

McGill Initiative Team Project

Professor Sonberg
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Sidsel Dupont
Sarah Devine
Felix Schupak
James Hallifax
Kibi Zhu

The Problem

McGill University is one of the top educational institutions in the world. It is an establishment where excellence is expected and delivered. These standards can create a large amount of pressure on the student body who are expected to excel. This means that the students are placed under harsh conditions, which can lead many of them to suffer with mental health issues. Mental health is often perceived as only being for severe illnesses, however, simply feeling stressed is also an example of this type of disorder. Many would agree that the majority of McGill University students feel stress, and a recent study published by the university said that “1 in 5 students suffer from a mental health disorder”. Some individuals are capable of managing on their own, but many struggle without seeking help. Our project will address the latter concern to try to ensure that all McGill students can not only perform, but also live to their fullest with an optimal state of mind as they pursue their undergraduate degrees.

In today's society, mental health is the victim of a harsh stigma. Pejorative words are often associated with it, such as “insane”, “psycho”, or even “crazy”. People suffer from mental health issues, but often they refuse to do anything about it as they do not want to be perceived in the negative light that the stigma creates. Our project seeks to change this mindset for students at McGill. If an open environment exists in which people are not afraid to speak about mental health issues and the community is more accepting, victims of mental health disorders will not feel as lonely and isolated. Our goal is to create a project that makes students comfortable seeking help and engaging in preventative measures.

The Solution

With the task of creating an increased awareness of preventative mental health measures and the benefits of living mindfully, we have designed the undergraduate workshop series, “*Mainstreaming Mental Health and Mindfulness at McGill*”. A small team consisting of doctors and professionals from McGill Mental Health Services, professors, campus life engagement staff and peer health educators will serve as the Board of the program. These individuals will design the structure and content of a series of workshops that will be offered to all first and fourth year undergraduate students.

The First Year workshop will be mandatory for all first year students to attend. Six separate workshops lasting two hours each will be held in student residences such as the New Rez ballroom. For off-campus students, the workshops will take place in the SSMU ballroom and the Off Campus Residence team will organize student attendance. The First Year workshop will focus on navigating the transition from high school to university and strategies for being successful in university. The Fourth Year workshop is also two hours in length and will be targeted to graduating undergraduates. It will be scheduled over the course of September-October in several sessions, hosted by each faculty for its own students. Unlike the First Year one, the Fourth Year Workshop will be optional for students to attend, but ideally professors would incentivize students’ attendance in the form of credit, or type of rewards. The Fourth Year workshop will focus on the transition from university to real life, and finishing one’s time at university positively.

The Board will host an all-day planning session at the end of August before school starts, in which they will teach and train 20 “facilitators” the content and delivery of both the First and

Fourth Year workshops. These facilitators will consist of PhD/Masters Psychology students, counselors from counselling services, professors from relevant fields, nutritionists, members from mental health awareness student clubs and staff from OSD, for example (details of this team described below). The Peer Health Educators program would be a great resource to recruit facilitators from. Since there will be many workshops, we wanted to have at least 20 facilitators available for rotation.

Finally, though content and structure will be determined by the Board, we believe that half of the time of the workshop should be dedicated to awareness and information about mental health illnesses and disorders, as well as de-stigmatizing them. The remaining half of the workshop should be to educate students on the mental health services, clubs, activities etc. provided on campus, as well simple demonstrations of breathing, mindfulness, meditation and stretching exercises.

Resources needed:

- Access to: the lobbies and gathering rooms in all residences, for three hours in each, six times in September; large rooms in SSMU or other campus building for the off campus and fourth year workshops; a large room, the SSMU Ballroom would suffice, for a day at the end of August to train the facilitators.
- Refreshments and food for the facilitators at the orientations and workshops (\$2,200).
- A regular meeting place for the Board.
- Pamphlets and other literature for mental health and counseling services (\$600).
- A training booklet for all facilitators (written by the Board).

- 20 dedicated, personable and knowledgeable facilitators.

Team Design

The team structure will consist of two layers. The first group, the Board, is responsible for planning and organizing the *Mainstreaming Mental Health and Mindfulness at McGill* workshops and then teaching the curriculum to the second group, the facilitators, who will execute the workshops across campus.

The Board, a small team of six people, will be a cross-functional self-managing team given full authority and autonomy to plan and organize these workshops and their standard curriculum. It will consist of doctors and professionals from McGill Mental Health Services, professors, campus life engagement staff and select students. Though diverse in skills, they should all share the same values in regards to mental health. Members of this group must have technical expertise when it comes mental health, but also task management skills and interpersonal skills. Interpersonal and task management skills are needed for these workshops to be approved, and much discussion and coordination will have to happen with external groups such as RezLife, McGill staff and InterRez Council (IRC). A self-managing team is the best design, since the problem of mental health on campus is complex and ambiguous with no clear solution. This non-demonstrable task requires a creative team focused on problem solving and sharing a common vision: ameliorating and destigmatizing mental health. They must ensure that there are explicit plans to meet the task and that there is a clearly defined goal. This team is reciprocally interdependent, as it requires all members to work closely together and pool their expertise to develop a solution.

