

The New Mentality Reflections 2007-2008

The project was the creation of Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) & the Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO. A Project Coordinator, assistant, and thirteen part-time regional leaders were hired in six regions in Ontario.

The three **objectives** of The New Mentality are:

- To create a youth-driven network who are engaged in child and youth mental health issues
- To engage youth in public awareness and stigma reduction
- To involve youth in the health system through speaking about child and youth mental health

The pilot project is currently being evaluated for the impact and success and funding may be extended for 2009 if The New Mentality was effective in achieving the above objectives. One of the directions the project is hoped to go is to engage youth in advocating for the availability of high quality child and youth mental health services.

Outcomes

Network creation: Many pockets of youth formed across the province to plan youth-run events and activities to involve young people ages 14-24 in the systems that affect their mental health. Looking very different in each region, the groups led by regional leaders were formed and advised by allies in each area and partner organizations.

Local and provincial youth engagement: Youth involved as leaders were invited to quarterly gatherings to discuss the projects, help each other along, and build on successes. Local projects were enhanced through the opportunity to gather feedback throughout the project and keep communication lines open with the coordinators.

Advocating for services: Leaders were given the opportunity to speak with many health care professionals and support workers and voice opinions about youth mental health.

Volunteer Recruitment: Youth teams were created and those teams were brought to the gatherings to build on the progress the leaders had made in expressing their voice.

Youth organization, agency, and funder commitment and support: The Centre of Excellence, as a partner, was as much a part of the project as the youth leaders. We were encouraged by their support and inspired by their efforts.

Youth events: Many events were planned such as a fashion show, conference, workshop, forum, presentation, artwork, video, theatre, and mental health week celebration.

Situations and how they were resolved

With the group growing close and feelings being expressed, many things came up which were difficult to address. Ally organizations, especially those assigned to the organizations, were there to give us support and have meetings to address any issues that arose. It seemed the best way to deal with issues was to address it as a group and have everyone support the person who was undergoing mental health issues. In the case that a situation arose within a group, then we would go to the supports in place like partner organizations and allies. It was important to discuss the four agreements of the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement at every given opportunity. Those agreements are respect, listen, understand, and communicate. At the provincial events, many people utilized the staff from Centre of Excellence in the middle of the night to express things that were bothering them. This is a time when many friendships were formed.

In uncomfortable situations such as experiences with cutting, negative attitudes, inappropriate language, jealousy, or anxiety, no amount of counselors attending an event could deal with in its entirety. It was important to realize that we could not solve youth mental health issues and we are not there to counsel young people. Our role as the new mentality was to get the voice of youth heard and increase the mental health of young people through the creation of spaces where youth gather, connect, and organize.

Key Issues

- Establishing protocol for emergencies such as illness or cutting
- Building relationships between sites and regional leader communication
- Encouraging young people expand their knowledge in the mental health community
- Gathering feedback from group members on an ongoing basis
- Keeping young people interested in the project and providing incentives
- Gaining support from the mental health system to advance youth involvement

Key Options

- Drawing on the experience of established organizations as partners
- Organizing youth from diverse backgrounds in youth-driven projects
- Interacting with mental health professionals
- Communicating with tools such as Taking IT Global project pages, websites, and magazines
- Expanding their skills in presentation and group development
- Creating relationships through the quarterly gatherings and locally-based groups
- Networking with health care professionals and mental health advocates
- Forming Research Action Team created to evaluate the regional youth networks