

NEWS RELEASE

CHARLOTTETOWN, PEI | August 21, 2015

Hundreds Gather to Improve Child and Youth Mental Health in Atlantic Canada

The focus on mental health of Atlantic Canadian kids and teens drew over 210 people to Charlottetown this week to collaborate on improving programs and services in Atlantic Canada. A Symposium on Child and Youth Mental Health attracted a diverse group of teachers, parents, youth, health care workers, community groups, researchers and government representatives, with the common goal of influencing public policy on mental health to improve the future for our children.

Political support for the Symposium crossed party lines. Reflections were given by PEI Minister of Health and Wellness Doug Currie, PEI federal NDP candidate Joe Byrne highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach, and PEI Green Party Leader and MLA Peter Bevan-Baker stressed the need for a proactive approach to mental health promotion.

The Symposium, organized by the Atlantic Summer Institute on Healthy and Safe Communities (ASI) in partnership with the Socially and Emotionally Aware Kids (SEAK) project, managed by the Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division, and Atlantic Canada Children's Effective Service Strategies in Mental Health (ACCESS-MH), enlisted prominent international, national and regional experts to share their strategies for supporting children and youth. Workshops and exhibits from across the Atlantic Provinces showcased the latest mental health research, programs for parents and children, and youth-led initiatives. Keynote speakers provided substantive messages. Dr. Mark Greenberg, Bennett Endowed Chair in Prevention Research, Penn State University stressed the importance of creating caring compassionate schools, while Dr. Ian Manion, Executive Director for the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, Ottawa summed up the spirit of the conference by saying "No major public health threat has ever been solved by treating people one on one."

Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director of Choices for Youth in St. John's, Newfoundland stirred emotions in the crowd as he advocated for system change despite its challenges, by saying "I have yet to see the day when what I do for a living is harder than what young people have to deal with every day."

Youth engagement was a key feature of the event. Twenty-seven young leaders from Atlantic Canada were hand-picked to attend the Symposium as part of a Youth Leadership Program. The youth participants shared their personal, sometimes emotional, experiences and put a spotlight on the importance of authentic youth engagement in policy and program development. An additional day of workshops focused on the importance of youth leadership, peer support and intergenerational relationships. The final product was a song that conveys the message that this is a time for change and action!

Participants at this event committed to increasing the quality of their partnerships by inviting youth, parents, grassroots supporters and all levels of government and policy makers to have a voice. ASI Symposium Coordinator Patsy Beattie-Huggan said that follow-up programming on mental health promotion would continue throughout the year, extending the opportunities to take action in different regions across the Atlantic Provinces. She concluded, "We have work to do and a voice to be heard in Atlantic Canada."

Key stakeholders met one last time Thursday to discuss next steps and explore ASI's role as a possible Atlantic hub for the promotion of better and improved mental health across sectors. All agreed that good mental health needs to be a top priority in Atlantic Canada - a time for each province to put their shoulder to the wheel to initiate systematic change, promote good mental health and increase access to much needed services.

Support for the event was also provided by the Government of Canada and all four Atlantic provincial governments, as well as many national and local foundations and corporate sponsors.

For more information about the Symposium on Child and Youth Mental Health, visit www.asi-iea.ca, call 902-894-3399 or email info@asi-iea.ca. Stay updated on ASI events via Facebook (www.facebook.com/ASIHSC) or Twitter [@ASI_HSC](https://twitter.com/ASI_HSC) and #ASIPEI2015.

Media Contact:

Patsy Beattie-Huggan
Coordinator, Atlantic Summer Institute on
Healthy and Safe Communities
902-894-3399
info@thequaich.pe.ca