Underneath the board, following a bureaucratic structure, are 20 facilitators who will be further subdivided into teams of 3-4. Once the Board has developed the program they wish to implement, it must hold coaching sessions to explain and teach the program to the facilitators. The smaller teams of facilitators, who are the ones going to the residences and the conferences for fourth years, will be manager-lead teams. They are assigned a specific task, tactically executing the workshops and the standard curriculum developed by the Board, which means that they do not need autonomy, but rather structure. Their roles, responsibilities and norms are clearly defined. The Board manages them, as they define the goals, methods, procedures and processes of the project. Most importantly, these facilitators should have strong interpersonal skills since their main goal is connecting with students to relay the vital information, though of course they must also have the technical expertise to answer any questions. They are sequentially interdependent of the Board. This means that for the facilitator teams to be highly functional, they are not only dependent on the Board to create an engaging and informative program, but also to be trained properly. Finally, there is a pooled interdependence among all of the facilitator groups and the Board. All smaller subgroups must be independent of each other to succeed in the workshops, and for the larger group goal to be achieved.

Despite being a large team that is subdivided into many groups, it is important that common values and goals foster an overarching team identity and entitativity. Group cohesion and trust can be maintained, by always remaining positive and creating intrinsic benefits to being a member of this project.

The Board

The candidates were selected based on the professional qualifications that we deemed to be relevant to the project. They represent a diverse mix of skillsets and expertise.

Louis R. Chauvin, Phd - Senior Faculty Lecturer, Faculty of Management

Dr. Chauvin has been teaching at the Faculty of Management since 1994. His areas of interest include mindfulness practices, how they assist in alleviating stress and research of happiness.

Guiseppe Alfonsi, Phd - Associate Clinical Director of McGill Mental Health Service

Dr. Alfonsi is a clinical psychologist specializing in cognitive behavioral therapy. As the Associate Clinical Director of McGill Mental Health Service, he has unique hands-on knowledge of the preventative measures and treatments that can be applied to the issue of mental health.

Patricia Dobkin, Phd - Associate Professor, Faculty of Medicine

Dr. Dobkin has provided and studied psychosocial programs on mindful-based stress reduction and medical practice for the past 9 years. She currently conducts mindfulness work at McGill with medical students, residents and other healthcare professionals.

Leslie Copeland - First-Year Coordinator, Campus Life & Engagement

Ms. Copeland is specialized in coordinating services for first year students. She has first-hand knowledge of the challenges that await new students when they arrive at McGill.

2 Student Peer Health Educators from Healthy McGill, a Student Services Initiative

Peer Health Educators are students with an interest in how health issues impact university students. They provide outreach, trainings and health education as well as referral to services.

Preferable one male and one female student.

Conclusion

By raising awareness of mental health issues and prevention, we can increase the number of McGill students who enjoy positive mental health. To accomplish this, work needs to be done both inside and outside of students' health care settings. The *Mainstreaming Mental Health and Mindfulness at McGill* project we designed is just one of the many methods to help address the problem from the outside. Our hope is that students realize the impact of mental health on their lives and start to take preventative action before problems emerge.

For the project to be successful, the members in the ideal team have to work closely and interdependently toward a clearly defined goal. This is a priority in building group cohesion and trust between amongst the members. However, the internal dynamics that we designed in the paper is based on the course concepts for the team to achieve the greatest efficiency. It is important to note that we do not overly control the roles and responsibility of the Board and the Facilitators. The aim was to provide them with flexibility in the actual work.

At the end of each semester, we intend to conduct a student survey to measure the effectiveness of the initiative. The collected feedback will be useful when working to improve the program structure and workshop content in the future.

Timeline - Mainstreaming Mental Health and Mindfulness Initiative

Tuesday September 29 In class	Members of the team present: SSJFK	First Team Meeting and Brainstorm for Ideas Summary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health - increase awareness • Mindfulness w. focus on stress • Course Registration - streamline digital process • Combine different digital platforms • Affordable food options on campus
Friday October 1 13:00 - 15:00	Members of the team present: SSJFK	Agenda: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide on problem from list of ideas created at brainstorm Summary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision made to go with a mental health/mindfulness initiative • Worked on assembling the ideal team • Discussed resources required, facilitators, volunteers • Discussed whether it should be in rez/on campus, across faculties, mandatory or not, how to incentivise attendees and collaborators
Tuesday October 13 14:00 - 15:00	Members of the team present: S	University Success Series arranged by Campus Life and Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to plan and prepare for exams, healthy habits and tips for managing time and networking • Low attendance: 5 students, all girls
Wednesday October 14 15:30 - 16:00	Members of the team present: J	Meeting with Rez Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry about details and costs associated with reservation of Rez ballrooms and lobbies
Thursday October 15 11:30 - 11:45	Members of the team present: SS	Meeting w. Peer Health Educator Alyssa Wooster of Healthy McGill <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquired how they reach the student body • Through their website, Facebook and tabling on campus • Discussed McGill Mental Health Hub
Friday October 16 17:30 -	Members of the team present: SSJFK	Agenda: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the different mental health/mindfulness initiatives already in existence on campus

19:30		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree on the design of the ideal team • Distribute writing tasks <p>Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined structure of paper • Assigned who writes what
Sunday October 25 11:30 - 13:00	Members of the team present: SSJFK	<p>Agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize project • Read through and edit • Send to Alie Cirgenski for input