

Fearless Learning



Respect Yourself! Respect Others!

Fearless Learning Non-Profit Organization

Imagine You Are 17 Years Old

I am compliant with my life-saving medication and am gaining weight each month.

Sometimes I drool and cannot drive any more.

Risk factors from my medication are a major concern; I wonder if these meds are worth it?

Finishing school is out the question and getting a job isn't even a thought. What I used to be good at no longer applies.

All I hear about is what meds to take.

I don't want people to know about how I feel or that I even exist.

I can't control these mood swings; I never know when a hallucination will happen.

Hopefully I have love and support at home, from friends, and from my school.

Hello, I am a person with an Invisible Disability (I.D.).

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The Current Status of “Youth At Risk”

While there are many organizations that treat mental illnesses or intervene in crisis situations, the majority of mental health-oriented organizations are charities that are relegated to advocacy roles for detection or treatment of a specific mental illness and in raising public awareness of that illness.

Traditionally under funded, their fundraising activities are forced to compete with other like agencies with an equally compelling agenda.

Donors are forced to decide which is the most worthy cause.

It may be surprising to learn that Canada does not have a mental health strategy despite the fact that 20% of all Canadian families will experience mental illness. And, the costs are enormous. The annual health care cost for mental illness is estimated at \$51 billion dollars. The personal costs are inestimable.

Mental health issues begin to manifest themselves at an early age.

The term “youth at risk” is an umbrella classification to describe those young people who are exhibiting behavioural problems which can lead to expulsion from school, potential injury to themselves or even death. Their risk-taking behaviour can include drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, depression and withdrawal or anger and violence. The causes may be rooted in their inability to cope within their personal environment or the onset of a serious mental illness.

Schizophrenia and other disorders often manifest in late teens and early 20's.

The front lines in dealing with these youth are the school systems.

This is where behavioral issues are observed both objectively and over time. This is where some action is expected to manage and defuse highly charged, stressful situations that impact not only the “youth at risk” but also their schoolmates and others in the school.

The purpose of this document is to outline the inherent I.D. problems and present answers: the Fearless Learning action plan.

Mental Health and Education

It is a sad fact that only 1 out of every 6 teens diagnosed with a serious mental illness ever receive professional help. And, any family trying to survive their child's serious, diagnosed mental illness will report, with deep frustration, how few support staff and programs exist.

While it is true that schools are the most likely place to help these youth, the reality is that the school system has not been funded to prepare teachers, counselors and administrators to adequately handle mental health issues. Virtually no mental health, mental illness programming exists in mainstream curriculum

This is not to suggest there is unwillingness on the part of the school systems to address mental health issues in a meaningful way. The Ontario education model provides support to At Risk students (not necessarily assessed students with mental health issues) through Ministry of Education social workers, psychologists and teachers in 'Safe and Caring Schools' and Special Education services.

Budget constraints restrict the breadth of programming potential. Traditional cost per thousand, ROI (Return-on-investment) models do not apply when a school or health system has to fund special education and At Risk or Safe Schools programs. Preparing teaching staff on how to address the mental health issues they face in and outside the classroom is not a part of past financial considerations in education.

As a result, the majority of school staff is uncertain about what they need to know about mental illness, about how to learn more or even begin a dialogue on what their role is, or should be, with respect to "mental illnesses and youth at risk".

The education system has been trying to cope alone.

Mental health services outside the education system are not being effectively utilized within the Ministry of Education's curriculum with the exception of a few successful collaborative projects between education and mental health agencies. Experts in treating and managing designated forms of mental illness have not been accessed to play a part in the Ontario education system. Educators continue their attempts to do it all internally.

Current Opportunities in Ontario Education and Mental Health

The need to establish a sound basis for the management of mental health issues in the school system has been clearly established. While most school districts are hesitant about profiling mental health disorders within the mainstream curriculum, strategic action is underway.

A joint-initiative between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth has begun. All of Ontario's 29 education clusters are now conducting an internal audit and inventory of existing services supporting mental health and wellness in education. While the intention is to list mental health services in-place within each of the 29 clusters and to identify "best practices" projects, each cluster is taking its own approach with no overall specific template to follow.

