

# Mental Health and Well-Being Belongs to Us

## Connection = Kindness + Friendship



FEBRUARY 2016

Issue #16

*The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched, they must be felt by the heart*  
Helen Keller

### Getting Connected

#### 'Students 4 Well-Being' Come Together to Create a Community of Caring

'Students 4 Well-Being' is the official name of the new TDSB board-wide Mental Health and Well-Being Student Engagement Leadership Committee. Secondary students from across the TDSB created this group after coming together this past fall at 3 mental health and well-being student summits, recognizing the benefit of learning from each other and sharing our wellness activities with each other. Many schools have wellness groups and most of them work throughout the year to help reduce stigma around mental illness and improve well-being in their schools and communities. Every wellness group is crucial to student well-being and success, and can make a huge difference in students' lives both in school and outside of school. Our main goal this year is to connect all wellness groups in secondary schools in the TDSB so we can share activities, initiatives, ideas, campaigns and suggestions on how to keep students well.

We did this by starting a social media platform, (an online community) through the creation of our Facebook group and a Weebly blog. We hope this will provide wellness groups in schools with a vehicle to share ideas with other schools and create opportunities for students to get involved and be a part of something that is so important and beneficial.

#### Students 4 Well-Being



Student leaders can be the change that is necessary to create caring school communities by taking the initiative to start a wellness group in their school. We are here to help! 'Students 4 Well-Being' will provide everything that is needed to help your group to get started, to stay engaged in wellness work or to take it to the next level! Some of the activities that wellness groups have done in schools in the TDSB include: yoga before exams, mindful minutes on the announcements, speed friending, mindfulness bubbles, mentoring new students, teacher thank you cards, puppy rooms, and more! It is these kinds of simple things that can turn a great day into a fantastic one for everyone and as a whole improve kindness, connection, friendship and foster a positive atmosphere in your school. 'Students 4 Well-Being' is ready to make change and improve well-being in TDSB schools, are you? If so, join our group on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/groups/1675707596001425/>) - or search 'Students 4 Well-Being'. Join the conversation, share, learn and be well! (By: Gabe M., Grade 11, on behalf of 'Students 4 Well-Being')

### We All Have a Connection to wellNSS!



wellNSS members raising awareness on #BellLetsTalk Day

Northern Secondary School is one of the largest schools in the TDSB with well over 1600 students. Our mental health and well-being initiative, **wellNSS**, promotes reducing the stigma around talking about mental health. We feel that every student and staff member is a member of wellNSS because we all have mental health!

This year we have been drawing connections between how physical health affects mental health and how mental health affects us all. We've hosted activities that include a walking activity on the school track, making stress balls, covering our front foyer in bubble wrap and having students pop it at lunchtime, a "wellNSS and Chill" movie event, as well as a day when St. John's Ambulance brought in several therapy dogs for students to enjoy and de-stress.

During our Mental Health Week we hosted an assembly that featured a guest speaker with a therapy dog. Many students were curious about how the therapy dog's companionship helped the speaker to cope with her anxiety and depression so we've created an event to help students understand that there are many different coping strategies available to people who are struggling with their mental well-being. Our executive team of students commented that February is a particularly stressful time for students and that having wellNSS activities that focus on practical coping strategies are very helpful and appreciated by everyone at our school. One of the reasons we hold many of our events in our front foyer at lunchtime is because this is the busiest and highest traffic area and time. What better way to promote a spirit of togetherness, connection, and community to reduce stigma? (By: Jennifer Carlesso, Guidance Counsellor, Northern Secondary School; on behalf of the wellNSS Committee)

See School Mental Health ASSIST INFO-SHEET "Welcoming Syrian Newcomer Students and Families to School" – back page

## Creating a Caring & Kind Atmosphere at Jesse Ketchum

Millions of people suffer from mental health issues across the world. It is a serious issue that not everyone knows a lot about. We must all learn about mental health; how to support those who are struggling and how to promote our own strong mental health.

Throughout the month of January, our class was promoting the importance of mental health, and the reasons why we need to talk about mental illness. We planned a day dedicated solely on promoting mental health, and exploring different ways to help strengthen our own mental health through workshops that we had prepared.



Our class split into four groups to put together PowerPoints and/or Prezis based on the workshops that we prepared for the Grade 7 and 8 students. We wanted the workshops to be informative about mental health, but also interactive and enjoyable. The workshops were about Yoga and Meditation, Healthy Eating, Expressive Art and Cooperative Games. Each PowerPoint presentation was filled with facts and information about how to participate in the activities. Mindfulness was an important component as it was the big idea and the main purpose for the activities. During some of the mindfulness activities, our peers focussed on mindful movement during our yoga workshop or mindful tasting during our healthy eating workshop.

