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Waterloo Region
Suicide Prevention Council
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Laurier leads in training future teachers in suicide alertness

WATERLOO – The Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council and Wilfrid Laurier University are breaking new ground by providing suicide-alertness training for student teachers.

All 150 students enrolled in Laurier's Waterloo-based Faculty of Education will participate in a three-and-a-half-hour suicide-alertness workshop on Jan. 18.

"Wilfrid Laurier University is leading by example and taking action," said Tana Nash, executive director of the Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council. "It is our hope that other Faculty of Education programs will take notice and follow suit."

Suicide-prevention training for teachers is currently not mandatory in Ontario despite the number of youth suicides, attempts, and suicidal ideation that take place in the school setting. Between seven and 10 young people aged 10 to 29 took their own lives each year in Waterloo Region during the period 2000-2007. More alarming, suicidal ideation and attempted suicide are reported more frequently for youth ages 15-19 than any other population. Youth continue to be an important target group for suicide-prevention strategies.

"It is critically important for teachers to know the signs of severe distress that could possibly lead to suicide attempts in children and youth," said Colleen Willard-Holt, dean of Laurier's Faculty of Education. "This is one of very few actual life-and-death situations that teachers can face. It is incumbent upon us as teacher educators to do all we can to prepare aspiring teachers with concrete steps that might conceivably save a life."

During the Laurier training, five workshops of 30 students each will be facilitated by members of the Suicide Intervention community training team involving trainers from a variety of organizations led by the Canadian Mental Health Association's Grand River Branch. The future teachers will learn how to identify people with thoughts of suicide and how to connect them to suicide-intervention resources. The workshops have graciously been funded by the Karim the Dream Basketball Tournament, an awareness and fundraising event hosted by friends and family in honour of their dear friend Karim who died by suicide.

"It is our hope that this training can be built into the curriculum in the future so that we do not need to rely on fundraising efforts," Nash said. "But for now, it is a huge step in the right direction. By having more individuals in our community that are ready and willing to become suicide-prevention helpers, we are building a suicide-safer community that preserves, protects and promotes life."

Suicide-alertness training is also available for workplaces, community groups or can be taken as an individual. For more information, contact workshops@cmhagrb.on.ca or visit www.cmhagrb.on.ca.

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