

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ditch the doll...Be your own beautiful!
Youth talking with youth about eating disorders and mental health

(Thunder Bay, ON, May 29, 2007) The Youth Advisory Group for the Eating Disorders Program at St. Joseph's Care Group launched 18 inspirational posters into Thunder Bay high schools. The group's goal was to raise awareness about the importance of good mental health and to reach out to others who may be suffering from an eating disorder.

The posters feature statements like "Breathe," "Laugh 'til it hurts" and "Create you own journey." The youth group hopes to let their peers know that everyone needs encouragement. Raija Begall is a youth group member and says, "We are all similar and share experiences of fear and insecurity at some point in our lives." The Youth Advisory Group wants people to understand that eating disorders are a mental illness. It's important to realize that a mental illness needs treatment just as a physical illness like diabetes needs treatment. "There is no shame in asking for help" says Raija.

In a recent study, 27% of Ontario girls 12-18 years old were reported to be experiencing symptoms of an eating disorder and 60% of grade 7 and 8 girls were dieting to lose weight. For youth with eating disorders, 58% are at risk of developing one or more chronic diseases as a young adult. Eating disorders are a growing problem. Despite their collective label, eating disorders are not about food; they are complex disorders, whose origins are highly individualized. They are often misunderstood, leading to criticism and judgment. Although young women are more often affected by eating disorders, it is important to raise awareness of the growing number of young men also affected.

Kerry Bourret is the Team Leader of the Eating Disorder Program at St. Joseph's Care Group. She is impressed by what the Youth Advisory Group have accomplished. "In general, youth with eating disorders are very bright and creative, together they are a dynamic group! Our program has been very fortunate to have their input and dedication."

The posters were revealed at Hammarskjold high school on Tuesday, May, 29th and will be displayed in public and catholic high schools later this week. The Youth Advisory Group will continue working towards more awareness and better understanding of body image issues in their peer population.

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