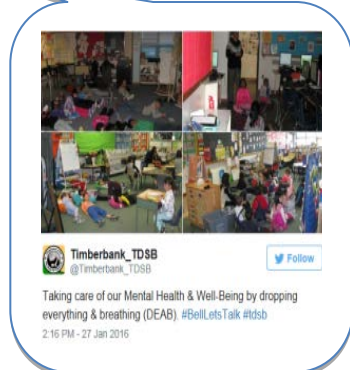
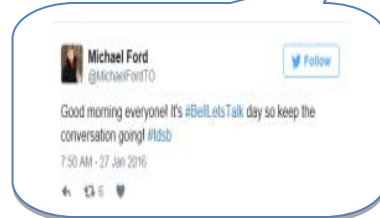
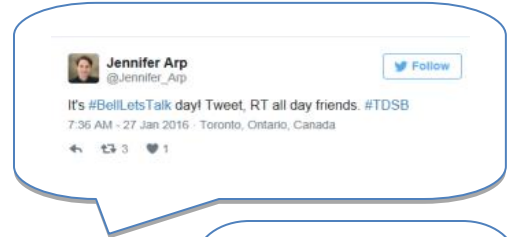
Other activities included art that expresses our personality/feelings, cooking breakfast wraps and muffins and even a co-operative egg toss. We created a schedule for each of the four classes, to make sure everyone had a chance to participate in each workshop.



Our mental health workshop day was a huge success, not only because we all worked together as a class to make it all happen, but because we have made a difference in our school. We helped to

create a caring and kind atmosphere for our peers that allows them to be free to talk about mental health. It feels good to know that our initiative has made a difference!

(By: Gigi, Grade 8, Jesse Ketchum Jr. & Sr. P.S.)



For the full storify for TDSB's #BellLetsTalk day visit: <https://storify.com/tdsb/belletstalk-at-the-tdsb-2016>

### 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.
- 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>

## White Haven Public School Receives Friendship Bench

Recently, White Haven Public School was the lucky recipient of a Friendship Bench. The Friendship Bench Project of Canada generously provides students a safe place to congregate at school. It is a safe place to help open the lines of communication where friendships grow and blossom. It is a permanent fixture in school yards, schools and communities.

"I like to just sit there and think about what just happened...when people ask me what happened I can just express it!" Shyann, Grade 5

Students may not always have the necessary social tools at their disposal to voice their concerns about bullying or any other issue. Therefore, when students use/sit on the Friendship Bench it alerts teachers, staff, volunteers, or even a classmate that they are in need of assistance.



Another remarkable quality that the Friendship Bench brings to a school community is that when children and youth help and support a child who chooses to use The Friendship Bench, the very act of this social interaction also teaches kindness, empathy, acceptance, understanding, compassion and respect.

"The Friendship Bench helps people get their mind off of things that make them upset." Aliyah, Grade 5

Kyla, from Kill It With Kindness (KIWK) came to White Haven to raise awareness about bullying and also explained to students that bullying cannot be tolerated. She encouraged students to practice being "upstanders" rather than "bystanders" before presenting them with the bench that had students cheering when it was unveiled.

Shortly after the Friendship Bench was placed in its new home, Principal Reilly encountered her first experience using the Bench. While sitting on the Bench a grade 2 student sat beside her and told her that she had a friend that was being mean to her so she told this friend that she did not want to be friends with her anymore and now she is all alone. Mrs. Reilly took the opportunity to walk this student through some self-help skills on how to manage friendship.

Executive Director, Kyla Prosser says "The environmentally friendly Friendship Bench is custom-made of 100% recycled plastic with a hand-crafted heart in the centre. The heart represents love, peace, respect, acceptance – the messages we hope to convey through our endeavours. The colour blue is featured prominently, as it is the chosen colour for anti-bullying awareness and the multi-coloured seat represents the diversity of everyone in our communities".

Source: Happenings @ TDSB

"I saw two Grade 2 students sitting on the Bench, so I went over to them and asked what was wrong. They told me they had a fight. I told them to try and apologize." Shreya, Grade 3

"Sometimes when no one will play with me and I get excluded....I go and sit down and think happy thoughts. Usually I will sit there and think what did I do wrong....why are they treating me this way. Aliyah sat beside me and it made me feel happy because someone cared." Olivia, Grade 5

"When students sit on the Friendship Bench they talk about what's bothering them...they get their problems solved and the Bench actually works." Amy, Grade 7

"I think the Friendship Bench was a good thing for White Haven because a lot of people actually come with their problems to the Bench. Then the Grade 7 and 8 students along with the lunchrooms supervisors actually solve their problems." Jessica, Grade 7

## A Mental Health and Well-Being Week in the Life of Students and Staff at Malvern Jr. PS

Classes at Malvern participated in health and wellness activities leading up to Valentine's Day and Parent-Teacher interviews.

