



THE FRIENDSHIP BENCH

#yellowisforhello

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS THE LUCAS FIORELLA FRIENDSHIP BENCH?

This not-for-profit corporation was launched in April 2015 to continue the selfless acts of Lucas Fiorella, a Canadian student who, after suffering from depression in secret for a number of years, took his own life in October 2014. In the aftermath of his death, Lucas's family and friends learned about his silent battle but also his efforts to reach out and save other students who were also suffering. A number of Lucas's high school and university friends and classmates reported that he took the time to reach out to them when he sensed they were suffering from anxiety or depression. Each conversation started with a "hello" and in each case, Lucas provided the courage to speak about their suffering with family and/or professionals and prevented these students from dropping out of school or taking their own lives through suicide.

IS THERE A NEED FOR THIS?



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**YELLOW IS FOR
HELLO**

Suicide has become the **2nd leading cause of death among Canadians aged 15 – 34**, according to statistics provided by the University of Guelph. That does not include the number of students who have considered suicide or who have dropped out due to depression or other mental health-related issues.

Further according to Statistics Canada research, more than **50% of students who suffer from depression never report it to friends, family, or professionals**, despite the fact that more and more secondary and post-secondary schools are adding full-time mental health counsellors on staff.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THE PROGRAM IN SCHOOLS?

Our campaign seeks to decrease the number of suicides and suicide attempts occurring among Canadian students between the ages of 15 and 24 by:

1. Encouraging peer-to-peer conversation about mental health among students in order to drive greater awareness of the disease and threat to students, recognition of the symptoms, knowledge of the prevention and support services available
2. Connecting more students to available on-campus and in-community mental health resources both as a preventative measure (for new students who may be at risk) and support measure (for those suffering)
3. Educating students and parents about the causes and signs of the various forms of mental illness so that students may be more aware of their own mental health and that of their friends

WHAT DOES THE LUCAS FIORELLA FRIENDSHIP BENCH DO?

Our 100% volunteer staff work with the school's faculty, volunteers, students, and community partners to raise funds in order to implement our national mental health program in local schools.

There's a few elements to what we do:

- A. The Friendship Bench
 - a. Our efforts are built around this iconic yellow friendship bench, which is installed at secondary and post-secondary schools. It serves as a permanent, physical, and year-round reminder



to students to take a moment out of their day to sit, breathe, and talk (or think) about their mental health and that of their friends. It's intended to inspire peer-to-peer conversations about mental health in order to reduce the stigma and encourage more students seek help.

- b. The plaque on the bench links students to www.yellowisforhello.org, which provides links to the mental health support services on and off-campus. It also lists the #YellowIsForHello hashtag, which connects students to each other and our positive support messages through social media.



B. #YellowIsForHello – The affiliated #YellowIsForHello campaign, so named to draw attention to the bench and its purpose, is used to connect on-campus and digital awareness and education campaigns. For example, our Facebook page posts “Mental Health Monday” tips

and strategies each Monday, “Wellness Wednesday” articles promoting mental and physical health while at school, and “Feel Good Friday” posts intended to inspire positive thinking and community. Our Instagram account shares daily positive images and philosophies – along with campaign news and updates – intended to help support daily positive affirmations.

- C. National Campaigns – Our hashtag is also used to connect national awareness campaigns and peer-to-peer discussions through a variety of national campaigns that we sponsor including “Bench Conversations,” “10 Days of Happy,” “100 Misfits,” and others. Participating schools, mental health counsellors and/or student volunteers are provided the option to joining us in promoting and delivering these campaigns on a local level, but it's not mandatory.

- D. On-Campus Support – The bench is used by participating institutions as a focal point for its own mental health initiatives. For example, some schools adopt the colour yellow into their mental health programs, others use the location of the bench as regular location for mental



health awareness events, etc. Others create unique campaigns designed specifically to work with the bench such as Fletcher's Meadow Secondary that created/installed a 3-dimensional "hello" sign that features pull out "conversation cards," which make a game out of starting conversations. Niagara College created/installed a "Yellow Friendship Wall" near the bench that asks students to post/take positive mental health messages with yellow Post-It Notes.



