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## Early Intervention Project – Investing in Our Young People

*The evidence is clear that mental and substance use disorders begin largely in the youth and young adult population and are the primary health issues for young people in their teen years and early 20s. **Increasing health literacy** in youth and young adults through community awareness campaigns and educational strategies is critical to promoting early detection and treatment, improving recognition and help seeking, and reducing the stigma of mental illness and substance use.*

**mindcheck.ca**, a new Mental Health and Addictions website went live April 14.

The website is part of a **Youth and Young Adult Mental Health and Addictions Early Intervention Pilot Project** that targets young people ages 13-25, as well as their parents, friends and professionals in regard to mental health and addictions issues (**anxiety, depression, substance use and psychosis**) that challenge young lives. Its objectives include:

- Increase public awareness about mental health and substance use disorders
- Increase the health literacy of young people, their parents, friends, professionals
- Increase recognition/improve early identification of symptoms
- Reduce stigma
- Increase help-seeking
- Improve access to services at an earlier stage of illness.

The launch of the project comes after months of work by Fraser Health youth and young adult mental health professionals in collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, school representatives, and community agencies, and in consultation with young people and family members.

There are three components that will focus initially on the southern communities of Fraser Health.

**1: Health Literacy Project – mindcheck website, creatives & targeted education**

**2: Building Community Capacity**

**3: Enhancing Clinical Services** (this component will be developed at a later date)

### **Health Literacy Project**

The team called upon experts both professional and those who have a lived-experience to guide the content of the Health Literacy Project. Focus groups targeted health care and education professionals, parents and most importantly young people experiencing mental illness and/or addiction issues, as well as those who were not.

A number of **Creatives** have been designed. They are simple and direct, and use a powerful image and message primarily aimed at getting the attention of young people, raising the index of suspicion and directing them to the website. There are also some targeted at families and friends.

They pose the questions that people may be asking of themselves, such as – Why do I just want to be alone? Why do I worry so much? Why is he in his room so much? Why does she cry so often? and a call to action, as in act now and check out the website.

Initially the project team will use the Creatives in poster and postcard format and will distribute printed copies as part of the public awareness campaign. As well, they will be available in an electronic catalogue for others to download as needed with an invitation to think about how they could use the Creatives in their work with young people – and their families.

**mindcheck.ca**, a new website aimed at 13-25 year olds has been designed to be youth and user friendly. It includes self-screening tools that will provide feedback based on the score and lead individuals to appropriate/relevant resources including:

- information on mental health issues (plus downloadable factsheets)
- local resource information (where to go for help within FH communities)
- self-care information
- links to Fraser Health Psychosis Sucks website and other appropriate mental health websites outside of FH (that have self-help tips, chat rooms, toolkits, etc.)

It also includes sections for families and friends, and professionals.

Planning is underway to provide **Targeted Education** in the local school districts during regular class time with certain high school grades. Based on the curriculum of Canadian Mental Health Association's YouthNet, it will include education about four different conditions to help teens recognize the early signs of mental health and addiction disorders and learn about strategies for help seeking. It will also provide emphasis on normalizing these health issues as much as possible.

### **Building Community Capacity**

**Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** will provide professionals and service providers with education/skill development specifically related to anxiety, depression, substance abuse and psychosis. MHFA is a strategy for improving health literacy, building community capacity and de-stigmatizing mental health and substance use issues.

As well, the project aims to create community capacity through building collaborative partnerships with existing services. This includes community agencies, primary care and public health care providers, high schools and post-secondary campuses. A collaborative consultation model is being explored.

### **Questions and Answers**

#### **Why is early intervention important?**

Early intervention presents a critical opportunity to invest in our young people! It has proven to have a significant effect on reducing the negative impact of mental illness and substance use on a young person's self-image and self-esteem, social development and personal relationships, family relationships, educational achievements, ability to live independently, and working life.

#### **What areas of Fraser Health are involved in the project?**

The pilot project involves the communities of Surrey, Delta, Langley and White Rock. If the pilot gives evidence of success, we hope to expand it across Fraser Health.

#### **What are the targeted timelines for the project?**

The Health Literacy and Building Community Capacity components are being rolled out initially with the Enhancing Clinical Services component to follow at a later date.

#### **What might be the impact on current services?**

The hope is that more young people will seek help sooner as a result of increased recognition of mental health and substance abuse symptoms. To contribute to meeting the increased needs, we aim to build community capacity: by establishing Mental Health First Aid responders; through collaborative partnerships; and through the self-care strategies that can be accessed through the new website.

#### **How will you know if the project is successful?**

Fraser Health is partnering with the Surrey School District, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, and Douglas College for the **evaluation (research)** component of the project which will include pre and post questionnaires to evaluate awareness of the campaign and increased knowledge as well as a change in attitudes as a result of the targeted education.

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