

By **TIM WHITNELL**
Special to the IFP

People afflicted with mental health issues can experience serious problems at home and school with the ultimate tragic result possibly being suicide.

For Steven Slowka, a student trustee with the Halton Catholic District School Board, personal knowledge and stories related to him about Halton students who ended their own lives spurred him to push for a mental health policy within the board.

The policy's aim is to de-stigmatize issues around mental health and get help or guidance for those who need and want it.

The Catholic board of trustees took the first step toward implementing a new policy on mental health when they voted in favour of adopting it in its present form and sending the newly-formed policy to parents and other stakeholders within the board for their input.

The mental health policy will come back to the board to discuss public reaction to it and at some point will be voted on by trustees for final acceptance as a new policy.

Slowka, who advocated for the policy and had a major part in developing its wording, told the board he

hopes it can be implemented before the end of the current school year. He also said he believes it could be used as a template for dealing with such issues by other school boards.

The Grade 12 student at Christ The King Secondary School in Georgetown said that it was while attending a Halton student senate meeting last November that he learned of the suicides of a couple of Oakville students the previous school year.

"There was also a peer of mine in elementary school in Acton who took her life about four years ago," said Slowka, in explaining his interest in pushing for a formal mental health policy at the board.

"It's a great issue and it needs to be addressed," he stressed.

Just how much of a student or school/board employee's personal information, such as an existing or new mental health issue, can be shared with board staff, and with whom, is a major consideration, said trustees and senior administra-



STEVEN SLOWKA

tors at the recent board meeting.

"On a need-to-know basis it may be shared with certain staff, with parental permission," Theresa Wilson, the board's chief social worker, said from the audience.

Education Director Michael Pautler echoed that sentiment saying the board is limited in what personal information it can share due to privacy policies and whether or not a person or parent chooses to inform the board.

During the board meeting that the policy was adopted on its first reading, Oakville Trustee Pauline Houlahan commented on a specific aspect of mental health.

"Depression among teens seems to be the most prevalent thing we hear about these days. We've got the staff with some training," she said.

Houlahan also suggested that the board's chaplains, of which each of the Catholic board's eight high schools have one, could get involved from a compassionate standpoint.

The mental health policy states, in part, "The Halton Catholic District School Board recognizes that mental health issues require the same consideration as physical health issues."

Under the direction of Pautler and Wilson, the board intends to form a mental health leadership team.

Mystery solved!

Senior thanks Good Samaritans

By **LISA TALLYN**
Staff Writer

Shirley Davis of Georgetown finally got the chance to thank the good Samaritans who came to her aid after she fell on the sidewalk on Guelph St. Friday evening.

Davis had no recollection of the fall that caused a gash on her head and severe bruising on her right side, but she wanted to get in touch with the two men who helped her back to her condominium in the Sands.

She was able to thank them when they called her after reading a story about the incident in Thursday's *Independent & Free Press*.

She doesn't know their last names but said they were Boris and Todd. She also heard from Mary Jo, another woman who helped her, and had the chance to thank her as well.

They were in their vehicles and saw Davis fall as she was attempting to cross the street at Delrex Blvd. and Guelph. Davis said she tripped on something that was "sticking up" and fell.

The three people who helped her said she was talking to them lucidly at the time, and knew where she was going and where she lived.

Davis figures the head injury caused the later memory loss.

"I certainly want to sincerely thank all three of them," said Davis, who is home and feeling much better after spending the weekend (May 8-9) in the hospital.

"All's well that ends well," said Davis.



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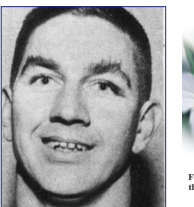
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