

PART 3: GETTING THE WORD OUT

There are a variety of community partners you can work with to promote your awareness program. You will probably be working primarily with local schools, community groups and the media; so in Part 3, we have focused specifically on ways of working successfully with these three groups.

3.1 PROMOTING YOUR AWARENESS PROGRAM TO SCHOOLS

These days, mental health issues are increasingly emphasized and taught in schools, particularly in secondary school. The new Ontario Secondary School curriculum guidelines contain a range of courses with explicit requirements to cover issues of mental health and illness. Given the natural fit with the curriculum of a number of secondary school courses, such as Challenge and Change in Society, and Healthy Active Living (please see Appendix A of the *Teacher's Resource* for a full list of courses, and relevant excerpts from the curriculum guidelines), and the captive audience, secondary schools in your community are natural partners for reaching youth with your awareness program.

Selecting a strategy

Finding the most effective strategy for promoting the awareness program to schools in your community depends on the way things work in your school region. In some cases, it might be more effective to approach the local school board formally before contacting individual schools. In other cases, it might be best to go directly to a particular school. In this section, we will discuss both scenarios and highlight ways of preparing for these meetings.

Approaching a school board

In certain cases, a school board may have a policy that all outside programs need to be approved by

the board before individual schools can participate. If this is the case in your area, you will have to find out who reviews and approves programs, and what kind of supporting information they require in order to make this decision. For example, the board may require the following:

- a description of the program and its goals
- an outline of the presentation
- results of the evaluation that measure the impact of the program
- evidence that the program complements the curriculum guidelines.

You will find a package of this information in the Tools section at the end of this section.

Approaching a school directly.

Policies in school districts vary widely. In some communities, it may not be necessary to approach the school board before contacting individual schools. You may be able to go directly to the principal or vice-principal, or even a particular teacher.

If a member of your planning committee already knows someone in one of the schools you would like to work with, take advantage of this connection. Find out more about how that particular school operates and which staff members would have an interest in an awareness program.

The goals of the awareness program fit naturally with the learning objectives of courses in Ontario such as Challenge and Change in Society, and Healthy Active Living. The most convenient and effective strategy may be to get to know these teachers and contact them directly.

In North Bay, a number of local secondary schools had previously hosted presentations by mental health professionals about mental illnesses. The coalition members decided it would be a good idea to start with these schools because relationships already existed with members of the group and local mental health resources, and there were already a number of staff within the school who were supportive of a mental illness awareness program.

Making contact

Once you have identified the appropriate contact person, contact him or her. You have several options. You could send a letter explaining the awareness program and its benefits and follow up with a phone call, or phone the contact person first and send a package of information afterwards.

How you proceed will depend on your style and comfort level. It's important to prepare in advance the main points you want to convey. Some suggestions include the following:

- the goal of the program (to reduce stigma associated with mental illness) and how the program accomplishes this goal
- the match between the program's goals and the curriculum guidelines for teaching about mental health in core courses such as Challenge

- and Change in Society, and Healthy Active Living
- how the awareness program enhances and reinforces the education that secondary schools are already providing about mental health
- the results of the program's evaluation, showing that students who attend the program report more positive attitudes toward people affected by mental illness and increased knowledge about mental illness.

In your mail-out to the school or contact person, you may want to include the following:

- a one-page description of your planning committee and its goals and objectives
- a copy of the video, *Talking about Mental Illness: An Introduction to an Awareness Program for Youth*
- an outline of the presentation, including a brief description of the presenters
- the results of the evaluation measuring the impact of the program
- comments from students and teachers who have participated in awareness programs.

In the Tools section at the end of Part 3, you will find a sample letter. The accompanying *Teacher's Resource* contains information on the program's goals and the curriculum guidelines, and information on the program's evaluation. The *Talking about Mental Illness* video, as well as the *Teacher's Resource*, contain a number of comments from students and teachers.

Establishing a relationship

Once you have contacted the school and piqued their interest, plan a meeting. Ask your contact who they think should attend the first meeting. Should the principal (or other decision maker) be encouraged to attend? Should the first meeting be an information session that involves all staff? Or should the first meeting be informal, with just the contact person and a representative of the planning committee, to explain the program and assess the similarities between the program and what the school is already doing?

Depending on what you have sent out in advance, you may want to bring some of the materials identified above to the first meeting. The outline of the presentation will be particularly useful to help you illustrate the different components of the program. It will also help explain how the members of the planning committee participate in the awareness presentation.

What they need to know.