There is currently a significant opportunity to maximize and leverage mental health resources within education in order to enhance the impact for each participant. Collaborations are attainable as evidenced by such successful strategic alliances between education and mental health such as George Brown College and CAMH (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health) as well as Peel Children's Center.

Our 'Education System' is willing to act. The opportunity now exists to strengthen ties between all players in the arena of mental health and maximize the contributions of each in a more uniform and meaningful approach to the mental health issues of our "youth at risk".

The expertise, passion and sheer drive of Fearless Learning Canada Non-Profit Organization will make a significant contribution.

Fearless Learning Canada: The Mission

Fearless Learning Canada Non-Profit Organization (FLC) was founded in June, 2007 with a mandate to assist youth with Invisible Disabilities (I.D.) throughout Canada.

Invisible Disabilities are defined as *those mental health issues that lurk behind 'at risk behaviour'.*

While the behaviour may be seen, the cause is invisible.

The Mission Statement of the organization and the impact it intends to realize is ambitious:

"To provide integrative programming support on a "business-to- business" basis for the non-profit mental health and education sectors."

Our intended impacts include:

- De-mystifying, thereby eluding the fear component associated with Invisible Disabilities
- For Students: To experience positive life-skills activities while working both independently and as part of a team; enhanced communication skills and understanding of the critical role of nutrition and health for growth and recovery.
- For Teachers: To gain knowledge, facts and awareness of mental health issues, stigmas and stereotypes. Enhanced understanding of various types of risk-taking behaviors and of the "observable" similarities and differences between symptoms associated I.D.
- Support services for educators by mental health providers : the teaching environment, expectations and guidelines;
- Collaborative program development across agencies that permits both health and educational organizations to meet their specific objectives;

FLC acknowledges that this is a bold undertaking.

Bolder still is the intention to assure that all training is subsidized through fundraising.

Given the limits on resourcing that exist in both the health care and education sectors, and recognizing the challenges all mental health based charities face in securing donations, *FLC intends to ensure planned programming delivery is underwritten.*

FLC is currently sponsored by Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC) a major national charitable organization advocating stigma-free programs for Canadians suffering from a mental illness. This relationship allows FLC to issue charitable receipts for donors.

Fearless Learning Canada: Programming

Research, training and evaluation are at the core of our operation. During our years in education we delivered to specific curriculum expectations as measured by approved “rubric evaluation” programs. These strategic competencies will be essential to success within collaborations between education and mental health services.

Our core programming is training. As the intention is to address mental health issues, any educational intervention has to be non-threatening with all in attendance feeling a sense of personal comfort. All learning is therefore predicated on a number of simple principles which are at the heart of our organizational promise:

1. The learning experience is *non-stressful* and accommodates the abilities of the learners to participate.
2. The focus is to work through and develop *coping mechanisms* to real life scenarios faced in daily life.
3. Engagement of the learner is achieved through fun and *learning is experiential*.
4. *Behaviour can be modified* and modification of behaviour can be learned.
5. All learners can learn *without fear of failure* or ridicule.
6. Success is measured by *personal growth in knowledge* enabling the learner to enter into an “At Risk” situation with renewed confidence and ability.

We are uniquely capable of delivering on these promises. With over 15 years of creating and delivering workshops and performances for youth from grades 3-12 (and university level) throughout Ontario, we really understand what works and why. Using skilled facilitators trained in quick-thinking/improvisation methods, the pre-established agenda for learning is adapted to the emerging issues in the classroom or within the training setting. We are an ideal facilitator between education and mental health services.

Learning results are realized... delivery is organic.

With experience in designing, testing and delivering a range of innovative, improvisation-based interactive workshops throughout the education system, FLC brings this core asset to the non-profit industry. *Stop the Bullying!*, Job Placement and Interview Training resources as well as our nutrition and fitness programs have provided an essential and highly effective series for our clients.

Fearless Learning Canada: Current Initiatives

- FLC is currently working closely with Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Safe Schools in developing improvisation-based creative workshops and resources regarding health, nutrition and fitness, as well as communication skills and career training.
- Our proven, life-skills workshops for “At Risk” students will be delivered to young people being serviced by partnering charities such as Youth Services, Child and Youth Centers, Parent-Teacher groups, leading and innovative educators and organizations providing assistance for I.D. youth and their families.
- Within both the public education system and with other non-profit mental health services FLC will add resources for “At Risk” students in mental health services by delivering workshops in essential life-skills not traditionally available as part of sustained academic programming either in schools or children services.
- FLC will increase the measurable outcomes (revenues, number of participants and/or awareness objectives) of other services, educational institutions, charities and non-profits mandated to help both I.D. and “At Risk” youth.

