

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Building supports for Mental Health

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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I had a chance last week to join a screening of the documentary ScreenAgers sponsored by the Newmarket Parent Support Network, the York Region Board of Education, and the Bully Free Community Alliance.

It was a fascinating piece that talked in a non-judgmental way about the impact on our kids of too much 'screen' time; the impact of cyber-bullying and some really helpful suggestions on how to manage screen time in a family. The documentary didn't just deal with kids and their mobile devices but it also raised adult patterns and how we can be just as addicted to our cell phones and video screens.

There was a spirited post-screening discussion that included a teen representative and a community policing officer from the York Regional Police force. A number of teens in the audience participated in the question and answer session and also suggested some great ways to curb too much screen time.

If you would like more information about this documentary, please go to www.screenagersmove.com. At this website you can find all types of resources to facilitate discussion and practical application of ideas relating to screen time contracts, helpful tips for youth and adults, basic screen time rules and more.

To applaud those that brought forward this documentary is not enough. It brought to mind for me 'again' that York Region does not have enough support services for adults, youth, family and service providers in the mental health area. The point was made that evening and has been part of my concern for a very long time that referring to mental health is a widespread category and stretches from what we would traditionally think of such as drug addiction, suicide prevention, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, all the way to cyber-bullying, sexting and general coping mechanisms for all ages and circumstances.

That is why I have been working for over two years now with a coalition of almost 20 organizations to bring some focus and suggestions forward on how to build mental health services in our area.

What has emerged is a comprehensive recommendation to the Minister of Health to fund a mental health hub in the Newmarket area.

This Hub will provide services other than hospital emergency departments for people to get help for police and paramedics to have somewhere to transport those who need help but are not in full crisis to facilitate better case management and follow up.

The proposal is a result of discussions with a community based group who brought forward their experiences in accessing mental health and addictions services, their experiences with wait lists and in general their experiences with what existing services we do have in place.

We do have some excellent service providers in York Region. And they have been a part of the dialogue around needing a mental health and addictions hub. But they are stressed too, both in trying to provide services for our expanding population and in matching their capacity to the needs of the area. Very good work has been done by this group to identify the real needs and to dig into how we can help.

The proposal is now before the health planners for our area - the Local Health Integrated Network - and the new Minister of Health Dr. Jaczek. We believe it is a solid proposal and one worthy of everyone's support.

It was very exciting to hear that a local resident, Arlene Lindsay, was being recognized for her work with the Trillium Gift of Life organization.

Gift of Life oversees Ontario's organ donation program and Arlene the founder of the York Region chapter. As the lead volunteer, she and her team can be found advocating for organ donation and raising funds at the Aurora Street Festival, the Stouffville Strawberry Festival, local Santa Claus Parades and the Gift of Life Bowling Tournament among other things. Arlene is a tireless advocate for organ donation and she was awarded a 2017 Trillium Gift of Life Advocates in Action Award in recognition of her role as an ambassador for the cause.

We are looking forward to hosting the 2018 Leading Women, Leading Girls celebration this week. Congratulations to all of the award recipients. I will tell you more about them and their many achievements and accomplishments in my next column. I am proud to tell you that this riding hosts one of the largest celebration of Leading Women and Leading Girls in the province. I thank everyone who participated in the nomination process.

Did you know that every April is Be A Donor Month? Everyone is a potential organ or tissue donor but you should register in advance. For more information go to www.giftoflife.on.ca.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.