

Milton veteran serves as Bell Let's Talk spokesperson

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Mental health is not a competition.

As obvious as that should be, Kelly Scanlan felt compelled to drive that message home during her Bell Let's Talk video.

On the receiving end of many 'well, that's nothing compared to what you've gone through' comments during her time as a staunch advocate for mental health awareness, the 26-year-old Miltonian urges Canadians to offer support to those in need rather than rank their struggles.

"People drown in oceans and people drown in pools and people drown in bathtubs. Everyone just has to stop worrying about how much water someone's drowning in and focus on the fact that someone's drowning."

Having found her way out of the darkness after



Bell Let's Talk photo

Kelly Scanlan (left) meets with Olympian and mental health champion Clara Hughes during the Bell Let's Talk campaign.

years battling Post Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI), anxiety, depression and a serious leg wound following her tour of Afghanistan at age 19, Scanlan is now part of the Bell Let's Talk team that took the social media spotlight yester-

day.

The opportunity — borne from her participation in last fall's Toronto Invictus Games, where she captured swimming gold and bronze for her country — was one the new part-time firefighter eagerly

embraced.

"I thought the Invictus Games were big, but this is way bigger," said Scanlan, one of 50 Bell Let's Talk spokespeople who championed the call for more mental health awareness and education and more financial support for support services. She recently spent time in Montreal, where she was part of comprehensive promotional work and met campaign centrepiece Clara Hughes. "The Invictus Games helped me overcome my struggles, and now Bell Let's Talk is giving me the tools to help others. I've been lucky. Since the Invictus Games, I've almost been preparing for this (Bell Let's Talk). It's been escalating (talking about mental health issues) and now this is the next step."

"I've met with so many people across the country with their own struggles and triumphs. It's been a whirlwind."

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— Kelly Scanlan, Bell Let's Talk spokesperson

Scanlan struggled with going public about her mental health issues for what seemed like an eternity.

"I kept it close to the chest. I told very few people in my extended family and friends. There was the stigma and the fear of what people would think, and then also what that might mean for my future in uniform."

That last concern proved groundless, as Scanlan has received overwhelming support from her fellow firefighters since joining the Milton

ranks late last year.

She said, "That was a huge relief to me. They've been just fantastic. I was so scared to do it (talk about PTSI) the first time, but after that it became easier and easier."

For every applicable text, call, tweet and social media video viewed yesterday, Bell donated five cents toward mental health initiatives and support networks.

"Hopefully people will be as engaged as previous years and we can continue to build these services," said Scanlan.

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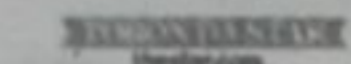


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