

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: FINAL WORDS AND NEW BEGINNINGS

Mary-Lou Donnelly, President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation

The statistics regarding youth mental health problems are staggering. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada (CMCC), between 15% and 25 % of our children and youth suffer at least one mental health problem or illness. These range from depression and anxiety to eating disorders and substance abuse. Mental disorders represent the most common and disabling condition affecting young people and therefore have major implications for students and schools. The Commission also notes that 70% of mental illnesses in adults have their onset during adolescence or childhood and 70% of childhood cases of mental health problems can be solved through early diagnosis and interventions.

At our November 2009 Board of Directors meeting, Michael Howlett, CMCC President, and Louise Bradley, Chief Operating Officer, made a presentation on the commission's framework and national strategic plan and invited CTF to be part of its *Stand in the Light: Partners for Mental Health initiative*. There was no hesitation on the part of our Board of Directors to join the national network of communities, parents, educators and health care practitioners. It was agreed that, as educators, we must help to eliminate the stigma associated with mental health issues in our schools. However, for this to happen, teachers need resources and materials. I was delighted to find out about a teachers' program being piloted in my home province of Nova Scotia that aims to provide this type of information for teachers. The project provides teacher and student resources on adolescent mental health and mental illnesses that can be incorporated into the curriculum of Digby Country high schools during the 2010/2011 school year. The project is part of the Mental Health Matters project, a partnership between the Digby Clare Mental Health Volunteers Association, the Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health at Dalhousie University, the IWK Health Centre and Laing House (the community support centre for youth living with mental illnesses). This is just an example of one initiative that provides support for teachers who cannot work in isolation but must be supported by parents, school boards, community partners and ministries of education.

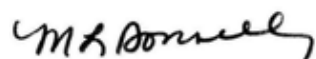
As a national federation, it is also important to work collaboratively with other partners and groups which share our concerns about mental health issues among youth. It was an honour for me to make a presentation on youth and mental health issues at two conferences – one in Prince Edward Island last August and another in Winnipeg last fall – as part of our ongoing work with the National Coalition of Community Safety and Well-being.

### Final word

We hope you will enjoy reading this issue of *Health and Learning* magazine which brings mental health topics to the fore with articles on learning barriers, genetics behind stress and depression, and suicide rates among youth, just to name a few. We are extremely grateful to our contributors for providing us with these rich and insightful articles. Sadly, this is the last issue under the banner of "Health and Learning" because of federal funding cuts to the Canadian Council on Learning.

However, all is not lost. We are pleased to announce that we will be launching a new online publication in June called CTF "Perspectives" which we hope will be the Canadian authoritative source for original and insightful articles and research findings on a broad range of topics related to education and the teaching profession. Some of the articles that appeared in *Health and Learning* magazine may find their way once again into CTF "Perspectives". Subscription is free. Visit our website: [www.ctf-fce.ca](http://www.ctf-fce.ca). Thank you to our readers, contributors and supporters.

Regards,



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