

CMHA, Six Nations Community use Town Park as backdrop to healing



The Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe recently joined forces with members of the Six Nations community to foster a space for healing ? using Aurora Town Park as a backdrop to a full day of learning.

Rise Above the Rest was an experiential workshop led by facilitators of the Six Nations Community for CMHA-YRSS staff and clients with a focus on ?empowering participants with a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultures, traditions, and worldviews ? fostering connection, awareness, and pride across the Community.?

The workshop was the brainchild of Sarah Caldeira, Program Lead for the CMHA-YRSS' Recovery College, or, formally, the College of Health and Wellbeing.

The intent, she says, was to recognize the importance of ?engaging meaningfully with Indigenous communities,? particularly with June being National Indigenous History Month.

?I thought it was the perfect time to create that space for learning and reflection, and the Recovery College program is really about empowering people to take charge of their recovery, wellness and wellbeing,? she says. ?Offering the Indigenous workshop gave people a chance to learn about Indigenous culture and history in a really respectful and culturally-aware way.

?I connected with facilitators from Rise Above the Rest. They brought a more deep and cultural understanding to the session, and I thought it was really important if it was an Indigenous Workshop that it came from Indigenous people, created that authenticity from lived experience and cultural knowledge.?

As the day unfolded, participants were able to take part in a number of Indigenous games, such as lacrosse, which organizers say ?got people up and about laughing and enjoying themselves,? as well as in drum demonstrations, and to witness traditional dances.

?One of the major highlights is always around the music part of things,? says Caldeira of both this initiative and other programs which have focused on Indigenous drumming on CMHA camping trips. ?When it comes to the benefits, it really helps create a more culturally-aware organization. I think it's really important when it comes to Indigenous communities and awareness that we strengthen those partnerships and continue to do so. It's also important because we have a very diverse clientele and I think it's really important to make sure we reflect the diversity of the community that we serve.?

CMHA-YRSS' Jill Yeo echoes these sentiments and notes there is a therapeutic element to Indigenous teachings as well.

?When we've had our camping trips with the drumming, it hasn't just been a case of enjoyment; we own many, many different drums and we have drumming sessions, and the clients, I feel, get so much out of the music in itself ? just being exposed to music, listening to music, sharing music, and it does have that therapeutic effect on them,? she says. ?There's also that spiritual effect with the drums.

There's something about drums that really bring out a lot of emotion with people and we have seen that for several years at any of our events where we've had that with our clients.?

The CMHA-YRSS' Indigenous Affinity Group, adds Yeo, is always working on community initiatives and says they're always looking for volunteers ? particularly from the Indigenous community to help them further develop such initiatives.

?This workshop Sarah did was the first time we've had this,? she says. ?It's something that hopefully next June we'll be able to elaborate on and add more and get more clients and staff involved.?

By Brock Weir