

Go green for mental health this May

By Michael Riley

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May is mental health awareness month, and it's a good time to acknowledge that it's okay to not be okay, as Baseball for Dad's Louri Snider says. For a long time, the prospect of admitting that one's mental health was suffering was not openly admitted to. If you had a broken bone or some other physical malady, you'd acknowledge and admit it, but a psychological malady? Most people would not have done so. Thankfully, that sort of thinking is changing and admitting that you have mental health issues, whatever they may be, is now not only acceptable but applauded. And it's about time.

Locally and in parts farther afield, Baseball for Dad (www.baseballfordad.com) has been getting the word out on this very important issue for years. Baseball for Dad is a non-profit charity set up in honour of Mark Snider who tragically lost his battle with mental illness, taking his own life in 2019. It was set up in Mark's honour by his mom Louri, to take the stigma away from mental illness. Since their inception, they've come up with a plethora of initiatives like placing baseball gloves around the world (as baseball was Mark's favourite sport), the Buddy Bench program, their Kindness Moose program, their Moosing Around party rental business, their Mark24 apparel line and of course, their Go Green for Mental Health green ribbon initiative.

On their Facebook page on April 29, Baseball for Dad kicked off their green ribbon campaign this year to raise awareness, start conversations and break the stigma around mental health.

?We're going green to show support, spark conversations and remind everyone it's OK not to be OK. You're not alone! Show your support by:

wearing green or mental health messages, hanging a green ribbon

turning on a green light or sharing your story or checking in on someone every small act can make a big difference let's make mental health a priority this May and beyond,? they said in their posting.

Each May, mental health is recognized in Canada and people are encouraged to learn and talk with others about their mental health, as it has been since this observance was established by the Canadian Mental Health Association back in 1951. Every year, one in five Canadians experience a mental illness or mental health issue according to Public Health Ontario. It affects everyone in our country, regardless of age, culture, education, or income, and it has become more prevalent publicly since the pandemic, and people are more cognizant how important mental health is to their overall health and well-being.

According to the World Health Organization, approximately 450 million people struggle with mental illness around the world, and it affects over 6.5 million Canadians. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, one in two Canadians have or have had a mental illness by the time they reach 40 years of age, and it prevents nearly 500,000 of us from attending work each week, with an estimated economic burden of \$51 billion each year (which includes health care costs, lost productivity and reductions in health-related quality of life). It also costs people their lives, with one person dying by suicide every 40 seconds worldwide, according to the WHO, and over 4,000 dying by suicide each year in Canada; 11 people on average each day. Other means like opioid overdoses, other long-term medical conditions, substance abuse, and tobacco addiction also contribute to this mortality rate for those with mental illness.

Snider told Bancroft This Week on May 1 that each May, they proudly take part in Go Green for Mental Health?an initiative dedicated to normalizing conversations about mental health and reducing stigma.

?For the past five years, we've hung green ribbons and awareness signs in over a dozen communities throughout the region. The goal

is simple but powerful; create awareness, educate, end the stigma, send a message it's okay not to be okay, and let people know they're not alone. The more we talk about mental health, we're normalizing the conversation, ending the stigma and saving lives," she says.

Snider says that this year, the campaign continues to grow and they're seeing increased community engagement, with more people requesting ribbons, sharing stories, and proudly displaying green in support of loved ones. She says it's truly heartwarming to see the momentum building year over year.

"While I didn't plan any extra activities through Baseball for Dad this year, it's for a good reason—my new role at NHCIA has kept me quite busy. This year marks NHCIA's 60th anniversary, and we're celebrating with 60 Ways in May to Give Back to Our Community. It's a beautiful reminder that kindness is deeply connected to mental health, and I feel incredibly fortunate that my passion for well-being, inclusion, and mental health awareness is part of both my personal advocacy and my professional life. I'm truly blessed!

To anyone currently struggling with their mental health, I want to say this: You are not weak. You are not alone. And it's okay to not be okay. Please reach out—to family, a friend, a doctor, or a support line. If you are in crisis or need immediate support, call or text 988, Canada's Suicide Crisis Helpline," she says. "Someone is there for you, 24/7."