

SUCCESS STORY

Crestomere School: Carrying on the Conversation

Submitted by Heather Kipling (reprinted with permission from AHS)



Crestomere School may be small, but its students are starting big conversations.

What started out as a small Social Studies assignment has grown into an awareness campaign, encouraging students and the community to openly discuss mental health and mental illness.

“We were talking about current events, and at the time, Bell was doing their Let’s Talk (about mental illness) campaign,” says teacher Bryan Lachapelle of his Grade 9 class. “(The students) decided they wanted to create something that would help eliminate stigmas and stereotypes surrounding mental health and mental illness. “What they’ve created is a video that they want to share with the world.”

To develop the video, the students consulted with Alberta Health Services Mental Health liaison Lisa Hagemann, who provides support and resources to schools, the community and patients who may be in crisis. She explains that homegrown awareness of mental illness in schools is important. “One of the places that we can make a difference in changing people’s attitudes and beliefs regarding mental illness and substance abuse is educating our youth,” says Hagemann.

One in five Canadians will experience a mental disorder or substance use problem in their lifetime, Hagemann says. It can affect people of any age group, any educational level, any kind of job, and economic status. But it isn’t always easy to talk about, and it can be “a scary subject for kids.” “By getting kids talking about it, we can teach them that it’s OK to talk about it, that it’s not something to hide or to be ashamed of.”

Developed entirely by the class, the video chronicles the challenges young people face every day when they are dealing with a mental illness. It can be viewed by visiting <http://teensonmentalhealth.blogspot.ca/2013/04/thevideo.html>.

“There is a lot of meaning in the video, and I hope we’re able to spread the word. If it helps even just one person that’s great,” says student Ferron French-Scott. Classmate Samantha Aarten agrees.

“It is something important that we all should be talking about,” says Aarten, who explains that the class learned different signs and symptoms of mental illness, as well as effective ways to talk about it with others. “We all have to do our part to let people know that they aren’t alone, that there are people they can talk to and get help from.”

“I’m very proud of this class,” says Lachapelle. “(They’re doing) something that I honestly think is going to make a difference.”

The Grade 9 class presented the project to the rest of the school on May 8, during Mental Health Week, which focused on youth mental health this year.



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