

Panthers join tournament to benefit mental health

By Jake Courtepatte

Some things are just more important than hockey.

The Bantam Aurora Panthers will be looking to break the stigma around mental health when they take the ice in January for the Start Talking Cup, a mental health initiative that has raised over \$40,000 since its inauguration in 2015.

Joined by the Barrie Jr. Colts and Orillia North Central Predators, the Panthers will showcase their talents against the Barrie Sharks at Barrie's Molson Centre on January 15, after the organization helped raised \$15,400 in last year's girl's tournament.

"It's not just boys who experience mental-health difficulties or addiction issues, girls do too," said Lynne Raimondi, resource development with the CMHA in Barrie.

With one in five Canadians struggling with mental health issues, according to Stats Canada, Raimondi said physical activity can help athletes with the battle.

"If you're physically healthy it certainly helps your mental health. And especially in the hockey world over the years we've heard so many stories of athletes who are struggling with mental-health issues, addiction issues. It really normalizes it."

Former Toronto Maple Leafs Jack Valiquette has supported the event from the beginning.

"I'm involved because it bothers me that these young athletes and any young people are taking their own lives," said Valiquette. "We want these young people to understand that being a good person and striving to be better is good enough".

An event attended by over 1,500 fans yearly, the Panthers will open the night against the Sharks at 6:45 p.m. Included are an array of silent auction items, a 50-50 draw, interactive booths, surprise VIP guests and more.

Tickets are five dollars each, and can be purchased at the door or at www.starttalking.ca.