**Health & Wellness Presentations** included Yoga time, Dairy Board presentations for primary classes and multiple workshops from Public Health for the Junior Classes (Rethink Your Drink & Who Am I/Body Image).

**Pump Up the Laughter Joke Contest** took place each day of the week. Support staff led the fun joke theme and handed out prizes: animals (secretary), food (nutrition coordinator) & "knock knock" (caretaker - students are always knocking on his door).

**Daily Physical Activity (DPA)** involved staff leading students in popular music line dances since the first week of January and on Thursday afternoon all classes joined together for a whole school workout.

**Nutrition Coordinator** ordered heart-shaped cookies & red nutritious treats for the whole school.

**Colour Connection** - students were encouraged to wear **Malvern Red, or Pink** for Thursday to celebrate friendship, learning, and Valentine's Day. This was a nice lead up to our Parent-Teacher interview evening. (By: Thelma Sambrook, Principal, Malvern Jr. P.S.)

We encourage you to **practice being kind to yourself** by acting in a way that helps you grow. This results in accepting yourself as you are and recognizing how **special you truly are**. No amount of chocolate tastes as sweet as when you are self-compassionate.



## Welcoming Syrian Newcomers

The School Mental Health ASSIST Newcomer Resource Group has created an information sheet for educators related to the mental health of newcomer students. We hope you find it useful in supporting the settlement of Syrian newcomer students from a mental health and well-being perspective. The complete version of the info sheet can be found at:

[http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/mentalHealth/school\\_mental\\_ASSIST.html](http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/mentalHealth/school_mental_ASSIST.html)

January 2016



## INFO-SHEET

### Welcoming Syrian Newcomer Students & Families to School

### 1. Creating Welcoming School Environments

*The school environment has an important impact on a student's sense of belonging and overall mental health and well-being. A culturally competent school community expresses commitment to equity and inclusion, monitors and addresses intolerance and discrimination, and demonstrates a willingness to learn about the traditions, strengths, and needs of newcomers. There are many ways that staff and students can contribute to a welcoming school environment for Syrian newcomers and others who join our school communities from different countries and cultures.*

**For example:**

- Take time to learn about the Syrian newcomer experience using credible information sources (e.g., [Citizenship and Immigration Canada](#)).
- Establish a school reception team to assist with welcoming and orientation.
- Ensure comfortable spaces for families and reception teams to meet and share information.
- Dedicate ample time for intake interviews to include parent concerns/hopes for their children.
- Ensure parents as well as students are involved in orientation activities.
- During initial meetings, inquire about the child's strengths, interests, and needs.
- Adopt a learning stance and avoid making assumptions about the family's prior experiences.
- During orientation, include information about safety procedures, routines, and attendance.
- Review aspects of school life that might be frightening for some students (e.g., ringing bells).
- Offer specially trained student helpers to provide full school tours for the whole family.
- Ensure that the student and his/her family has access to competent adult interpreters.
- Post multiple signs in Arabic and other common languages that are visible across the school.
- Provide translated information about settlement and mental health services in the community.
- Connect with families regularly to discuss their child's transition to school.

**Good Settlement Leads to Good Mental Health!**

### 2. Creating Welcoming Classroom Environments

*Creating inclusive and calm classroom environments can go a long way to preventing adjustment difficulties that can lead to problems in mental health and well-being.*

**For example:**

- Greet each student individually by name daily with a smile.
- Have predictable visual routines in the classroom. Announce changes in advance.
- Make sure students know and understand the roles of key school team members.
- Ensure the classroom environment reflects the linguistic and cultural diversity of students.
- Build relaxation breaks into each day, particularly during transitions.
- Encourage and support students' use of their first/dominant language in the classroom and at home.
- Share information with the class to help students to understand and welcome newcomers.
- Take time to get to know the unique stories and strengths of newcomer students.
- Provide opportunity for all students to share information about their unique cultural identity.
- Pair each newcomer student with a peer helper to help with orientation and routines.
- Promote compassion and understanding, and address instances of intolerance directly.
- Notice and support student leadership and kindness vis a vis newcomer classmates.
- Know how to support students and families to access settlement and mental health services.

**Build on strengths and resilience!**



**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

Leslie Fox, Executive Assistant – Student Support Services and Care