

# Mental Health Activities at Seneca – An Update

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by **Counselling and Accessibility Services**

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The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) recently announced a two-year project to develop a “National Standard on Psychological Health and Safety for Post-Secondary Students.” It is intended to act as a voluntary guideline to help Canada’s post-secondary institutions promote and support students’ psychological wellbeing.

In their review of the literature, which provides background information and emerging and promising practices from across the country, Seneca was identified as one of nine “trailblazing” post-secondary institutions in Canada. As a result, we wanted to highlight some of the mental health activities to support students at Seneca.

**Friendship Bench** – Each of our four main campuses has a Friendship Bench. This is part of an initiative by one of our own faculty, Sam Fiorella, who lost his son to suicide. The bright yellow benches serve as a permanent reminder that we need to take time to connect with each other; remember, “Yellow is for hello.”

**Mental Health First Aid** – This two-day training supported by the Mental Health Commission of Canada serves to equip participants in responding to mental health emergencies. Patterned after physical first aid training, these sessions give participants practical tools to respond to mental health crises. These sessions are made available to both staff and students.

**SafeTALK** – This half-day workshop prepares participants to recognize signs and signals of those contemplating suicide and equips them with information in how to respond with appropriate resources. Visit the website for more information and the workshop schedule.

**“Go To” Training** – This half-day training workshop is being developed and will be available to staff and faculty very soon. Developed by Dr. Stan Kutcher and optimized for Seneca staff and faculty, this session provides participants with an orientation to the mental health of post-secondary students and provides clear, specific, practical direction in how to identify

and respond to students experiencing mental health challenges.

**Health and Mental Wellness Promotion** – A position has been created (within Counselling and Accessibility Services) to provide all Seneca students with information about mental health. We are using Seneca social media and events and activities to promote wellness by providing strategies, tips, and resources that students can use for themselves and when they need to assist a friend. In December, there was an awareness campaign on Seasonal Affective Disorder with therapy lights at each campus for students to try out.

**BEACON** – Seneca has recently partnered with BEACON Mind Health to provide an online tool that augments our counselling services. This will be particularly useful for students who are unable to access 1:1 counselling support on campus. BEACON offers therapist-assisted internet Cognitive Behaviour Therapy especially for depression, anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorders.

**Therapeutic Yoga** – This 6 week group intervention has been designed to specifically support students with disabilities who need assistance dealing with anxiety.

**Mindfulness Groups** – A variety of mindfulness programs have been designed to support students (especially students with disabilities) who could benefit from learning effective ways of dealing with anxiety.

**Experienced Staff** – Although we are not a mental health facility, a crisis unit, or an emergency ward, we have counselling staff that are experienced and skilled to deal with a wide variety of mental health challenges that students present on a daily basis. Each year, staff update their skills and participate in professional upgrading as a requirement of their membership in a Regulated Health Profession. In addition, the department in the past year has provided all staff with training in Enhancing Capacity for Interventions in Four Common Youth Disorders and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy.

**WELL program** – This is a new peer support program that trains students to spread the news of mental wellness. It is being piloted at our King campus and offers a drop-in, wellness activities, and supporting events and activities that promote mental health.

**Events** – Bell Let's Talk is a recent example of the events that are supported throughout the year to raise awareness and bring understanding to student mental health. Students completed hundreds of inspirational "thought bubbles" and sent thousands of tweets to support this initiative. We also actively support World Mental Health Day, and a number of wellness events and activities with Athletics and Recreation, and Seneca Student Federation on all campuses.

**Cognitive Behaviour Therapist at the Health Centre** – The Health Centre has entered into a partnership with Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Science to have a cognitive

behavioural therapist provide onsite treatment to Seneca students in the health centre. This manualized, research-supported intervention is especially targeted for those students with anxiety and depression.

**Support for Students on the Autism Spectrum** – Four years ago, some Counselling and Accessibility Services staff were trained by Dr. Elizabeth Laugeson (from UCLA) on the delivery of a social skills program for students experiencing Autism Spectrum Disorder (Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills for Young Adults – PEERSYA). Seneca was the first post-secondary institution in the country to offer the program to students. The research on the program is unequivocal, this is a program that dramatically changes the lives of students who participate. While we continue to provide this program at Seneca, we are also sponsoring a training opportunity for other colleges and universities in the province. At last count, 14 colleges and universities were committed to attending.

Through SMILE, we are also offering mentoring for ASD students. And we are now piloting an ASD coaching project at S@Y with our counsellors and Learning Strategist.

**Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC)** – After reviewing our Request for Interest, the MHCC has requested Seneca's involvement in the development of the National Standard on Psychological Health and Safety for post-secondary students. We will be entering into a partnership to host events with students that would inform the development of the National Standard on Psychological Health.

View the [March 2019 issue of the Academic Newsletter](#).

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