



Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health

Issue 7

Newsletter for the Mental Health Community

May 2009



Message From Stan

Dear Friends of the Chair,

These past few months since our last newsletter have been busy. Our team has been working hard, and with summer approaching we have hired five summer students. Holly Huntley, Julia Gibson, Jess Wishart, Martha Carmichael and Katie Radchuck will be joining our group to work on various projects including a resource on understanding adolescent anxiety, a youth mental health action guide, and research on the teen brain.

The capacity for us to expand our team is due in part to the generous support we receive from our funding partners. I am pleased to announce that Sun Life Financial, the T. R. Meighen Family Foundation, the Kathryn A. Weldon Charitable Foundation and the IWK have all made significant contributions to the Chair allowing us to increase the scope and reach of some of our signature projects. Their support, even in the wake of this economic climate, speaks to their commitment to enhance child and youth mental health nationally and internationally.

The timing of this support could not be better. This year the IWK Health Centre was the national host for mental health week events. Recognizing the need to enhance awareness about mental health in young people, Canada celebrated National Child and Youth Mental Health Day (May 7) during Mental Health Week (May 4 – 10). The day's events were held at Pier 21 and included a passionate speech by the Honourable Senator Michael Kirby a recipient of the Order of Canada for his lifetime of achievement on public policy issues and his commitment to confronting issues related to mental illness. I had the honour of introducing Sen. Kirby and to speak briefly about innovations

in mental health care and the need to establish child and youth mental health policies and plans in Canada.

One of the priorities of the Mental Health Commission of Canada is the establishment of a national mental health framework. Part of this framework deals with youth mental health and the MHCC has been working closely with Alan McLuckie and me to lead the Evergreen project. The Evergreen project is the development of an innovative national framework to effectively, ethically and confidently address the mental health needs of Canadian children and youth now and in the future.

While these projects at the national level are of great importance to the Chair, we have also been working at the local level, specifically to develop projects that link mental health and the arts. The arts are a powerful vehicle for the exchange of meaning and emotion. Providing opportunities for young people to express their emotions and talk about mental health through art can help lessen the burden and stigma that is often associated with mental illness.

Last year the Chair partnered with the ViewFinders International Film Festival to host a series of film camps during March Break.



This year we were able to partner again thanks to signature support from the T. R. Meighen Family Foundation. The 2009 camps focused on producing short animation films on mental health. The films, along with an accompanying documentary, were premiered at the ViewFinders festival in April and will be taken on the road to schools and communities across Atlantic Canada this summer and fall. The films were also screened at a family event as part of Mental Health Week.

In March the Chair also launched another art project. Working with the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and J. L. Ilsley High School, the Chair was engaged in a series of art workshops to build awareness of the complexities surrounding the adolescent brain and mental health. The project effectively integrated mental health into

the high school art program and linked the workshops with the school's youth health centre. Art produced from the workshops



will be a starting point for the development of an extended large-scale collaborative art project with the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia entitled "Art and the Brain" in 2010.

As we move forward with our initiatives the Web will become an increasingly important tool for the dissemination of our material. We have worked hard to produce a site that is user-friendly and shares knowledge about youth mental health using the best available scientific evidence. Recently our site won a silver award at the 2008 Web Health Awards. The Web Health Awards recognizes the best Web-based health-related content for consumers and professionals, with the goal of providing a "seal of quality" for electronic health information.

Some of the website's key mental health resources include: a guide to understanding teen depression, a guide to understanding evidence-based medicine, a booklet for siblings with a mental illness, various multimedia presentations, and free clinical tools for health professionals.

Looking ahead this summer our team will finalize the development of nationally-certified continuing medical education course on adolescent depression which will be ready in the fall. I will also be teaching two courses at Mount Saint Vincent University as part of their undergrad and graduate education programs. One course will focus on mental health literacy for educators and the other will examine adolescent depression and suicide education.

If you would like any more information on the activities of the Chair please contact David Venn or Tracy MacKenzie at (902) 470-6598 or visit us online at www.teenmentalhealth.org.

Sincerely,

Dr. Stan Kutcher

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Kathryn A. Weldon
Charitable Foundation