At this point, explain the importance of preparation and follow-up activities that should take place in the classroom, before and after the presentation. It is important to understand that teachers have great demands on their energy and classroom time because of new Ontario curriculum requirements. By focusing on the ways the awareness program complements the curriculum guidelines (and having the documentation to prove it), teachers will be more receptive to your request.

To illustrate the connection between the curriculum and the awareness program, you might want to bring along copies of the relevant sections of the new Ontario Curriculum Guidelines (found in Appendix A of the *Teacher's Resource*), and the program components (contained in Appendix A: Outline of the Program, found in this guide) that teachers can use before and after the presentation. This will give teachers a sense of the amount of classroom time that should be devoted to the program. Although it would be ideal to devote at least four periods to the program (two for preparation, one for the presentation, and one for follow-up activities), the program can be adapted to fit a shorter format.

What you need to know.

Use the school meeting to determine the concerns of students and staff in the area of mental illness. You can use the School Information Survey contained in the Tools section at the end of Part 3 to guide your discussion. The purpose of this discussion is to become familiar with how mental health or mental illness issues are viewed by the school and the surrounding community. It is extremely important to find out some of these details to understand the culture of the school. It will allow your group to tailor the presentation and ensure its relevance to your particular audience.

Tips for promoting your program to schools

Use your networks to establish contacts with schools.

If a member of the group has an “in” with a particular school or teacher, take advantage of this connection. An insider will help you introduce the program to the right people.

Stress the program's appropriateness for the curriculum guidelines.

The curriculum for secondary schools presents many opportunities, both informal and formal, for teachers to teach about mental health and mental illness.

The formal opportunities are found in two main areas of the Ontario secondary school curriculum — health and physical education, and the social sciences and humanities. The particular courses in which there's a good fit are listed in Appendix A of the *Teacher's Resource*. You can indicate to teachers that the relevant sections of the Ontario Secondary School Curriculum Guidelines for these courses are in bold typeface, so that they will easily be able to see the fit.

Show teachers that the program will help them meet the curriculum requirements. Presenting the curriculum information to school representatives when you first meet with them helps to show that the awareness program is not an add-on, but a way of helping teachers meet existing curriculum requirements for a number of courses. The activities contained in the *Teacher's Resource* are a student- and teacher-friendly way to meet the requirements of the mental health education curriculum.

Highlight additional opportunities to address information about mental illness in the classroom.

Informal opportunities or “teachable moments” occur across the curriculum. For example, in English class, the experience of a character in a novel can be used to explore the attitudes expressed by society toward mental illness. In art, students can view the work of artists who have experienced mental illness and discuss the potential connection between their illness and the creative process. These courses and others provide easy entry points for discussion about how beliefs, attitudes and knowledge about mental illness have changed over time.

Make links to the broader community.

Teachers can also take advantage of events in their school and community to encourage thoughtful discussion about mental health and mental illness. This can be an effective way of increasing students’ knowledge about mental illness and their awareness that mental illness affects all members of society. Some of these opportunities, such as Mental Illness Awareness Week, and Walk for Schizophrenia, are outlined in Section 3.3, “Promoting Your Program with the Local Media.”

Emphasize the flexibility of the program.

Although it would be ideal to devote at least four to five class periods to the program, a condensed format can also be effective.

Build support for your program.

Get to know what other service providers work in the schools, such as youth counselling and public health. These groups can help support your efforts to bring the program into the school.

3.2 PROMOTING YOUR PROGRAM IN THE COMMUNITY

In order for your awareness program to take hold in your community, people have to know about it. By engaging and educating them, you will be able to help change attitudes and behaviours toward people with mental illness.

Reaching out

The best way to publicize the program will vary from one community to the next. Use or adapt any of the following ideas to get people interested.

- Place notices in community calendars about upcoming information sessions. Ask community groups to print free announcements in their newsletters or other publications.
- Post flyers advertising information about your program on community bulletin boards or in high-traffic areas like grocery stores, community health centres, doctors' offices, hospitals, laundromats, day cares, schools, libraries, churches and other local organizations.
- Ask your minister, priest, rabbi or other religious leader to mention your awareness program during services, or have details printed in church bulletins.
- Invite your mayor or other well-known public leaders to participate in or attend an information session. Involving public and community leaders may help establish popular interest and support.

Reaching wider audiences

Although the program has generally focused on youth in secondary school, there are a number of other places where the program could be of value. Think about getting in touch with potential community partners such as after-school recreational clubs, churches, community centres, and Big Brothers and Big Sisters organizations.

