

Mental Health and Well-Being Belongs to Us

Highlights from Children's Mental Health Week

Special Edition



MAY 2015

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Mindful Monday

Mental Health Week at R.H. McGregor

Until last week, all I cared about was doing things to keep physically healthy like getting exercise, brushing my teeth and being careful when I climbed a tree. But on Monday, when Mrs. Chatzis announced something about MENTAL Health I realized that you shouldn't only take care of yourself physically, but also mentally. During mental health week, every day had its own theme, starting with Mindful Monday and ending with Fit Friday. Every day we did something nice for either ourselves or others around us. On Tuesday, we had something called "mindful minutes" and that was one of my favorite activities of mental health week. I thought that it was a great way to help my brain just relax. We did it again 2 days later and I enjoyed experiencing it again. At the end of the week, I realized more and more why mental health is important and why you should take care of yourself in multiple ways. All you have to do is find an activity you enjoy that helps you with your physical and mental health.

(By: Marina - Grade 5, R.H. McGregor)



"Mental health week was a great experience for the whole school. This is the first year R.H. McGregor celebrated Mental Health Week. We found this week a very relaxing week. Every morning kids came to talk about mental health and about taking care of yourself, not only in a physical way but in a mental way. (Kaiya and Petra - Grade 5, R.H. McGregor Public School)



Students from R.H. McGregor Public School raising awareness about mental health and well-being

Take Time to Create Tuesday

Lynngate Community Circles

The week of May 3-9 was Children's Mental Health Week, and we wanted to do something special at Lynngate Junior Public School.

On Creative Tuesday, we designed a whole-school project to display our "art of community". Every member of our school, from students, teachers, support staff and administration, daycare children and staff, as well as lunch room supervisors and parents, coloured their own quarter of a circle. We then put all those quarters together to create one big picture and to show how we all fit seamlessly together. We are all part of the Lynngate Junior Public School Community!

(By: Diane Kriksciunas, Principal, Lynngate Junior Public School)



Lynngate Junior Public School "Take Time to Create" Circles



The Importance of Raising Awareness

As a parent I feel that Children's Mental Health Week is important. Often we forget how much stress and worry our young children can experience, and having time to learn about ways to support our children is important. My family has experience dealing with mental health concerns and through awareness my children feel supported not only by me, but by their peers. Knowing they are not alone in their struggles helps them feel comfortable with who they are, and what they are experiencing.

I know that my children's school has played an active role in creating symposiums for parents and for children as well, such as the ER12 "Healthy Minds, Healthy Kids" event this past week, on "Taking Care Thursday". I think it is wonderful to be able to explore the many options for support and services that are available in one location, which makes it more accessible to families. I also believe that a symposium designed for children is extremely important, as many teens and pre-teens have struggles that they do not feel comfortable discussing with their parents. Providing them with the education and tools to support themselves is a much needed proactive step in preparing today's youth to be healthy as a whole (mind, body and soul).

Children's Mental Health Week is only one tool of many that helps bring awareness to the issues facing youth today. Using this tool and many others, it will help breakdown the misconceptions and the stigma surrounding mental health.

(By: Zara Willmott - TDSB Parent)



Parents and staff practice stress relief techniques at at ER12's annual "Healthy Minds, Healthy Kids" event.

SuperCouncil Presents Grade 7/8 Mental Health & Well-Being Summit "Taking Action Together" – Reflections

By attending this summit, we were hoping to get a better understanding of what mental health is and what people go through when they are experiencing mental illness. As part of the Health and Wellness Committee (H.A.W.C.) at North Kipling Junior Middle School, we were also hoping to get new strategies on how to make our school a better positive place, and how to inform more people about our committee.

We were completely blown away by Asante (the keynote speaker). His take on what he went through and his experiences with mental health and how he dealt with it were inspiring. He taught us that people can be affected by mental health, when it has to do with their surroundings and the people around them. A lot of students can really connect to Asante and what he went through because his story is similar to what other students our age are dealing with. It was great to hear how he coped with mental illness and how he was able to move forward and get help and be successful and happy. We really enjoyed listening and learning from his experiences.

We felt that the breakout games were an effective way to teach us that you never know what people might be going through. The "airplane game" taught us that you shouldn't judge people based on a little bit of information. For example, after the celebrities were revealed, people changed their minds about wanting to sit beside them. We also felt that the "Opening Doors and Hearts" video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIHtuKc3Gig>) was extremely powerful to show how small things can have a huge impact.

One of the most beneficial parts of the Summit was when we got a chance to share and learn about different initiatives that other schools were doing or have done. We were able to come up with new ideas for the H.A.W.C. to implement at our own school for this year and also to plan for the upcoming year. On our taxi ride home, we were already brainstorming on how to make our school a more positive place because we were so inspired after participating in this summit.

The day after the summit, we started writing positive and motivational messages on the windows and doors of our school to let people know that they are special and they are not alone!

(By: Poomika K., Prianthe R, Vaishnavii S., & Hemali P., North Kipling Junior Middle School Students)

Taking Care Thursday



George Harvey CI Grade 11 Leadership students presenting at the Grade 7 & 8 Summit



George Harvey Collegiate Institute student, Vicky V. with her poster "The Stigma Surrounding Mental Health"

George Harvey Students Help Others Learn How to Take Care

Initiated by the Senior Leadership class this year at George Harvey, the Student Mental Health Committee was created to decrease stigma around mental health challenges. The students designed campaigns that targeted reducing stress and anxiety. Activities such as bubble wrap popping, positive messages and affirmations written on windows around the school and lockers were incorporated. Grade 11 leadership students Hatice U., Stacey S., Rachel N., and Danika F. presented their yearlong initiatives to over 150 students at the May 6th SuperCouncil Grade 7 and 8 Mental Health and Well-Being Summit. The hard work of the Student Mental Health Committee culminated during a whole school assembly which featured guest speaker Asante Houghton who addressed the student body incorporating spoken word and hip hop to describe his journey towards mental health and wellness. Leadership student Vicky V. designed a poster entitled "The Stigma Surrounding Mental Health" detailing facts around mental health and wellness and describing supports available for students. The poster was distributed to all classrooms at the completion of the assembly. At George Harvey we are very proud of all the hard work the student Mental Health committee had done to support a nurturing environment where all students feel welcomed and have a sense of belonging.

