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TRENDING

# North York high school holds mental health summit to raise awareness

There's anxiety about marks, transitioning to post-secondary: A.Y. Jackson principal

By **Aaron D'Andrea Toronto.com**

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Grade 10 students from AY Jackson Secondary School Olivia Smith, Mariam Naqvi, Justin Greaves, and a student wearing a hijab all participated in a mental health awareness and summit.

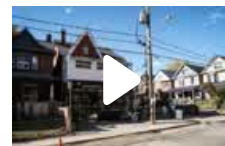
In a hallway at A.Y. Jackson Secondary School in North York are two boards highlighting what paths students can take after graduating high school.

Thinking about the future is stressful for Grade 10 student Milad Ghulam and his friends, because the present is already at times too much to handle.

Milad, 15, said that school has been getting harder.

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"I have a really hard semester, so there's a lot of stress to deal with," he said. "I feel like a lot of kids in this school, they are dealing with the same stress I'm dealing with and they need someone to talk to, but they don't have the courage to do it."

A.Y. Jackson principal Peter Paputsis has heard that problem and is trying to address it.

Recently, the school hosted a mental health awareness and wellness symposium, where students like Milad learned about mental health and ways to reduce stress through workshops and a presentation.

Paputsis said that mental health is a topic students and staff wanted to learn more about, as there was a need to "address certain mental health issues."

"There's a lot of anxiety, lot of worry around marks and university entrance, transition anxiety from kids coming from Grade 8 to 9, fitting in ... self-esteem," he said. "All of the big flags and triggers we would normally associate with mental health."



At the summit, students learned about different strategies to cope with stress including meditation, staying active and creating healthy sleeping habits.

For Olivia Smith, A.Y. Jackson is a "pretty hard academic school."

"People are always stressed and everyone cares about their marks. That's just our community," said the 15-year-old Grade 10 student.



*Students Olivia Smith (left), Katerina Bovos, Milad Ghulam and Marium Naqvi have stressed over life after school before. — Justin Greaves/Metroland*

According to CAMH's latest [Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey Mental Health and Well-Being report](#) conducted in 2017, about 30 per cent of students in the province reported experiencing an elevated level of stress or pressure in their lives.

"When it comes to my friends, I feel a lot of them are doing well when it comes to mental health," said Katerina Bovos, 16. "I think everyone struggles with a little bit of anxiety or stress at some point in their lives. I don't think there's anyone who doesn't feel a little bit of that in high school."

In addition, the report stated that roughly three per cent of students sought help for a mental health problem by calling a helpline or going online, but 31 per cent of students wanted help but didn't know where to turn.

Paputsis said that the school's goal is to provide more supports to students.

"We want to go deeper than just tolerance," he said. "We want to be accepting and create an environment where students can feel safe about talking about their issues and struggles, and let them know there's supporting adults around the building and there's a community of supportive classmates and peers."

For Marium Naqvi, 16, the summit that the school hosted will help students with mental health, but she wants her peers to remember they're all there for one another.

"If you are struggling, don't think you're alone," she said. "Don't be afraid to get help."

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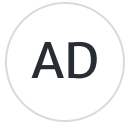
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**Aaron D'Andrea**

*Aaron D'Andrea is a former toronto.com journalist. He got his start in journalism in the television industry before becoming a reporter covering Toronto and the GTA. He earned an advanced diploma in journalism at Humber College in Toronto.*

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