

Report to 2024 CEM Conference on Mental Health First Aid Initiative

Goal: to act upon the study recommendations forthcoming from the 2018 Mental Health Initiative Group with the intent to improve support offered to persons with mental health issues attending our camps and congregations

Background

In 2018 a motion was passed at CEM conference to provide trained mental health staff at all CEM camping events. (Note: COVID placed a long pause on the pursuit of support for persons experiencing mental health issues.) Actions that resulted from this motion included a committee comprised of members from CEM, CWM, and the Canadian Peace and Justice Committee. Recommendation to the CEM President in 2019 included:

- CEM should mandate an administrative policy regarding the type of staff training and role of staff trained individual in response to mental health challenges.
- CEM should encourage, perhaps pay for, anyone on a staff team to attend and become certified.

Process on the Recommendation in the past year:

Following the study recommendation to capitalize on current programs offered by CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association) and Sanctuary, several options were considered.

1. **Sanctuary Mental Health** - Ministries resources are designed to equip the church to support mental health and wellbeing. Resources are online, free and biblically based and focus primarily on supporting individuals with mental health issues. This course focuses on reducing the stigma of mental health issues, caregiving, self-care and common mental health disorders. Each module includes meeting a person telling their experience and professionals talking about the mental health issue. Persons proceed through the modules independently. www.sanctuarymentalhealth.org
2. **Applied Suicide Intervention Skill Training (ASIST) provided by CMHA** - This two-day program focuses on preventing things that contribute to suicide interventions that increase the safety of persons with thoughts of suicide and help for persons who injure themselves and those affected.
3. **CMHA Mental Health First Aid** course builds mental health literacy and helps individuals identify, understand, and respond effectively to signs of mental distress with first aid intervention. Participants who take this course are prepared to interact confidently about mental health with their family, friends, communities, and workplaces. This course focuses on the four most common mental health disorders including substance

related, mood related, anxiety and trauma related, and psychotic disorders. This 12-hour course can be offered virtually or in person and requires independent pre-work plus two sessions with a trainer.

Three individuals were offered the **Applied Suicide Intervention Skill Training (ASIST)** two-day program in Waterloo provided by CMHA to determine if the program met our needs. It was determined that although the program was worthwhile, it was not what CEM was needing to assist staff in our camping program. After discussions regarding the other two programs, the third option was determined to best fulfil the need identified in our camping programs.

- CMHA Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training course was offered to persons in CEM.
- Fourteen persons indicated an interest in taking the course.
- The cost of \$180 per person was covered by CEM.

These are their words...

Within days of taking the ASIST course, I had opportunity to use the skills learned to help a person in distress who was considering suicide.....N

Participating in the Mental Health First Aid was 1,000 times worth the time and effort. The written resources and interactions were to the point, relevant and insightful. The instructor was knowledgeable and experienced and brought a fresh outlook on an important topic and minimized stigma. I would recommend this course to anyone interested. ... S

- Education on mental health issues reduces stigmatization.
- Education is an investment in well-being.

Recommendation:

- Given the rising incidence of mental health issues and related concerns, we recommend more education for persons in CEM on mental health issues so that every camp and every congregation have individuals trained in Mental Health First Aid.

Vonda DenBoer, Dawn Dawson, Mary Jean Belrose

Mission Centre Presidency Team