

# Mental Health and Well-Being Belongs to Us

## Leading, Innovating and Collaborating

To Increase Mental Health and Well-Being at the TDSB



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Issue #8

### Exercise To Success: Developing Healthy Young Leaders

Exercise To Success is a dynamic physical fitness and recreation program with a special focus on relationship and community building. We are determined to continually engage students (elementary, intermediate and secondary), parents, siblings, teachers, community members and volunteers in a powerful and positive experience. Inclusiveness, warmth, support, safety, flexibility and fun are core values that help guide the program. "Community or group discussions" are key components of all sessions, with special attention being placed on healthy attitudes and the mental health and well-being of all participants. In addition to developing healthy individuals and communities, Exercise To Success is very committed to developing strong youth leaders who will positively impact their communities.

**Regular Participant:** "When someone comes in new, they get a nice warm welcome and introduction. You feel safe, secure and everyone is loving and outgoing."

**Youth Leader:** "The Exercise To Success group is like a branch. It allows me to reach out to others."

The Program runs after school on a weekly basis in each location (currently at Emery Collegiate Institute and Thistletown Collegiate Institute) and incorporates: formalized group fitness facilitated by youth leaders, group discussion/educational presentations, a nutritional snack, informal recreation and leadership development.

Leadership development is a central aspect of the Exercise To Success experience. All participants have the opportunity to take part in some level of leadership at their regular weekly school sessions, such as co-facilitating the formalized fitness component of the program with other youth leaders. However, some youth are interested in a more in-depth leadership experience. Therefore, in addition to participating in their regular weekly sessions, these students also have the chance to join other student leaders in delivering a modified version of the Exercise To Success Program to local schools and community groups. These programs have been time limited and have ranged from 1 to 6 sessions. The strength of Exercise To Success is its intentional and genuine inclusion of everyone from the school community, adapted for all levels of activity and ability, and the unique and engaging facilitation style of the students as healthy young leaders.

(By: Richard Filler, Social Worker Area A)

**Community Professional Who Attends Regularly:** "It's a grassroots way of everyone getting together. Some think youth are disengaged, not interested and apathetic, but when you go straight to the source, you get a very different picture. You get a picture of students wanting to get more involved....and this is a pretty strong foundation."

Thistletown CI Students Facilitate and Engage in the Exercise To Success Program



### TDSB Restores! Creating Community and Connections through Restorative Practices

Caring and Safe Schools is always working with proactive approaches to ensure student success. Working along with other departments, we are continuing to provide support to school communities wanting to become restorative in nature. Stemming from Aboriginal communities, restorative practices have a long history of helping to resolve conflict.

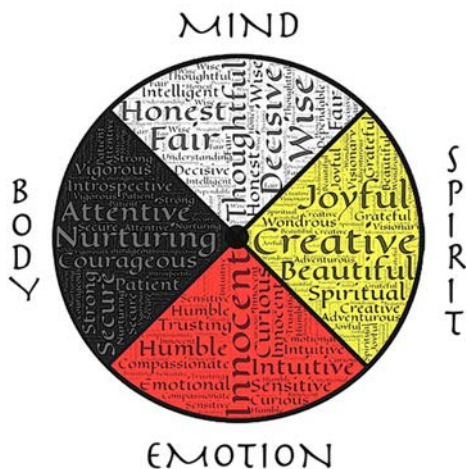
As a philosophy, the Restorative Practice Framework provides a construct for acting restoratively in a 'community'. With application in a variety of settings such as schools, the aim of the framework is to focus on maintaining, building and repairing relationships. It draws on a variety of restorative approaches across a continuum of practices. In schools it is meant as an integrated and proactive approach where a major goal is the effective building of strong relationships which are the key to learning, healthy well-being and positive school communities. In instances where Restorative Practice is a city wide initiative, a sense of community, increased mutual respect, strong relationships, improved attendance as well as a sense of inclusiveness are some of the general benefits. The framework has direct application to teaching and learning and creating and maintaining safe and healthy schools.

