

U of C launches campus mental health strategy after 20% of students report diagnosis



BAILEY HILDEBRAND, CALGARY HERALD

[More from Bailey Hildebrand, Calgary Herald](#)

([HTTP://CALGARYHERALD.COM/AUTHOR/BAILEYHILDEBRAND](http://CALGARYHERALD.COM/AUTHOR/BAILEYHILDEBRAND))

Published on: December 7, 2015 | Last Updated: December 7, 2015 6:20 PM MST



University of Calgary student Kiran Grant is one of the students involved in a new mental health initiative at the university. *GAVIN YOUNG / CALGARY HERALD*

Two years after nearly one in five students in a U of C campus survey said they had been diagnosed or treated for a mental illness, the university on Monday launched a new mental health strategy.

The results of that 2013 survey, as well as the stabbing deaths at a party in Brentwood that killed five people on April 15, 2014, were two of the factors that led to the creation of the mental health task force, according to Debbie Bruckner, chair of the university's mental health working group.

"In 2014 we had the tragedy in Brentwood and the impact on mental health of our entire campus community, which is still really strongly felt," Bruckner said.

Task force member Andrew Szeto said the Brentwood homicides were traumatic for everyone at the university — whether they were directly involved or not.

"We know things like this do have a large impact on students," said Szeto, a research scientist at the Mental Health Commission of Canada and an assistant psychology professor at the university. "It affects the culture of the university, it affects the people's attitudes.

"Something like the tragedy at Brentwood does have a large impact on people's mental health."

A 2013 campus survey suggested a need at U of C after it found eight per cent of students who participated in the survey seriously considered suicide at some point during the previous 12 months. It also found 18 per cent of students reported a professional had diagnosed or treated them for a mental-health condition.

Ninety per cent of students who responded to the survey said they had felt overwhelmed at some point, 64 per cent said they felt lonely, and 58 per cent said they had overpowering anxiety.

Bruckner, who is also the university's senior director of student wellness, said data from the university's employee assistance plan also suggested a need for a closer look at mental health supports.

The task force has adopted a mental health strategy from the World Health Organization, with six areas of focus:

- Raising awareness and promoting well-being
- Developing resilience and self-management
- Enhancing early identification and self-management
- Providing direct service and support
- Aligning institutional policies, processes and procedures
- Creating and sustaining a supportive campus environment

The group has 28 recommendations it plans to implement starting next month and continuing for the next several years. This includes developing programs to foster mental health and supporting initiatives to reduce the stigma around mental illness as well as removing barriers to diagnosis, treatment and acceptance in society.

Kiran Grant, 19, is a second-year student studying health sciences who has been advocating for mental health initiatives since his early teens after watching close friends and family experience mental illness. Grant said he was disappointed with the lack of support on campus and hopes the new strategy will help students at the university.

“I started volunteering at the Calgary Distress Centre,” Grant said. “Over the last four years I’ve heard a lot of people’s stories and there’s a lot of common trends — a lack of support, a lack of love and a feeling of being isolated and alone.”

Bruckner said the mental health strategy isn’t just for students, but everyone on campus.

“The first part of the vision was to make sure that the strategy addressed the entire campus,” she said. “It supports ... anyone that is part of our community.”

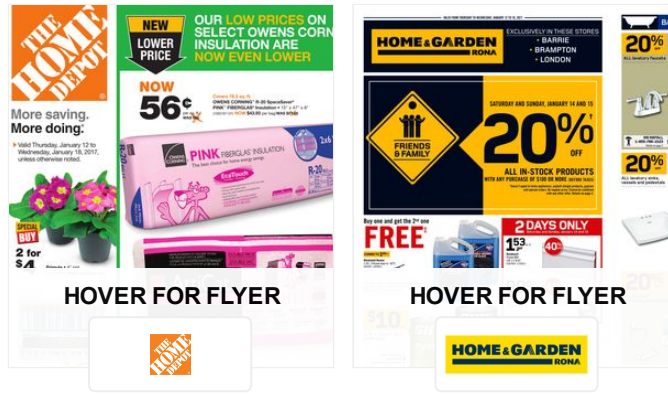
Szeto said research is clear when it comes to mental illness in the workplace and that stress at school is comparable. He cited a study he and a colleague conducted that linked workplace stress to mental illness.

“Those who perceived their workplace as extremely stressful were two to three times more likely to experience or have a mental illness than those who perceived their workplace as not very stressful at all.”

At this point, it’s unclear how the task force will implement the recommendations, but Szeto said the group is determined to make it happen.

“We need to evaluate the success of the strategy itself so although it’s a little bit unclear at this moment I think we will get it done.”

Calgary Flyers



Comments

We encourage all readers to share their views on our articles and blog posts. We are committed to maintaining a lively but civil forum for discussion, so we ask you to avoid personal attacks, and please keep your comments relevant and respectful. If you encounter a comment that is abusive, click the "X" in the upper right corner of the comment box to report spam or abuse. We are using Facebook commenting. Visit our FAQ page (<http://www.calgaryherald.com/news/story.html?id=7195492>) for more information.

1 Comment

Sort by **Newest**



Add a comment...



Amber Craig · Co-founder & Chairman at Breaking Free Foundation

Fantastic initiative that is so needed for Calgary students! Really want to get the word out that our non-profit, Breaking Free Foundation, offers free trauma therapy to Albertans. We screen our therapists thoroughly, and are able to provide the highest quality mental health treatment at no cost to the client. Everyone deserves mental health wellness!

Like · Reply · Dec 8, 2015 9:21am

Facebook Comments Plugin

([HTTP://WWW.POSTMEDIA.COM](http://www.postmedia.com))

© 2017 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.

Powered by WordPress.com VIP (<https://vip.wordpress.com/>?

[utm_source=vip_powered_wpcom&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=VIP%20Footer%20Credit](https://vip.wordpress.com/?utm_source=vip_powered_wpcom&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=VIP%20Footer%20Credit))