3.3 PROMOTING YOUR PROGRAM WITH THE LOCAL MEDIA

Another way to let people in your community know about your activities is through the media. Besides informing a larger audience about what you're doing, the media can add momentum to your efforts and provide the kind of coverage and recognition you'll need to keep you going.

Making contact

The first step is to make contact with the people in your community who work for newspapers, radio and television. There may be one key contact to provide advice on whom to call, how to make your story newsworthy and how to get the kind of attention you want.

It important that members of your group take the time to develop a clear sense of what you want to accomplish by working with the media. Designate a specific person in your group to deal with the media, both to stimulate interest and to respond to enquiries. Before a spokesperson from your group does an interview with a media representative, make sure you've prepared a clear set of messages about the impact of stigma on people's lives and about the program itself.

Creating a press release/community announcement

Your initial contacts may suggest you send out a press release to publicize your program. There

may be several points during the program when issuing a press release would be helpful:

- when your group first comes together, a press release will help you publicize your goals and recruit new members
- when you are putting on the first presentations in a local school.

To create a powerful press release, there are a few things you should keep in mind:

- Editors often have to shuffle through hundreds of press releases every day. If you create a strong, newspaper-like headline, you will have a better chance of being noticed.
- The first sentence should contain the most important facts of your story. The rest of the release should answer who, what, where, when and why.
- Clearly indicate a contact name and a phone number for more information.
- Keep it short — one to two pages, double-spaced.
- If you have a logo for your program, make sure your press release and accompanying materials are printed on letterhead that displays your logo.
- It is best to send out a release after making personal contact with the person who will be receiving it.

A sample press release is included in the Tools section at the end of Part 3.

Tips for working with local media

Practice your blurb.

For regular radio and tv news, you will have 15 to 30 seconds to make a statement. Practice what you want to say before you get behind the microphone.

Write a letter to the editor.

Writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper is a good way to get publicity. Your group may want to respond to a recent news item that relates to the impact of stigma on people's lives.

Link your actions to other news events.

Your program will have a better chance of being covered if it ties into other news events: Mental Health Week, Mental Illness Awareness Week, hot issues, current events, and so on. Each year there are several designated days and weeks for the awareness of mental health and related issues. During these times, the media are on the lookout for stories and special events to commemorate these designations. This is an excellent time to get the message out about the awareness program. Special interest articles in newspapers or small promotional ads about the program can give your coalition a lot of exposure.

Mental Health Week, co-ordinated by the Canadian Mental Health Association, is usually held during the first full week of May. The purpose of Mental Health Week is to increase the public's awareness of mental health, deliver mental health information and reduce the stigma of mental illness.

Mental Illness Awareness Week, held during the first full week of October, is sponsored by the Canadian Psychiatric Association. It attempts to raise awareness that mental illness is real, diagnosable and treatable. Thursday, during Mental Illness Awareness Week, is National Depression Screening Day, where participating organizations set up locations offering communities screening and information. For further information, please refer to the Web site at <http://www.cpa.medical.org/MIAW/Miaw.asp>

World Mental Health Day is an international event that often coincides with Mental Illness Awareness Week. The campaign is co-ordinated by the Health Education Authority in Britain and aims to reduce fear and anxiety about mental health problems, to challenge damaging stereotypes and to give a voice to people's experiences.

CHECKLIST

- You have made initial contact with a number of secondary schools in your community.
- You have met with school staff to discuss the program.
- You have described who is in your group and provided background information on the program.
- You have stressed the link between the goals of the program and the curriculum guidelines for mental health education.
- You have provided school staff with an information package about the program.
- You have made contacts with local media and are working with a media representative to promote your program.

FOR FURTHER READING

Canadian Psychiatric Association. *Mental Illness Awareness Week Guidebook*. Available on-line at: <http://www.cpa.medical.org/MIAW/Miaw.asp>

For more information, call: (613) 234-2815.

Whitman, A. Making friends with the media. *Community Tool Box*, 25, (2). Available on-line at: <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/ctb/c25/c25s2>

This section of the *Community Tool Box* provides information on how to develop a positive relationship with the media, which will benefit your program. It lists the pros and cons of different media to help you choose the best ones and increase public awareness of your group.

Ryan, C. (1991). *Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing*. Boston: South End Press.

This book includes information on areas such as planning a media strategy, mainstream notions of what's newsworthy, how to create news leads, and how to develop good working relationships with reporters.

