

Mental health donation supports leaders of tomorrow



Our leaders of tomorrow might be struggling today ? and it's up to a collective effort to ensure they reach their full potential.

This is the view of Aurora resident George Rappos.

An insurance agent with Desjardins, Mr. Rappos recently donated \$10,000 to the Canadian Mental Health Association ? York Region & South Simcoe (CMHA-YRSS) to help fund the organization's youth mental health programs, including MOBYSS, their mobile youth walk-in clinic, which provides free primary care and mental care to youth between the ages of 12 and 25.

It is the latest boost Mr. Rappos has given CMHA-YRSS and the latest in what he hopes will be a much wider movement beginning this spring.

?I am aware of the challenges of mental illness,? says Mr. Rappos, noting that mental health is health, just as much as diabetes, asthma, and other challenges. ?We don't put the same emphasis on supporting mental health in this country, I believe. Obviously, there is a societal stigma attached to exposing yourself if you do have a mental illness or mental disorder, but at the end of the day, we all have mental health, just like we all have physical health.

?20 per cent of the population, unfortunately, suffers from a mental disorder or mental illness. [For] a lot of these mental illnesses and disorders, the onset of them starts at a very young age of a person's life. To even get an assessment from a child psychologist could run you a couple of hundred an hour, which isn't covered by OHIP. Unless you have employer-paid benefits, it is very difficult to afford even getting a psychological assessment. It is important that we make sure a lot of our young people don't fall through the cracks, especially families that live on the margins of society. We need to make sure there is proper funding.?

Mr. Rappos' donation isn't just to support funding youth mental health programs, it is also to support the CMHA in advocating for governments to ?do the right thing and make sure there is enough funding? for coverage through OHIP.

?The issue is long, convoluted and complex, but over the last couple of years we have found with the pandemic that mental health disorders and illnesses, if you have one, tend to be exacerbated,? he says. ?At the end of the day, it is necessary we make sure we nip this in the bud early on because these young people are going to be adults one day and we need to make sure that these young people who are going to become adults one day will become contributors to our society and our economy. If we're leaving 20 per cent behind, that is not a good thing.?

To further this moment, Mr. Rappos hopes to mobilize the entire insurance industry in Canada to become part of a fundraising campaign to support youth mental health on a national scale through an initiative called 'Insuring our Future', set to launch this spring.

'We are hoping to garner some support from [industry associations] as we launch the campaign,' he says, noting a tentative launch date in early May. 'We have had some great discussions with the CMHA and they are starting to plan and brand around the initiative. I am really excited about that and I am confident we're going to be raising a significant amount of funding. This is not a one-off, but this is something we're going to try and implement annually in the insurance industry.'

'This is going to be a grassroots initiative to challenge all of us to make sure we step up and make a contribution to hopefully support youth mental health. Youth are going to be our business leaders, involved in arts and sciences, and we need to get these people the support they need to make sure they are functioning citizens.'

By Brock Weir
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