



Youth Perspectives on Mental Health: Programs that Engage

"I saw friends do drugs and drink and didn't want to follow their path. Instead I wanted to help and support them." – Youth Participant Go Mental, Get Physical 2005

Projects

- National: Go Mental...Get Physical National Youth Report
- Provincial: The New Mentality (Ontario)
- Municipal: Kainai Youth Council Suicide Awareness (Kainai First Nation, Alberta)
- Local: Project: Summer Employment Program (partnership with Laing House/ Halifax)

Knowledge Transfer and Outcomes

It is estimated that between 15% and 25% of youth in Canada have a mental illness¹ and 20% experience suicidal ideation.² Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in 15-24 year-olds in Canada.³ Understanding the state of distress of young Canadians has led to knowledge development and programming that encompasses a youth engagement strategy. Engaging young people in structured activities significantly generates lower levels of depression than those who were not engaged.⁴

Youth engagement in the mental health and illness context is not limited to developing meaningful structured activities – it is also about empowering young people to take leadership roles in developing and leading positive mental health promotion programming. As found by Simon Davidson and Ian Manion, when faced with mental health problems, youth would overwhelmingly prefer to talk with other youth. As well using young people as consultants for program development/enhancement engaging them actively and meaningfully produces important insights into young people's experiences, and yielded an appealing product.

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement has had increasing numbers of requests to support youth engagement programming in the child and youth mental health sector as well as providing expert consultation and supporting dialogue between young people and government and health organizations. One example of this was the support provided in the contributions of young people to The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology in their cross country hearings before releasing "*Out of the Shadows At Last: Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction Services in Canada*" which led to the creation of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

Linkages

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement is addressing youth mental health and illness issues with our core partners and with local, provincial and national organizations, assisting them to build capacity and evaluate their strategies for meaningfully engaging children and youth in their mental health programs.

References:

1. Health Canada. (1999). Healthy development of children and youth: The role of the determinants of health. Catalogue No. H39-501/1999E. Ottawa: Health Canada
2. Davidson, S., & Manion, I. G. (1996). Facing the challenge: Mental health and illness in Canadian youth. *Psychology, Health, & Medicine*, 1, 41-56.
3. Health Canada (2002) A report on mental illnesses in Canada. [Catalogue](#) No. H39-643/2002E
4. Mahoney, J. L., Schweder, A. E., & Stattin, H. (2002) Structured after-school activities as a moderator of depressed mood for adolescents with detached relations to their parents. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 30,(1), 69-86