Workshop Benefits

By providing a positive, non-evaluative interactive workshop environment where having fun is a priority, FLC programs can provide youth with a place to succeed and grow individually and as part of a team.

Life skills’ training has been proven to increase educational and work readiness, engagement in community, and self-confidence with a focus on the future.

Professional Development

A 15 minute presentation on mental health designated topics as part of “lunch & learn”; scheduled presentations at weekly school staff meetings and on designated Professional Development days. (Possibly part of an on-going series.)

A non-threatening, useful format that builds awareness and confidence regarding mental wellness and mental illness. By profiling stereotypes and myths and supporting statements with facts, educators will gain new expertise and raised levels of awareness of I.D. in their classrooms.

Fearless Learning Canada: Future Plans

It is our unique expertise in both education and mental health that provides the platform for a steady enhancement of mental health services within education. Our strategic business associations and business leaders will also be very supportive in adding core resources.

Our plan is to succeed in the flag-ship TDSB Safe Schools program and expand to all 29 regional clusters and then across Canada. Measurable workshop and related resource outcomes will be critical to expansion.

At Risk students (those needing more assessment, suspended or expelled) are now supported by a team including teachers that chose this special group with which to work in addition to social workers, psychologists and child and youth counselors.

Our philosophy is that 'At Risk Youth' with I.D. will receive and maintain support as long as it takes in order to successfully re-enter the regular school system or community.

The FLC workshops are designed for students to have fun while they learn. The more these designated students enjoy participating, the more likely we can set the tone for a positive change.

The key is to re-activate a student's belief that making better choices and enhancing their life skills will assist not only in attaining curriculum expectations but also prepares them to return to regular school and/or the community.

Fundraising Opportunities

We have a fundraising plan to differentiate us from the rest.

Our measure of “Success” as a start-up agency comes from helping youth in navigating their way through education and health services. And, this depends upon the positive impacts we make, contracts negotiated and not simply how much we raise.

The founder of FLC has underwritten the start-up costs through a generous investor.

Our innovative funding plan is to raise money through Canada’s first live, sketch-based comedy show all about health, wellness and fitness...including mental health. The production is underway and will be profiled to educators and mental health providers in August 2009. Secondary Schools will be the primary market commencing in September 2009.

Our track record is at the forefront in addressing tough school topics successfully within curriculum expectations such as *Stop the Bullying!*, Literacy Test and Stigmas and Stereotypes.

We are known for the quality of our programs, our pre and post workshop/performance activities and our level of professionalism. Other mental health “comedy offers” are more stand-up in nature and inappropriate within education curriculum expectations.

A major opportunity exists to both entertain and teach not only students At Risk but the whole student body and staff. This is our way of cutting through any system-oriented blockages around the topic of mental health and of society-accepted myths, about body-image stereotypes, nutrition and mental health labels.

Our program is much more sophisticated than others because it is professionally produced for entertainment values in both the sketches and curriculum-handouts for pre and post shows.

It’s also a winner for a school and major mental health charities to charge the public for the show as a fundraising event!

Finally, we also do traditional fundraising and are proud to have a relationship with Canyon Creek starting in June 2009 with their Golf Tourney for us. The plan is to involve these franchises to designate/actively support us across Canada.

The founder of FLC is actively engaging support from business associates; a Director of Development began in April 2009 and is retaining a government-grant expert beginning September 2009.

Fearless Learning Canada: Financials

- During 2009-2010 we will raise \$145,000 in funds through donations and another \$30,000 in earned-for-service programs.
- Program costs during that period will be approximately \$170,000
- Expanding into 2 more Ontario school clusters during 2011 and an average of 3 more per year starting in 2012.
- 2012 costs will be \$325,000 given the geographic area being covered within Safe Schools and other mental health service providers.

It is the creative side of life that rules when it comes to breaking down stereotypes!

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PROUD TO BE CANADIAN

