

Mental Health Initiatives at Seneca

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by **Laura Boyko, Counselling and Accessibility Services**

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Welcome back! Counselling and Accessibility Services (CnAS) are excited to welcome all new students, staff, and faculty to campus this fall! Our department also has several new staff joining the team; we have a new Director, Laura Boyko, and we have new and returning counsellors, learning strategists, and assistive technologists. We look forward to working with our campus partners throughout the coming year!

Most of us are aware through media and research of the increasing need for mental health supports in postsecondary institutions across the province and Seneca is no different. CnAS provides students with personal counselling for a variety of issues as well as support for students who require accommodations. Students of all ages are faced with immense pressures and transitional challenges when they come to College. In order to assist with that, CnAS has tremendous services and programming to support and provide assistance to help all students become academically successful.

Support for Students on the Autism Spectrum – Our PEERS® (Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills for Young Adults – PEERSYA) program will continue to run this fall, supporting students on the Autism spectrum. CnAS staff are trained by Dr. Elizabeth Laugeson (from UCLA) on the delivery of a social skills program for students experiencing Autism Spectrum Disorder. Seneca was the first post-secondary institution in Ontario 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. For more information on the PEERS® program, see the [PEERS®: A program for students on the autism spectrum](#) article in the **June 2019 issue** of the Academic Newsletter.

Groups – Bringing together students with similar concerns can build connections and community, as well as reduce loneliness, an alarming revelation indicated in our National College Health Assessment survey results this past spring (almost 30% stated they felt very lonely). Group offerings this fall will include our Therapeutic Yoga and Mindfulness groups, as well as an LGBTQ group. Additional mood and anxiety groups will also be developed as

these are the majority of concerns students present to counselling for.

Mental Health Training – Throughout the coming year, you will see a variety of training offered for staff, faculty, and students:

- SafeTALK – a half-day workshop that prepares participants to recognize signs and signals of those contemplating suicide and equips them with information in how to respond with appropriate resources
- Mental Health First Aid – a two-day training supported by the Mental Health Commission of Canada to equip participants to respond to mental health emergencies. This training is patterned after physical first aid training giving participants practical tools to respond to those with mental health crises

Development is underway to roll out a three-hour training this fall for staff and faculty, in order to provide participants with an orientation to the mental health of post-secondary students and provide clear, specific, practical direction in how to recognize, respond, and refer students experiencing mental health challenges. Stay tuned for more details!

Health and Mental Wellness Promotion – Staff within CnAS continue to work to provide all Seneca students with information about mental health and wellness. 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. Last spring, Seneca participated in the National College Health Assessment, surveying students about all things health related, including general health, physical activity, drug and alcohol use, sexual activity (including experiences of sexual harassment and assault), mental health, and work/volunteer activities outside school. The results of this survey will be shared this fall.

Seneca supports National Mental Health Awareness days such as the Bell Let's Talk day and Accessibility Awareness day. Our staff work hard each year to raise awareness and bring understanding to student mental health. We also actively support World Mental Health Day and a number of wellness events and activities with Athletics and Recreation and the Seneca Student Federation on all campuses.

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 one-on-one counselling support on campus. BEACON offers therapist-assisted internet cognitive behaviour therapy especially for depression, anxiety, and post traumatic stress disorders.

Did you know? Ontario Shores and Seneca's Medical Centre have partnered to provide a cognitive behavioural therapist on-site to provide one-on-one cognitive behavioural treatment

to Seneca students in the health centre. This manualized, research-supported intervention is especially targeted for those students with anxiety and depression. Please contact the [Seneca Medical Centre](#) for more information.

Should you have any questions about the services of CnAS, please [give us a call or email](#). We would be happy to consult with you!

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

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