Schools embracing the Restorative Practice Framework report a safer, more connected environment with higher levels of student achievement as existing and new practices are framed through the restorative lens. There are many schools across the district that have adopted and successfully use this practice. Caring and Safe Schools continues to provide education and professional learning in this area. For more information on incorporating the Restorative Practice Framework in your school, please contact Ruth Bell at [ruth.bell@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:ruth.bell@tdsb.on.ca). (By: Ruth Bell, Safe Schools Administrator)

## Living in Balance

Although there are over 400 diverse First Nations in Canada, there is a commonality that unites us with respect to how we view mental health. Mental health cannot be separated from emotional, spiritual, and physical health and well-being. It has been suggested that “to live in wellness means striving to be in balance within self (Body, Mind, Spirit and Emotion), with others (Family, Community), with the Spirit World and with the land and nature. If there is an imbalance in any of these areas there is stress on our overall system. In time this stress causes illness and it can be physical illness, mental/emotional illness (such as depression), or spiritual illness” (A Path Forward: BC First Nations and Aboriginal Peoples Mental Wellness and Substance Abuse – A 10 Year Plan, p. 14).

World view is embedded within language. My ancestry is Kaniekehaka (Mohawk), and the phrase *Skennen ko:wa ken* is often translated as “how are you?” If we pause for a moment to consider how many times we are asked this question daily, or how many times we ask someone else, it is easy to see that the English translation lacks sincerity when we don’t wait for an answer. In Mohawk, the question is actually asking “are you at peace?” within your mind, body, spirit and emotions. Cree Elder Joanne Dallaire reminds us that we are human beings before anything else (nationality, gender, job title), and as human beings, our first language is that of emotions, particularly tears when we first arrive in the world. Yet as we age, we strive to suppress our emotions and are often embarrassed or made uncomfortable by tears, although they are necessary, healing and nothing to be ashamed of.



The Cree call themselves Nēhiyawak, which means “the people who live in balance.” Following the teachings of the Medicine Wheel, it is a lifelong journey to balance mind, body, spirit and emotions. Today, most people place emphasis on the body and mind and neglect the other equally important areas.

For more information, please visit: [www.fourdirectionsteachings.com](http://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com)

(By: Michelle Corneau, Instructional Leader – Aboriginal Education)

## Mental Health and Well-Being belongs to...Speech-Language Pathology!

May is Speech, Language and Hearing Awareness Month! This provides an opportunity to highlight the important link between strong social communication skills and mental health and well-being. Social communication skills help students build friendships, understand the “unspoken” rules in the classroom and share their thoughts and feelings effectively with others.

Research shows that students with oral language difficulties struggle to achieve not only academic success but also social competence (Brinton, Robinson, & Fujiki (2004)). Therefore, participation in and enjoyment of school may be limited and affect both emotional development, mental well-being and overall quality of life.



Students with speech, language and communication delays typically have great difficulty with social communication because they struggle to:

- Appreciate their listener's perspective and respond appropriately to the "intent" of the listener's message;
- Keep up with the fast pace of conversation;
- Understand sarcasm, innuendo and figurative language; and
- Use verbal and nonverbal signals in conversations to enter conversations and initiate and shift topics.

Your school speech-language pathologist can support educators and parents in developing social communication skills in your students. For suggestions, please speak to your school speech-language pathologist or look for our flyer on Direct Line during the first week of May.

(By, David Haffner & Sharon McWhirter, Chiefs of Speech and Language Pathology)



Forest Hill Collegiate Institute celebrates International Day of Pink (April 8) with Toronto Police Service. Congratulations for your leadership and commitment to stand up against bullying.



Chief of Police, Bill Blair tells Forest Hill Collegiate Institute students that leadership counts! Stand up, have courage and wear pink in your hearts every day.

- 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.
- The Anxiety Awareness Module with your staff. This module can be found on the Professional Support Services webpage under training modules or by clicking the following link: <http://tdsbweb/site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=10486&menuid=42888&pageid=36043>

## Innovative Use of Breathing and Yoga in Social Work Practice

Six year old Jazmine practices a yoga pose in the office. She is a bright-eyed grade 1 student whose eagerness to learn is often disrupted by her difficulty in managing her emotions. Jazmine is now learning how to apply the practices of yoga to improve her self-regulation skills.

