say? a) "You must be really smart!" or b) "You must have worked really hard!" Surely it's better to build up children's self-esteem and affirm how capable they are, not make them think they have to make up for a lack of ability with extra effort, *right?*

*Wrong.* Psychologist Carol Dweck has done lots of research on how people understand why they do well at things, and she has found that there are two ways of viewing ability and achievement. You can think you are born with a certain level of ability, which doesn't change much, if at all. Dweck calls this a *fixed mindset*. You can also think your ability can change, if you work on it; Dweck says this is a *growth mindset*. People usually have elements of both fixed and growth mindsets, but some of us are more on the "fixed" side. It turns out that the differences between these contrasting views are very important.

People with a mainly fixed mindset may shy away from challenging tasks, because their performance could prove that they have less ability than they'd like to show—or even acknowledge. People with this mindset are more likely to lack confidence and to take setbacks hard, because after negative outcomes they may feel like failures. Furthermore, these people are more prone to suffer from anxiety and depression.

On the other hand, when people have a growth mindset, they're more likely to try their hand at challenges, because if they don't do well at a task, they know it doesn't say anything about how well they *could do* if they practiced more or worked harder. In fact, if they face setbacks they often confront their problems and work harder to overcome them.

We seem to put great value on success without effort, and yet—the life stories of many successful people are stories of not doing well at something in the beginning, failing again and again, but working hard to finally meet with success. In other words, achieving great things often means having a growth mindset. The best news Dweck offers is that over time people can change from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. How?

One simple way to help kids—and, for that matter, adults—is to teach them *the power of "yet."* If they don't meet with success at something, tell them that they simply can't do that *yet*. Imagine this exchange: "I failed another math test. I stink at math!" "I guess you haven't mastered the ideas in that unit *yet*. Let's keep working at them."

Eventually, people can get the message that one negative result isn't the end of the road; with effort and time they may well be able to achieve the success they desire. (By: Paul Legzdins, Chief, Psychological Services – Area C)



## Summer Vacation: A Good Thing for Children's Mental Health?

There is little research on the effects of summer vacation on children's mental health, as past stakeholders focused instead on academic retention (Cooper, et al, 1996<sup>1</sup>). Yet, it is not hard to hear the battle cry of students pleading for release into the playground-paradise known as "summer vacation". What is it that children and youth understand about their need for a break, and why should grown-ups pay closer attention?

As children's mental health begins to claim important space on the health and social policy landscape, there is a growing value for 'wellness' as an unfolding concept. It is not just about how much academic material a child retains over the summer, but also about the 'additive' advantage of summer break on a whole child's sense of well-being.

There is some growing evidence that vacations can influence stress-reduction and adult physical and mental health. In a meta-analytic review, (Bloom et al. 2009<sup>2</sup>) found a small positive relationship between vacations and health and well-being, and proposed more comprehensive 'vacation research' to illuminate this relationship.

Educators and parents could learn a lot from children and youth about mental health over the summer months, as well as through remembering personal experiences. For many adults, the very mention of 'childhood summer' can trigger a collection of memories rich with imagery, and sensory and emotional content. Many attest to a qualitative difference in childhood perceptions of time, with summer providing a vital setting for life experience unhindered by the usual stressors.

Saadia is a 14-year-old secondary student with a strong academic profile. Her eyes twinkle at the mere mention of summer vacation. She professes "there is no stress behind you...you can just go at it and do anything you think will make you happy". She shares a strong desire to live life without the time-crunch and structure so present throughout the academic year. At the same time, she acknowledges that mental health and wellness is dependent on creating new experiences, both social and recreational. She has already begun to make a list of things she wants to do, including must-see movies, and learning how to swim at the YMCA.

Ms. Green, an HSP teacher at Rene Gordon Health and Wellness Academy, wonders if summer vacation promises the same opportunities for social connection that she experienced as a child. She believes the two-month break may weaken important peer networks as well as attachment bonds with teachers and staff. She hypothesizes that smaller breaks throughout the year could preserve these important relationships.

Cole, an 11-year old boy about to complete his final year before middle school, sings the famous "I will get to do whatever I want" chorus. For him, summer vacation is a reprise from kids who have teased him throughout the year. He forecasts a summer without complex social problems, populated by friends of his choosing.

There are many research questions that have yet to be tested about summer vacation and children's mental health. While aspects of this collective wisdom are not yet grounded in much empirical research, it is safe to presume that the magic of 'summer vacation' on mental health is compounded by multiple variables such as community safety and access to social opportunities. Regardless of this complexity, students continue to join in the rhythmically synced plea to just give them a break! (By: Lisa Barnwell, Social Worker – Area D)

<sup>1</sup>Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. (n.d.). *The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Meta-Analytic Review*. *Review of Educational Research*, 227-268.

<sup>2</sup>Bloom, J., & Kompier, M. (2009). *Do We Recover from Vacation? Meta-analysis of Vacation Effects on Health and Well-being*. Konstanz: Bibliothek der Universität Konstanz.

---

### Additional Resources:

Sesame Street: Janelle Monae - Power of Yet - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLeUvZvuvAs>

Fixed vs. Growth: The two basic mindsets that shape our lives: <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/29/carol-dweck-mindset/>

*The Most Magnificent Thing*, by Ashley Spires – Kids Can Press, 2014

---

*On behalf of the Mental Health and Well-Being Core Leadership Team*

*We wish everyone an amazing, enjoyable, refreshing and safe summer.*

*We hope you do what inspires and relaxes you. We hope you create lasting memories with the ones you cherish. More importantly, we hope you make time to care for YOU! Thank you for a great year.*

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

Leslie Fox, Executive Assistant – Student Support Services and Care