

Youth Partnership in Action - HLYC

Mental health week at Princess Margaret Secondary and Summerland Secondary

Each month, we highlight healthy schools stories. Have a healthy school story to share? DASH wants to hear from you! Click [here](#) to view the Healthy Schools BC Stories Map to read more stories or submit your own.

Healthy Living Youth Council (HLYC) members and alumni have been connecting to create positive change for mental health. Current HLYC member Caitlin partnered with HLYC alumna Rylee in planning school-based events to engage youth in talking about mental health.

[IDEASfest Okanagan 2014](#) was the beginning of a movement that would bring positive change and strong initiative into Princess Margaret and Summerland Secondary Schools. This event was designed primarily to give the youth of Penticton an opportunity to share their ideas, garner support from adult community activists, and collaborate with like-minded youth from throughout the valley. Through this event, youth were able to come together to focus on improving mental health awareness and services in the community, in turn allowing youth to begin the planning for the upcoming National Mental Health Awareness week. Rylee and Caitlin share their experience from the event below, including the benefit of working together.

Rylee, HLYC alumna member:

With support from our teacher partners, we agreed that a week-long event followed by continuous small events and or group meetings would be the most impactful way to reach students. At Princess Margaret Secondary School, I organized a small event for every day of the week from May 5th- 9th which each connected with a theme that would relate to Mental Health. Monday was gratitude, and a giant black canvas of paper was put up in the common area, with the white chalk words, "What Are You Grateful For?" written across the top. Students were encouraged to think about the things that made them happy or thankful, and chalk them onto the paper. By the end of the week, the wall was filled with positive thoughts and sentiments that I hoped would remind students of the good in their lives. Monday was also the day that I addressed the student body to explain the week's events, as well as to share the story of my journey with a mental illness. The message that I strived to get across is that the only way that we can raise awareness about mental health, is to eliminate the stigma by being open about our personal struggles. After the more serious kick-off, the week continued with fun-filled events that included bunnies in the common area, free Booster Juices, and planting flowers.

Caitlin, HLYC member:

So many people in our world take positive thinking for granted. May 7th was National Child and Youth Mental Health Day in Canada. I wouldn't have even known about the day if I hadn't met Rylee a couple weeks before when we both attended IDEASfest in Penticton. Talking to her during that event really moved me. And Rylee also just happened to be an HLYC alumni member. She was so inspiring and supportive that I decided I needed to have an event for this important day at my own school in Summerland. I got together a group of teachers, speakers and students and planned out a school-wide mental wellness fair for May 7th!

At Summerland Secondary, I put together a day that would give students the opportunity to choose an activity during a school-wide spare block that relates to mental health. Options included a hike up a near-by mountain, yoga and meditation, an anxiety seminar, ultimate Frisbee, and Tea and Talk, which was hosted by Rylee and Jenny Mitchell, Health Promoting Schools Coordinator. The variety of choices allowed students to find an activity that would suit them, thereby adding an element of comfort to the stigmatic topic that the day was focused on. Students enjoyed the positive effect that the outdoors and exercise had on their mood, the calming strategies offered by yoga and meditation, and learning about the stress and anxiety that affects the majority of our society. Tea and Talk gave students a chance to sip tea while working with Jenny and Rylee to come up with ways to improve their mental health, as well as learning about strategies that are proven to help. We also had a number of teacher-led sessions, along with three sessions put on by guest speakers. Rochelle Henbury, a local musician, put on an amazing session about music and mental wellness. Dr. Cathi Shaw spoke to a group of students about strategies for reducing stress in the transition from secondary to post-secondary studies. Supplies from FamilySmart accompanied the activities, and students wore stickers and pins that boasted, "I Care about You". Posters were also provided by [FamilySmart](#), and they were put up around the school where students could respond to the prompt, "I Know You Care When...". Overall, the day was a major success, and it got the school talking about mental health, which is the first step in eliminating the stigma. The event was great and wouldn't have been nearly as successful without the amazing people who helped me. I hope it can be even bigger next year!

Rylee and Caitlin:

We hope that these events will not only continue in our schools, but grow to become something that is a part of our education system, as this topic is one that requires attention. Mental health is a component of our overall health, and this is something that is not always realized by the public. Not only could people's quality of living be greatly improved if society was educated about how to maintain and improve their mental health, but lives could be saved by teaching strategies to deal with anxiety and depression, especially among youth. It is a long journey to a world where there is no stigma surrounding mental health and mental illness, but it is a journey that we will begin by taking leadership in our own schools, communities, and homes, by just talking about it.