(By: Marcia McCurdy Fagan, Vice Principal & Amanda Drover –Soriano, Leadership Teacher – George Harvey Collegiate Institute)

Positive Steps for Mental Health

Be kind to yourself. Encourage rather than criticize yourself. Treat yourself the way you would treat a friend in the same situation.

Take up a hobby and/or learn a new skill. Increase your confidence and interest, meet others or prepare for finding work.

Help others. Get involved with a community project, charity or help out someone you know.

Eat well. Eat regularly, eat breakfast, eat a balanced diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Connect with others. Stay in touch with family and friends; make regular and frequent contact with them.

Exercise regularly. Being active helps lift our mood, reduces stress and anxiety, improves physical health and gives us energy.

Have fun and/or be creative. Having fun helps us feel better and increases our confidence.

Relax. Make time for yourself. Allow yourself to chill out and relax. Breathe... imagine a balloon in your belly, inflating and deflating as you breathe in and out...

Ask for help/Talk about it. Even though it can be difficult, ask those around you for help.

See the bigger picture. What meaning am I giving this? Is it fact or opinion? How would others see it?

Accepting: "It is as it is". Some situations we just can't change. Try to surf the waves instead of trying to stop them.

Happy Child and Youth Care Practitioner Week

Poster included in the "Mental Health Minute Kit" provided by the Child and Youth Services Mental Health and Well-Being Committee

Fit Friday



Students and staff walking to raise awareness for Children's Mental Health

Making Strides in Mental Health Awareness

To conclude a busy week of activities celebrating Children's Mental Health Week, and in the spirit of our daily theme of "Fit Friday", many staff, students and community members joined in on a community walk to raise awareness of children's mental health. Led by Trustee Jennifer Arp, Ward 8, students from Earl Haig Secondary School, Drewry Secondary School and East York Alternative Secondary School, along with staff from various departments at 5050 Yonge Street, walked together around our Education Centre. Similar walks were held at 140 Borough Drive, and many schools from across the district.

After the walk there was a reception where greetings and remarks were shared on TDSB's commitment to mental health and well-being and how it is essential to student achievement, along with a poignant video from Hardbord Collegiate Institute entitled "Lighten the Load" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uCRb6TeHb8>). Five students from various schools were presented prizes and certificates as winners of the Child and Youth Services Children's Mental Health Week poster contest. The walk not only served to raise awareness in the community around children's mental health, but got many of us up, and active on Fit Friday, taking a break and highlighting the important connection between regular physical activity and mental wellness! (By: Saleem Haniff, Social Worker, Mental Health and Well-Being – System Support)

Parents as Partners – Taking Action Together

The First Annual Mental Health and Well-Being Parent Symposium welcomed around 200 participants on Saturday, May 9th, 2015 at Earl Haig Secondary School. The one day event was a huge success and was filled with information booths, workshops and a panel discussion. By the end of the Symposium, parents felt inspired, passionate and confident in being partners with the TDSB in taking action together to support students' doing well in school and in life.

The event was well organized. Many parents pre-registered online and for those who were not able to pre-register, they started lining up even before 9:00 a.m.! With Director Quan's greetings and opening remarks, parents heard a message of care, effort and support from the TDSB towards students' mental health and well-being. Parents also heard Director Quan's commitment to work to create less stressful working environments in support of TDSB employees' mental health and well-being. Director Quan closed her sincere speech by saying, that as parents we are part of a team and we can't work alone in dealing with our children's mental health issues.

Next there was a physical activity break led by Antonio Montes, from the 60 Minute Kids Club. Even though it was 10 minutes, the audience was energized and ready to receive important messages and helpful tips from our keynote speaker Jennifer Kolari. Jennifer is well-known to parents, and her speech was so intense and deeply engaging. Her dramatic tone, her high-functional expertise, her insightful strategies and her sense of humour filled the auditorium with laughter. Jennifer's keynote made a remarkable difference in helping parents to understand what may be going on in our children's developing minds. The audience related to what she said and went away with an abundance of information, ideas and strategies.

The Symposium provided 11 workshops, and all workshops looked very interesting! I attended the “Understanding Anxiety” workshop - the room was packed! Maria Battiston provided us with an understanding of the physical, social, emotional and cognitive signs of anxiety. Parents were very interactive and raised a lot of questions in relation to their specific situation and challenges in support of their child’s mental health concerns.

After lunch and the second set of workshops, there was a panel discussion. Each of the panelists spoke about the TDSB's role and how the system works in terms of supporting students and their families. The panel addressed parents' questions and helped parents further understand how to access supports within the TDSB. In Sandy Spyropoulos' closing remarks, she said the TDSB takes its responsibility very seriously; parents are raising the children of tomorrow and we move into the future taking action together.

As one of parents attending the Symposium, I am inspired to take action and am sure many parents feel the same. We see the needs and the urgency of our children regarding their mental health and well-being. We have a better understanding now of how mental health and well-being doesn't just belong to our children, it affects everyone including ourselves, educators and society - it belongs to all of us! (By: Jane Cheung – TDSB Parent)

Thank you for Making Children's Mental Health Week 2015 a HUGE Success!



To view a transcript of Children's Mental Health Week Twitter activity please [click here](#)