The ancient practice of yoga includes elements of physical postures, mindfulness, meditation and regulated breathing. It has been extolled for its many virtues and more recently for its applicability in school settings. There is burgeoning scholarly evidence that demonstrates that yoga helps students to achieve greater focus<sup>1</sup>, relieve tension and stress<sup>2</sup>, regulate emotions and increase overall school performance<sup>3</sup>.

A 2013 study found that after a 20 minute morning yoga practice "...participants were better able to focus... process information more accurately and also learn, hold and update pieces of information."<sup>4</sup> Another recent study found that preschoolers who practiced yoga improved their self-regulation compared to a control group.<sup>5</sup>

Diaphragmatic breathing used during yoga activates the parasympathetic nervous system, the part of the body's nervous system responsible for the body at rest. Using this type of controlled breathing helps to reduce the amount of cortisol, a stress hormone that interferes with learning, in the body. Students are able to use diaphragmatic breathing in any stressful situation, such as tests, presentations, athletic events, and social events.

As a school social worker, there are many creative ways to utilize the practice of yoga in your work. Aside from teaching a formal yoga class, you can incorporate aspects of yoga into individual and group work. I teach kids how to do diaphragmatic breathing during individual sessions and often close sessions with it. This helps to reinforce the practice for the student's use outside of our session and to create a sense of containment for any unpleasant emotions that may have been stirred up during the session.

Diaphragmatic breathing can be taught to kids using bubbles, the bigger the inhale, the bigger the bubble so it is a natural way to reinforce deep breathing. A wonderful introduction to teach young kids diaphragmatic breathing can be found on Sesame Street, "Belly Breathe" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH8TWHv0UkU>) features the rapper Common and the country singer Colbie Callait singing instructions for students on just how to do it.

You can also teach mindfulness meditation to students with 'Smiling Mind' (<http://smilingmind.com.au/blog/>), a program designed to teach students how to meditate while providing fun visuals to help them compare their mood pre and post meditation mood-state. In short, yoga's efficacy in a school setting for helping students has been demonstrated and of course is just plain fun!

(By: Aliza Shupac, Social Worker Area D)

### Sources:

<sup>1</sup>Dapeng Chen D. & Pauwels L. (2014). Perceived Benefits of Incorporating Yoga into Classroom Teaching: Assessment of the Effects of "Yoga Tools for Teachers".

<sup>2</sup>Wall, R.B. (2005). Tai Chi and mindfulness-based stress reduction in a Boston Public Middle School. *(Journal of Pediatr Health Care, (19) 4, 230-237)*.

<sup>3</sup>Slovacek, S., Tucker, S. Pantoja L. (2003). Program Evaluation and Research Collaborative (PERC), A Study of the Yoga Ed Program at The Accelerated School (2003)

<sup>4</sup>Gothel, No, Pontefex, M.B., Hillman, C & McAuley (2013). The Acute Effects of Yoga on Executive Function.

<sup>5</sup>Razza R.A., Bergen-Cico D. & Raymond Kimberly (2013). Enhancing Preschoolers' Self-Regulation Via Mindful Yoga, *Journal of Child and Family Studies (1.42)*

### Upcoming Events

Making the Connections: Fostering Healthy School Communities, Support Student Mental Health & Wellbeing  
Toronto Public Health Open House April 28, 2015 at Novotel North York – 3 Park Home Avenue

SuperCouncil Presents Mental Health and Well-Being Summit "Taking Action Together" for Students in Grades 7 & 8:  
May 6, 2015 at Eastern Commerce Collegiate Institute

Children's Mental Health Week: May 3 – 9, 2015  
More information to follow in the coming weeks

Mental Health and Well-Being Parent Symposium – Taking Action Together: Saturday, May 9, 2015 at Earl Haig Secondary School from 8:30 a.m. – 2:45 p.m.

### 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