E. Host schools are can also take advantage of one-time or ongoing mental health educational lectures provided by our Co-Founder, Sam Fiorella. Sam a professional speaker, author, professor, and marketing executive before starting this initiative, now provides educational mental health lectures to schools, parents, businesses, and community groups across the country. Learn more: <https://thefriendshipbench.org/book-sam-to-speak/>

DOES THE PROGRAM WORK?

The #YellowIsForHello campaign has just launched; however, early response has been tremendous. The first schools to launch the program have already reported an increase in the number of students reaching out to on-campus teams for support. Further, a marked increase in the number of unsolicited student posts on social media about the importance of mental health awareness or statements of support have been noted.

As an example, the on-site social worker at our first secondary school reported that one of the first students to reach out was a "senior school sports hero" who had been suffering silently for a number of years and neither sought help nor spoke to anyone about this depression. His first comment in reaching out was "I now feel that it's OK to talk about this."

Early reports from those campuses that have the program running state that they've seen approximately 18% increase in the number of students seeking help for some form of depression.

The main difference between our program and others, according to the feedback provided by participating schools, is that our yellow bench and the #YellowIsForHello campaign is a constant, visual reminder and educational source for students, instead of one-off campaign events.



We are not a counselling service. Through our bench and campaigns, we work on promoting existing on- and off-campus resources so that those suffering in silence may get the help they need. As a result, the program leverages existing momentum and augments the current services and efforts of school staff/volunteers to aid students.



HOW MANY SCHOOLS ARE INVOLVED?

We have just completed our first year (program launched April 2015, the first installations began September 2015) and the results have been tremendous. We had 11 benches and campaigns installed in the first year and by the end of October 2016, we'll have 22 installed across Canada. You can see the current list of schools highlighted on our website: www.yellowisforhello.org

Another 40 schools are in queue for fundraising for a bench and mental health program; however, funding is preventing our non-for-profit organization from rolling them out as quickly as the community - or we'd - like.

WHO CAN RECEIVE A BENCH?

The primary target for The Lucas Fiorella Friendship Bench and the #YellowIsForHello campaign are secondary and post-secondary schools; however, we do consider requests from elementary schools, community centres, fire halls or other locations where students frequent. For elementary schools or community groups, we encourage representatives to reach out to us via our website contact form in order to set up a consultation to determine how we may partner together.

WHAT DOES THE PROGRAM COST?

Our volunteer group is working tirelessly to raise enough funds to support all the schools asking for the program; however, currently there is more demand than there is funds. The estimated cost to launch in each Canadian school (including bench manufacture/delivery, unveiling ceremony, give-a-ways, website support, campaigns, etc.) is approximately \$10,000 plus another \$2,000 - \$3,000 per year to support year-round mental health education and suicide prevention campaigns.



In order to speed up access to the program that is already helping Canadian students, we are partnering with schools, schools boards, parent associations and student councils to launch independent fundraising programs to cover some or all of the program costs required their respective schools. We're also receiving support from socially-conscious businesses such as **Distinct Infrastructure Group Inc., New York New York Men's Grooming Lounge,** and **Treasures Yorkdale** that have started fundraising efforts among their staff and clients.

Schools that initiate fundraising campaigns or that directly donate to the program to cover some or all of year one costs, are moved up the donation priority queue. Costs for year two and beyond are the responsibility of The Lucas Fiorella Friendship Bench. There is no obligation by host schools to contribute or continue to fundraise; however, we gladly accept any additional support that schools or community groups wish to provide.

HOW DO I LEARN MORE?

Corporate Website: www.thefriendshipbench.org

Campaign Website: www.yellowisforhello.org

Request a Bench: www.thefriendshipbench.org/request-a-bench/

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/thefriendshipbench>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/yellowis4hello>

Instagram: <http://www.instagram.com/TheFriendshipBench>

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