

Bolton non-profit launches regional mental health awareness campaign

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

A Peel-wide campaign has been launched to support and bring much needed mental health awareness to all communities in the area.

Youth Activists Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting and advocating for youth leadership and youth related issues in Ontario. The organization began in February of 2019 and has been working with youth across the province with the tagline 'Ignite Your Passion.'

Executive Director Dmytro Basmat is a local community activist who got involved in advocating for mental health issues in his community after losing a close friend to suicide.

'As tragic as that event was, it inspired me to advocate for mental health awareness through my 2018 run for School Trustee, and in the creation of Youth Activists Inc,' he said. 'And although our non-profit focuses on a broad range of social awareness issues, mental health is a top priority that our Board of Directors wanted to move along with especially in such pressing times with COVID-19. Our organization's motto is Ignite your Passion, and with this we turned a passion into a full-fledged campaign.'

To bring awareness to mental health issues across communities in the province, Youth Activists Inc. is aware of the increase of mental health challenges surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and are hoping to be able to support young people who may be struggling.

'The purpose of the campaign is to increase awareness about various mental health challenges that many young people are experiencing during COVID-19, and to remind people that checking-in and supporting one another is extremely important,' said Basmat.

The pandemic has created a list of struggles due to the lack of human interaction or contact and having to stay away from friends and family.

Statistics Canada held an online questionnaire for 46,000 Canadians who shared their perspective on the effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on their mental health.

58 per cent of Canadians have stated that their mental health has declined due to the physical distancing rules set in place.

88 per cent has experienced symptoms of anxiety, 71 per cent felt nervous, anxious or on edge, 69 per cent became easily annoyed or irritable and 64 per cent had trouble relaxing.

With young students' education being held off for months on months, to the eventual return, but with several modifications in place, school has become extra stressful to cope, Basmat explained.

'COVID-19 has had wide-ranging effects on mental health on virtually everyone over the past seven months,' said Basmat. 'The effect of physical distancing has especially hit many students hard with online courses and has made many of us feel socially isolated from one-another. That's where the importance of bringing social awareness to various mental health challenges lies.'

October marks Mental Health Awareness month so the Peel-Wide Mental Health Awareness Campaign has come at a perfect time. The campaign is running from October 21 until November 13 where Youth Activists Inc. has put out an awareness video on their Facebook.

?We hope to remind people that mental health needs to be talked about on an on-going basis,? said Basmat.

For more information, please visit change4youth.org/mentalhealth.