

Four per cent attempted suicide

Guest
in the Spotlight

Boundary Child and
Youth Mental Health
and Substance Use
Local Action Team

The recent mental health crises in the communities of Attawapiskat and Woodstock, Ontario have brought national attention to the issue of youth mental health. While we often think of stress, anxiety and depression as adult problems, the reality is that children and youth are affected as well. The Canadian Mental Health Association estimates that 10-20 per cent of Canadian youth are affected by a mental illness or disorder.

A report recently published by the McCreary Centre Society "Unspoken Thoughts and Hidden Facts: A snapshot of B.C. youth's mental health" provides insight into the mental health of B.C. youth.

The report outlines a number of risk factors for mental health concerns among youth.

Males are more likely than females to report that they feel good about themselves, feel happy most of the time, and felt calm and at peace. Females on the other hand, are more likely to have feelings of extreme stress and despair.

Youth who have been physically or sexually abused experience poorer mental health. It's important to note that 11 per cent of Boundary youth report physical abuse in the past, while six per cent report sexual abuse.

Youth who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual or intersex (LGBTQAI) experience poorer levels of mental health. For example, while 10 per cent of heterosexual youth seriously considered suicide in the past year, a staggering 43 per cent of LGBTQAI youth had considered suicide.

The same survey revealed that 12 per cent of Boundary youth seriously considered suicide in the last year, while four per cent attempted suicide one or more times in the last year.

There are approximately 485 students in high school in the Boundary.

Using the results of the McCreary survey, this means that approximately 19 out of the 485 students in Grades 8-12 attempted suicide one or more times in the year prior to the survey. It is not clear how many of these youth received support following the suicide attempt.

"I have never been diagnosed for any mental health issue, but I worry about being depressed. I'm not sure; I never, ever speak of it," wrote one youth who submitted a comment on the McCreary survey.

The report also outlines a number of strengths, skills, resources and supports that help promote positive youth mental health. Youth who feel more connected to their community

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are more likely to report positive mental health than those who feel less connected.

Other protective factors include family support, connection to school, positive peer relationships, and participating in sports or physical activities. Youth who regularly participate in extracurricular activities including sports teams and informal activities (e.g. biking, skateboarding, hiking) are more likely to feel happy, calm and at peace than those who do not. Communities can promote positive

youth mental health by increasing low-cost or free activities for youth.

These protective factors also increase the likelihood that youth will access mental health services when they need them. Accessing supports when they are needed is key. The reality is that today most mental health challenges and disorders can be treated. We know from research and clinical practice that receiving help at the right time can help prevent the escalation of symptoms, and even help youth return to good health.

"I overcame depression by the help of a wonderful school counselor," wrote one youth who participated in the McCreary survey.

Information is also key. The Boundary Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Local Action Team has come up with a series of short articles to run in this paper to help youth and families recognize and understand some common mental health concerns, and connect youth and families to supports available in the community, regionally and provincially.

There are also a number of high quality provincial websites that produce up-to-date information about a wide variety of mental health and substance use concerns. To find out more you can visit openmindbc.ca; mindcheck.ca, forcesociety.ca, and keltymentalhealth.ca.

For more information about the McCreary Adolescent Health Survey you can visit mcs.bc.ca.

Brought to you by the Boundary Local Action Team, coordinated locally by Kootenay Boundary Division of Family Practice. Action team members include doctors, mental health counsellors, school administrators, health authority staff, community agencies, families and more. The Child Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Collaborative is supported by the Shared Care Committee with additional support for specialist participation from the Specialist Services Committee. Both committees are partnerships between Doctors of B.C. and government of B.C.