

Re: Exposing Canada's ugly mental health secret, Sunday, October 13, 2013

The Canadian Association of School Psychologists (CASP) applauds Senator Kirby's efforts to obtain more equitable mental health services for children and youth in Canada. Certainly the personal and financial cost to society is a great concern, and one which needs to be a priority for our government.

However, CASP would like to see the approach to remedying this problem broadened by recognizing the role of schools in the mental health of our children and youth. Schools are the only mandated service that all children and youth access, and they do so at the most critical times of their lives in relation to personal, social, emotional and intellectual development. Schools, and school psychologists, have the advantage of being able to work from a prevention perspective, introducing universal programs to enhance mental health and wellness in all students. School psychologists are also in a unique position, since they are within the system, to support teachers and assist in early identification of potential problems and then to address them with targeted interventions intended to "nip them in the bud". And if problems do persist, school psychologists are there for direct services, including assessment, counselling, and referrals to other specialists, if needed.

As well, schools are strategically positioned to collaborate and work effectively with the larger community and all other agencies that are concerned with the education, well-being and welfare of our children and youth. It is often the disconnect between societies' agencies that limit, prevent or even deny the kinds of comprehensive and integrated services that together can do so much more in the promotion of psychological health. We would refer interested readers to a special issue of the *Canadian Journal of School Psychology* (2013) on "The role of schools in a new mental health strategy".

CASP advocates that there needs to be an equally assertive lobby for more school-based mental health services, especially those utilizing more school psychologists and allied professionals to provide these services. Educational systems across the country are challenged to fund and fill school psychology positions, and yet without these services, the ability to provide the comprehensive prevention programs to promote mental wellness and offset mental health problems is seriously hampered.

So while calling for equitable access to private psychological counselling for those in need, CASP would implore Senator Kirby to continue to lobby as strongly for readily accessible psychological services within the public school system. Preventing problems before their onset is certainly the most cost-effective and most socially conscious approach to our young citizens. We laud Senator Kirby's strong support of school-based

mental health initiatives, and in order for this to occur, yes, part of that solution is to acknowledge the need for system-wide access to school psychologists.

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