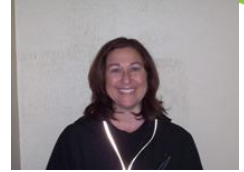


Youth Engagement Conference...



By Yolanda Pascal, Care and Treatment Worker, Pinecrest Program

On October 1, 2009, the Pinecrest youth had the opportunity to attend a youth conference entitled, "Youth Voices: Creating New Choices". The conference was initiated, planned, and carried out entirely by youth. The purpose was to raise awareness of mental health issues facing young people and to provide a forum for youth to express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions to service providers. Many youth told their stories, shared their talents, and challenged service providers to hear what they are wanting and needing from them. I am proud to say that two of our young ladies in the Pinecrest Program were an integral part of planning this event. It was truly inspiring to watch these motivated youth from diverse backgrounds come together to stage this meaningful event. Many of the youth involved will continue to work together to create ongoing youth initiatives, because in their words, "we can't just talk the talk, we need to walk the walk." Future plans include developing a newsletter which will speak to youth about mental health, and planning another conference for the Fall of 2010. All who attended this year's event had positive feedback for the youth, and were inspired and excited about the future of mental health services for youth.

FROM A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ...

Being a youth who helped to plan the event, I would say that planning was much easier than the actual day. Once the day came, I was very nervous, but once the conference started I became more at ease and I thought the day went very well. There were some pretty inspiring speeches. I think that all the youth really got to speak our piece and that the audience really listened to what we had to say. That was amazing! When I shared my own personal story, everyone in the audience listened and was very supportive. That made me feel great! I would definitely do this all over again because I think it is very important that youth have a voice. This conference gave us that opportunity.

Tatjana Kop, Youth Leader, The New Mentality



"The Youth worked really hard during the planning and contributed significantly to the shape of the day. They made it their own."

"On the actual day they went above and beyond what we had planned. They took ownership of the day, telling their own stories. It was absolutely mesmerizing to watch them owning the stage and the day. It was an incredible experience. I couldn't have asked for a better outcome of the day."

Kathy Anderson, MCYS (who helped organize the workshop)

Quotes from the Centre of Excellence ...

"Each year, the Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO works with local MCYS regional offices throughout the province to put together a day-long conference in the field of child and youth mental health. The focus of this year's conference in Central East Region was on youth engagement. The day was planned and carried out by a group of enthusiastic, committed young people, including some associated with New Path, from the Central East region working together with Kathy Anderson (Program Supervisor, MCYS) and staff from the Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre. This important event has laid the groundwork for future youth engagement initiatives, and an ongoing collaboration between young people and adults in the region working together to promote the best mental health for children and youth. The Centre of Excellence was proud to be able to model authentic youth engagement, and we were honoured to support those involved in producing such an inspiring day."

Erin Smith, Centre of Excellence, Youth Engagement Coordinator and Purnima Sundar, Centre of Excellence