

Caledon high school students host mental health event]

Robert F. Hall students welcome future Grade 9 students at mindfulness conference

By Zachary Roman

Caledon students are working to erase the stigma around mental health for their future peers.

On May 2 and 3, students from Robert F. Hall Catholic Secondary School (RFH) in Caledon East hosted a "mindfulness matters" conference for Grade 8 students entering high school this September.

Josephine Marcolla, Department Head of Academic Resource and Alternative Education at RFH, helped organize the conference alongside "The Pack", the student leadership team at RFH.

Grade 8 students from six different schools attended the conference over the two days. The goal of the event was to promote awareness, advocacy, and action for positive mental health and wellness.

The event started with a welcome, and attention was called to the shirts each member of The Pack was wearing. On the back was the following saying: "All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle." Marcolla said this quote represented what RFH is about; that the wolfpack takes care of each other.

The Pack then presented some misconceptions about mental health, and talked about stigma, asking for help, and looking after yourself. Grade 8s were given strategies to stay happy and healthy, and take positive action.

The Pack then led the group in repeating some positive affirmations like "I love and accept myself just the way I am" and "I have the strength to overcome any challenges that come my way."

Grade 8s were taught about who they can go to for help if they are struggling, and were shown all the different extracurriculars they could join to make friends. After a mental health-themed game of Family Feud, the Grade 8s broke off into groups to participate in activities and workshops like yoga, meditation, gratitude, nutrition, and conflict resolution.

Marcolla said she's seen the need for mental health support increase over the years, especially because of the pandemic. However, she also said she's seen awareness and support for people experiencing mental health issues increase too.

There are 55 members on The Pack this year, and Marcolla said it's a testament to how students are really caring about each other and their mental health.