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NOVEMBER 13, 2012 | 155-12

Laurier event marks mental health grant and features performance focused on suicide prevention

WATERLOO – Representatives from the Bell Let's Talk Community Fund will present a \$40,000 grant to Wilfrid Laurier University at a kick-off event focused on reducing mental health stigma. The event, held at 3 p.m. Nov. 14 at Wilf's Pub on Laurier's Waterloo campus, will feature a performance of the suicide-prevention play, *The Gospel According to Josh* by New York playwright Josh Rivedal. The performance will be followed by a panel discussion on suicide prevention.

The performance represents the first of many peer initiatives on campus organized by the Mental Health Student Support Team. The team is led by Adrienne Luft, who was appointed in September as Laurier's mental health student support team leader, making Laurier one of only three Canadian universities with such a role.

Luft will lead Laurier's institutional mental health strategy and implement the Bell Let's Talk grant, which will support a mental health and awareness-training program for faculty, staff and students to help them identify the signs and symptoms of mental illness. The grant will also go toward expanding the resource library.

"We are so thankful to Bell for supporting peer initiatives at Laurier," said Luft. "We hope that these events help students to feel safer reaching out when they are having a difficult time."

One of the group's key messages is that many students experience challenging times connected to their mental well-being, and that rather than being shameful, seeking help is courageous.

Laurier will also join a U.S.-based research study aimed at gaining a better understanding of mental health on university campuses.

The Gospel According to Josh is a dark comedy featuring a small-town boy who moves to Hollywood and deals with his father's suicide. The play is now being used as a youth suicide prevention program that provides a forum to make it acceptable and comfortable to talk about mental illness. www.thegospelaccordingtojosh.com

The Bell Let's Talk Community Fund is part of the Bell Mental Health Initiative, a national program in support of mental health that provides grants of \$5,000 to \$50,000 to organizations focused on improving access to mental health care. For more information, visit Letstalk.bell.ca

The Nov. 14 event is free and open to the public.

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