TOOLS

- School Information Survey
- Sample Letter to a School
- Sample Press Release
- Sample Public Service Announcement

SCHOOL INFORMATION SURVEY

Discussing the following questions with a school representative (such as a principal, vice-principal or teacher) will help your group find out more about the context of mental health issues in a particular school. Several student representatives should be invited to participate in this discussion because it provides a good opportunity to develop student interest and participation in the project. This discussion should take place when the school has already expressed interest in participating in the program.

- What are you currently teaching about mental health and mental illness? Who is providing this teaching? In what courses is it being covered?

- What are the major cultural/ethnic groups present in the school?

- Has anything happened in your school or community recently that would influence people's perceptions of mental health and illness issues (e.g., suicide attempt)?

- Have there been any serious problems associated with drug use in the school or the community (e.g., overdose, hospitalization)?

- What is the role of your guidance department in providing support to students? Does the school have a protocol for responding to students with mental health concerns?

- Has the school hosted any special events or speakers recently that have caused the school concern? What were the concerns? How might they be avoided in the future?

- What particular topics relating to mental health and illness are students most interested in learning more about?

SAMPLE LETTER TO A SCHOOL

You can adapt this template to help you make contact with local schools.

date

address of school or school board

Dear **(name of principal, vice-principal or teacher)**

Please find the enclosed information package on “Talking About Mental Illness,” an innovative and effective mental illness awareness program. The purpose of the program is to provide students in Grade 11, 12 and OAC with information about mental illness and to raise awareness about the impact of the stigma that surrounds it.

The enclosed information package includes: an outline of the program’s components and activities, a summary of the results of the program’s evaluation, comments from teachers and students who have participated, and a description of what the program offers students.

The program directly addresses the new Ontario Secondary School Curriculum Guidelines requirements for a number of courses within physical and health education and general social sciences and humanities. Excerpts of the relevant sections of the curriculum guidelines are also included in this package.

The program involves classroom activities and an in-class presentation. In the presentation, people who have experienced mental illness share their stories with the students, providing an autobiographical account of what it is like to live with a mental illness. Through the presentation, students learn that people with mental illnesses are neither violent nor incompetent, and that in one student’s words, “they are just like everybody else.”

In **(name of your community)**, a community coalition, including members from **(your partner organizations)** is currently organizing this program. A member of our coalition would like to meet with you to discuss working with your staff to bring the benefits of the program to your students.

Sincerely,

(names of organizing committee members)

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

You can adapt and use this template to create press releases for your project.

(program logo here)

(headline:) **Community help needed to educate young people about mental illness**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, (name of your town/city), (date)

Symptoms of severe chronic forms of mental illness — such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, panic disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder — most often begin to appear between the ages of 16 to 24. Yet, the myths, misunderstandings, fear and stigma that surround mental illness frequently prevents young people from seeking and getting the help they need. Several organizations in (name of your community here) are attempting to increase young peoples' understanding and awareness of mental illness through an innovative educational program.

(the following is a quotation we used — you may want to get a similar statement from a mental health professional in your own community:) “Young people are at a very sensitive time in their development. Learning about mental illness is key not only for their own health, but to reduce the stigma for friends, family members and others in the community who experience these problems,” says Rozsa Guylay, Nurse Case Manager, and Co-ordinator of a mental health awareness program for youth, at the Centre of Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto.

The program, entitled (name of your program here), provides secondary school students with the opportunity to hear the personal stories of community members who have experienced mental illness. The program also provides information about local mental health-related resources that can provide support and help to youth coping with their own, or a family member or friend's mental illness.

Members of (name of your organization here), representatives from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario, and (name of other organizations) are already working together to co-ordinate the project, but they need your help to organize and raise resources.

A public information session on the **(name of your project)** will be held at:

DATE AND TIME:

LOCATION:

ADDRESS:

All interested community members are invited to attend. Come and learn how to make a difference in the lives of young people and those with mental illness in **(name of your community here)**. To find out more about how you can help, contact **(contact names, office telephone numbers)**.

-30-

("30" indicates the end of a press release)

MEDIA CONTACT:

NAME:

YOUR ORGANIZATION:

PHONE NUMBER:

SAMPLE PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

(program logo here)

Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, (date)

The (name of your program here) will be holding a mental health public information session. The session is for people interested in helping organize an educational program that provides secondary school students with the opportunity to hear the personal stories of community members who have experienced mental illness. The program also provides information about local mental health-related resources, which can provide support and help to youth coping with mental illness — for themselves, a family member or a friend.

The public information session will be held:

DATE AND TIME:

LOCATION:

ADDRESS:

Call for more information:

MEDIA CONTACT:

NAME:

YOUR ORGANIZATION:

PHONE NUMBER: