

CMHA issues 2,000 push-up challenge to support local mental health care

Staying active during the winter season is crucial for mind, body, and soul ? but if you're looking for a good excuse to keep moving, consider the Canadian Mental Health Association's Push-Up Challenge.

Now in its third year, the Push-Up Challenge is a way to ?have fun and push for better mental health.? Participants are invited to take on 2,000 push-ups between February 5 and February 27, a number chosen in memory of the estimated 2,000 lives lost to suicide each day around the world.

?The Push-Up Challenge is a powerful reminder that small daily actions can create meaningful change,? said Catherine Matzig, Senior Director of Philanthropy for the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe (CMHA-YRSS), in a statement. ?When our community shows up for this Challenge, they're not only honouring lives lost ? they're helping ensure that people in York Region and South Simcoe can access mental health supports when they need them most, especially during those isolating winter months.?

Matzig tells The Auroran they think of the Push-Up Challenge as a ?cross-country movement with a local heart,? and money raised locally will benefit all of the CMHA-YRSS' programs, including programs supporting those experiencing depression and anxiety.

?People understand the importance of recognizing mental health and mental illness, talking about it, and this gives people a really easy way to introduce that conversation and to keep coming back to support mental health,? she says. ?I think we all know somebody close to us who in some way has been impacted by mental health, mental illness, and it's a great way to support programs and services that support those who are struggling with their mental health and to really raise the level of conversation locally, but absolutely across the country to destigmatize, demystify it, and give us an opportunity to learn more and to come together as a community of people who really care about the mental wellness of those who are close to them.?

Holding the Push-Up Challenge during the winter months is a conscious decision of the CMHA because it's a time when people are ?struggling with the effects of low light, with the cold, the dark, and the temperatures, and staying active while all this is happening is key for mental health,? says Ansara Ali, Peer Support Worker with the CMHA-YRSS' Community Connections team.

?This encourages the social piece since that is something we definitely struggle with during this time of year,? says Ali. ?We tend to be a bit more secluded naturally for that reason,? she adds, noting that ?any form of movement? can help make a difference.

?You can be very flexible with that in terms of whether it's a walk in the community or, if you're at home, you can just designate five to 10 minutes to do a mindful meditation, or just dancing to your favourite song,? she says. ?Any form of movement is very important in terms of just maintaining where we are during this time.?

And if push-ups aren't your thing, other activities can help you stay active while supporting the cause.

?Anybody can join the Push-Up Challenge and you can join solo, but you can also join as a team,? says Matzig. ?You can rally your workplace or your gym. The structure of the event is really built for communities and companies to step in, start a friendly competition, and keep each other accountable.

I think keeping friends and neighbors accountable throughout this winter season is really important to keep our mental health high.

?Accessibility really matters to us for this push up challenge. So, you don't have to just do push-ups. It's not everybody's cup of tea. So, you can squat, do sit-ups, bench presses, resistance band moves, jumping jacks, lunges, anything that just gets you moving and gets you motivated, and alternatives to push ups, wall push ups, chair push ups, that sort of thing, so that everybody can participate safely and to the best of their ability. Also, please keep it local. When you are choosing your recipient CMHA, please choose York and South Simcoe during your registration. Your efforts really do help support and expand mental health programs and services right

here in our Region.?

For more information on the 2026 Push-Up Challenge, including how to register or support a participant, visit thepushupchallenge.ca.

By Brock Weir
Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter