

Shining key spotlight on mental health at Lethbridge College



Seize The Awkward is one of several new mental health initiatives sweeping Lethbridge College. Lori Harasem says the campaign is a helpful tool for those who aren't sure how to start the conversation about mental health with anyone who might be showing red flags. This special mental health publication aims to inspire change by sharing personal and professional accounts.

New ‘peer-spective’ on mental health: promoting student-led support systems

Story by **Nicholas Rabl**

Talking candidly about mental health has proven to be effective in easing the burden for those struggling with school or everyday life. The real challenge lies in getting the conversation started.

Lori Harasem, health promotion coordinator at Lethbridge College, is determined find new ways to spark positive conversation around campus about mental health and suicide prevention.

One way she hopes to do it is with a grant the college received from the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (CASP) to initiate a Life Promotion program.

“Life promotion isn’t a phrase that most people are familiar with, but it’s essentially an Indigenous way of looking at suicide prevention in that it’s more based on strength,” said Harasem.

According to the CASP website, life promotion programs focus on the interconnection between mental, physical, spiritual and emotional behaviour through four pillars: purpose, hope, meaning and belonging. They aim to reflect the wisdom of Indigenous traditional knowledge.

“When we were applying for the grant, we hadn’t even heard of the phrase life promotion,” admitted Harasem. “It was in our research that we recognized this is more of an Indigenous way of approaching suicide prevention with young people. Now we’re looking at how we can use these four pillars to meet the needs of students on campus.”

Along with a focus on life promotion, Harasem wants to create a peer-driven mental health initiative like the University of Lethbridge’s Student Wellness Ambassador Program (SWAP), where students help students cope with mental health troubles.

“We want to create a program that will be like the university’s program and we’re going to be looking for students to help us create it. These students would go through some of the normal training for mental health support and suicide prevention,” said Harasem.

What advantage do students have?

Autumn Ellis-Toddington, Team Spirit Coordinator of SWAP at the University of Lethbridge, says students are able to empathize with one another.

“I feel like students can connect to other students on a deeper level because we’re going through school at the same time. It’s kind of nice to know that the person who’s helping might be able to relate,” said Ellis-Toddington.

In her opinion, the stigma around mental health continues to be another big factor.

“Some students don’t think they need counselling or don’t want to go to a formal place to receive it. I think it’s important for them to have other options,” said Ellis-Toddington.

Harasem has no shortage of ideas when it comes to lifting the stigma around mental health.

“We’re planning to launch the program in the Fall 2023 semester but want to get the word out

now to generate as much conversation as possible,” said Harasem. “We’d love for our peer program to have students from all areas of the student body—international, mature, single-parent, Indigenous, queer—so that anyone who might need help can get help.”

If you’re interested in joining a student-led initiative, contact Wellness Services at 403-320-3289 or visit them at CE1380.

See full story on LethbridgeCampusMedia.ca.

“We’d love for our peer program to represent all areas of the student body [...] so that anyone who might need help can get help.”

Lori Harasem
Health promotion coordinator



Some Canadians felt increasingly isolated during the height of the pandemic. Photo by Kevin Castro Guillin.

Suicide and depression increased during pandemic

Story by Kevin Castro Guillin

The pandemic has left its mark on Canadian mental health and some professionals say social media and other factors have contributed to its impact.

According to the government of Canada website in the first survey done during the pandemic, 54 per cent of Canadians mental health was good. According to the Statistics Canada website, women report poorer mental health than men during the pandemic.

Depression increased during the pandemic due to the number of limitations and restrictions that the world faced for two years.

Daniel Alejandro Paez, a psychologist in Colombia, said music and social media are not a reason for suicide, but it can be a trigger.

"Music and social media create something that in psychology we call availability heuristic. What happens with social media is that in there we can see that beautiful side of reality, this can create frustration and a feeling of incompetence in the receptor who has depression," Paez said.

Only 49 per cent of women report to have good

or excellent mental health, while men reported 60 percent good or excellent mental health.

Statistics Canada's website also shows that 42 percent of youth between 15 to 24 years old, reported having good or excellent mental health condition.

Merle Fuller, Lethbridge College psychology instructor, said suicide can be related to impulsiveness but not necessarily.

"I think it can be and that's very individualistic," Fuller said.

"Suicide is carefully planned out, thought about ruminated on for several days, several weeks until the person actually makes the decision to do this, and so it's not necessarily related to impulsiveness," Fuller said.

According to Kids Help Phone, provinces with the highest texts about suicide are Yukon, Nunavut, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Manitoba.

If you are having suicidal thoughts, or you know someone who has a suicide plan, call Kids Help at 1-800-668-6868 or contact them via text at 686868.

In case of an emergency call 911.

See the full story in LethbridgeCampusMedia.ca.



Many Lethbridge College Students are spending their time studying for their exams, which is causing a lot of stress for many of the students. Photo by Hayden Siemens.

Exam Stress and the ways to combat it

Story by Hayden Siemens

For most people, college is the way to get themselves into a career they are interested in or to learn new skills.

But for someone to learn these skills, they must first learn and understand new concepts and prove how much they know about the topic.

For most students, this comes down to exams.

Exams have remained in the school system as an important part of the education process, but it does come at a cost.

The cost of writing exams is the mental toll it can place on a student.

Exam stress for most people is the fear or hyper fixation on an upcoming exam and can affect the subject in different ways, including making a person lose their appetite, or increased aggression.

Unfortunately for many students, the stress can linger after an exam is done, with another upcoming test keeping the feeling alive.

For more information as to what a person can do to help remedy these feelings of exam stress, Andrew Derksen, an academic strategist in Lethbridge College Learning Café shares what can help someone during these difficult times.

“For students suffering from stress that an exam may bring, the more they practice a test

like a test, that’ll help. And the more they practice retrieving information rather than absorbing information, that will help.”

But for most students, the content of the exam may not be the main source of their stress.

One such instance is the anxiety that no matter what they do, no matter how much they prepare, they will fail.

This stress has different factors that can lead to the same problem.

To get a better look into what may cause stress in a student, Elizabeth Eremenko from the Learning Café had some insight on the topic.

“I think one of the main problems that can cause the most amount of stress in a student is when they compare themselves to others. So it adds that extra stress to themselves. And for when someone is thinking that or going through that, I think the best thing a student can do is remember that people learn and work in different ways and that’s alright and you are more than your own test score.”

Most students have probably felt these same types of stress, thinking they have to ace the test or they become “lesser” in their own or others eyes, but the truth is that a test is a test.

The most important thing a person should focus on is their own mental health and learning when to take a break when they need it most.



First-year nursing students at Lethbridge College complete assignments at Buchanan Library on Nov. 18. The group notes November is a stressful time and after completing midterms in the previous week, they had six assignments due on the same day. Photo by Mackenzie Jarvin.

Struggling students seek answers about fall break

Story by Mackenzie Jarvin

With the fall semester in full swing, Lethbridge College students are feeling the pressure – and raising the question of whether the college should extend its reading break.

November can be particularly difficult for students. The mid-point of the semester means midterms, projects, assignments and other stressors.

Lori Harasem, health promotion coordinator for Wellness Services, said some students believe the college should have a longer break in the fall semester.

“I definitely have heard from some students that they feel that they would like a bit of a longer break. Others are fine with a long weekend,” she said.

This year’s break fell over Remembrance Day, with students getting one additional weekday off.

Harasem said the number of students seeking on-campus supports has continued to grow this month.

“Both of our counselling programs and our student support nurses have definitely seen an uptick in November. It’s actually been really high since September,” she said.

According to a report published by the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) earlier this year, three-quarters of the post-secondary students surveyed experienced negative mental health during their studies.

The report also lists students in Alberta as one of the groups most at risk for negative mental health.

The Lethbridge College Students’ Association (LCSA) has seen a spike in the number of students reaching out to the student-led organization about the fall reading break.

Celine Gilbert, a student representative for the LCSA, said some students think a two-day break is not enough.

“Students continue to come into the LCSA office and ask us why the college does not have a full reading break. A lot of students are spread thin and struggling,” she said.

The student representative said she plans to research other post-secondary institutions and consult Lethbridge College students on the topic.

“This work is still in its early stages. Having more information and student feedback will help us advocate for solutions,” Gilbert said.

See the full story at LethbridgeCampusMedia.ca.



Reading is proven to sharpen your mind and relax your body. When your body is relaxed, your mind is able to calm down and destress. Photo by Kyleigh Tytula.

Ways to boost declining mental health

Story by Kyleigh Tytula

As students near the end of their fall semester, assignments have started to pile up and stress about finals is weighing on everyone's shoulders.

One Lethbridge College student, who wishes to remain anonymous, says she has really struggled with mental health in the past and has had to learn ways to work through it.

"My anxiety really peaked in high school and I found that listening to music helped to calm me down," she said.

Music has been proven to act as a channel for processing many different emotions such as trauma and grief, but it is also often utilized as a way to calm anxiety.

"Believe it or not reading actually really benefited my mental health during really stressful times. It helped me calm down and forget about everything weighing on me," she said.

Many different studies have shown reading to

have a positive impact over mental health because it helps to improve the quality of sleep, it sharpens your mind and it relaxes your body.

Pets can also have a very positive influence on mental health as interacting with them causes your body to produce higher levels of dopamine and serotonin.

Jody Villemaire, a psychology major at the University of Lethbridge, says mindfulness is a great way to relax when battling with exam stress or end of semester anxiety.

"A good place to start would be breathing. Go someplace comfortable, let your body relax and then begin breathing normally before gradually working up to breathing from your diaphragm," Villemaire said.

Professionals recommend a healthy amount of sleep, lots of water, exercise and as much social interaction you can get since making connections with others has proven to help mental health.

See full story on LethbridgeCampusMedia.ca.



Damien Friesen, a transgender man, believes that being LGBTQ can be an isolating experience.

LGBTQ people at high risk for mental health issues

Story and Photo by Cloud Argue

LGBTQ people are often at far higher risk of facing housing instability, eating disorders, bullying, and suicide.

Mental health is important, no matter your gender or sexuality. However, being LGBTQ often puts people at higher risk. Being LGBTQ brings a whole host of challenges, including coming out, lack of acceptance and a lack of support resources.

The Trevor Project is an American non-profit that provides support and resources to LGBTQ people with a toll-free hotline and website.

Numerous studies by The Trevor Project have noted suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts are higher with LGBTQ students than cisgender, heterosexual students. One published on Sept. 28, 2022 specifically notes 39 per cent of transgender and nonbinary American college students have considered suicide. In comparison, cisgender LGBTQ students sat at 26 per cent. They had the lowest per cent, not including cisgender, heterosexual students.

“Its difficult to make friends and be open with

people if you have mental health issues but it is tenfold if you’re gay or part of the LGBTQ community because there’s so much more that you have to worry about,” explained Damien Friesen, a transgender man from Lethbridge.

For transgender men, there is an extremely high chance of experiencing trauma because of their gender identity. According to a study done by The Trevor Project on July 28, 2022, 53 per cent of transgender men experience trauma symptoms.

LGBTQ people still face discrimination and even violence in their daily lives. Deadly shootings are not uncommon. An LGBTQ club in Colorado Springs, Club Q, was recently targeted by a shooter. Five people were killed and 25 were injured. The attack came a day before Transgender Day of Remembrance, held on Nov. 20 in honour of transgender people who have been killed in acts of anti-trans violence. Attacks like this are not rare, especially on drag queens, nonbinary people and transgender people.

Access to mental health services and LGBTQ support is critical for suicide prevention.

See full story on LethbridgeCampusMedia.ca.



Inset: Bill Ward does a gentle spinal stretch which promotes good digestion and spinal mobility. Main: Kelsey Tasker demonstrates her strength and balance in side crow.

Yoga helps mental health

Story and photos by Rachel Gelowitz

Imagine yourself in a calm and content state of being. Now imagine you are in tune with your body and mind instead of at their mercy.

For many people with mental health issues such as stress or anxiety, this feeling can seem unobtainable, but yoga can help to bring peace within reach.

Bill Ward, a student of athletics and yoga, initially got into the practice to improve his running and cycling but has found benefits outside of that.



Left: Bill Ward attempts to begin side crow using the yoga block as his instructor suggested. Right: Kelsey Tasker and Bill Ward begin their yoga practice with wrist and forearm stretches.

"Predominantly with yoga, it is to slow the mind down so that it's not racing and I can use that in day-to-day life," Ward said.

Ward found yoga to be helpful in reducing both event-related and daily stress in the 10 years he has been practicing.

"Yoga is an outlet. It lets the mind turn off and you focus on breathing," he said.

Kelsey Tasker, a yoga instructor with Be Fit For Life at Lethbridge College, said many yoga poses stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is also known as the rest and digest system.

According to an article on the parasympathetic nervous system published by the Cleveland Clinic, last reviewed by a medical professional in June 2022, this system relaxes the body after stress or danger and helps run life-sustaining processes such as digestion and breathing.

"[Yoga] not only helps to calm your body, but your mind is able to calm down as well. So, you're not in a state of always doing and you're able to just be in the moment," Tasker said.

A study conducted in 2010 by Harvard psychologists Matthew Killingsworth and Daniel Gilbert revealed when thinking of pleasant, neutral or unhappy topics, people were either no

happier or less happy than they were when fully engaged in what they were doing. This means being present in your life increases your ability to be happy.

"As a yoga instructor, my goal is to get people to focus on the moment right here right now because that's all we have. Everything in the past is already gone and everything in the future hasn't happened yet," Tasker said.

The instructor said there are different types of yoga to fit each person and help achieve their goals, whether it's wanting to calm down, elevate the heart rate, or build muscle strength.

Ward said even if yoga isn't for you, you should be active in some form.

"The hardest thing was the first step. Get out of the door or into the classroom and start, then you find the enjoyment," he said.

Tasker's advice was to enjoy the small things in life.

"Whether it's the warmth of the water when you're washing dishes, the warm sun hitting your skin, or someone's laughter, life is those little moments pieced together," she said.

Be Fit For Life's schedules for yoga and other fitness classes are available online at lethbridgecollege.ca/departments/be-fit-for-life.

"The hardest thing was the first step. Get out of the door or into the classroom and start, then you find the enjoyment."

Bill Ward, student of athletics and yoga

Left: Kelsey Tasker demonstrates deep breathing to center herself and become present. Right: Tasker performs bird-dog which improves stability, encourages a neutral spine and relieves lower back pain.



Sexual assault significantly worsens mental health

This piece focuses solely on sexual assault towards women

Story and photos by Julia Fletcher

There is so much that contributes to our mental health - how we were raised, our social support and how we have learned to deal with stress. There are also biological factors, like how our brains are wired, genetics and our family history. Then different life experiences impact our mental health, such as abuse and trauma.

One of the greatest traumatic event that many individuals have to overcome is sexual assault and rape.

The difference between sexual assault and rape is that sexual assault includes someone sexually touching your body of any kind that is unwanted or forced, including kissing or groping or forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex and attempted rape. Whereas rape is sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration carried out against a person without their consent or knowledge.

However, these are mostly interchangeable these days, with sexual assault being the preferred phrase, as it includes rape.

Tarzia, Thuraisingam and Novy explored the relationships between sexual violence and mental health in an Australian primary care study, with the BMC Public Health in December of 2018.

They limited their research and results to the depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress linked with sexual assault. They interviewed 306 women in their study.

Approximately 41 per cent of participants had experienced some form of sexual assault since the age of 14 and 23 per cent had experienced it in the past 12 months. Thirty-eight per cent had never



Student stands in reconciliation of how important consent is no matter where or what situation your in.

experienced rape or sexual assault.

The biggest thing they got from this study was that women who had experienced sexual assault and rape had significantly higher PTSD, depression, anxiety, substance and eating disorders scores than women with no experience of sexual assault.

Brooke Bagley, a counsellor who began seeing patients in 2013 and is now a supervisor at the Sexual Assault Center of East Tennessee says she has found many different tactics that help the mental health of her sexual assault patients.

"I ask clients to walk me through a recent trauma-related episode, having them focus on what they felt bodily versus emotionally or cognitively. Many clients report feeling pain behind the eyes and many feelings of anxiety. Some clients become physically numb and feel no sensation — much like physical denial. A common practice I use for working with this trauma response is based on mindfulness. I encourage clients to engage all five of their physiological senses by directing them to smell, touch, taste, listen to and focus visually in



Women not knowing what to do about the strain of her mental health on her day to day life.

their space. Once this senses-based intervention has been practiced within the therapeutic office, I encourage clients to continue using this intervention at home.”

This is one of many different approaches to supporting those who have been sexually assaulted.

There was 10.5 per cent of Lethbridge College students who experienced a form of sexual violence during and before being at the college, according to a survey of the student body regarding consent.

One Lethbridge College student who wanted to remain anonymous was 15 when she was raped. She admits she had mental health troubles after the incident, in school, with her family and friends.

“I never told my parents or the police because I was scared. I never went to therapy after the incident. I got in trouble because my family and teachers didn’t understand what was wrong. I couldn’t be alone in a room with any male, not even my dad or stepdad. I only found solace in getting it off my chest by talking to my peers.”

She now encourages people to go to therapy. She helps others who have been assaulted or raped to get through their emotions. Unfortunately, after five years, she said she hasn’t healed yet.

Canadian Women’s Studies presented a study in

June of 2022. Out of the approximately 4.7 million women that they studied who live in Canada, 30 per cent of all women aged 14 and older have been sexually assaulted outside of an intimate relationship. This does not include the statistics from sexually assaulted victims in intimate relationships.

With sexual assault numbers rising as more women report their experiences, it is important to know how to support the mental health of victims. Here are some things you can do to help yourself heal.

An article by Amy Morin, posted on Aug. 29, 2022 with Very Well Mind says it’s important to calm your body with soothing activities like yoga and light exercise. You also have to face your fear. Having a trusted therapist who can help you find a coping strategy.

It is important to know you’re not alone and there are many resources in your community can help with anything you’ve been through. It is very important to speak with anyone and to know that nothing is your fault.

We believe you. If you’ve experienced rape or sexual assault, please call 1-866-296-0477 to speak with a sexual assault and rape specialist from the YWCA.

Physical health amplifies mental health

Story by Chase Chambers

College can be stressful for many students.

Between busy schedules and looming deadlines, finding ways for students to look after their mental health can be a challenge.

Cole Guilbert, Lethbridge College second year Natural Resource Compliance student, says joining the Kodiaks indoor track team and being involved in sports has been beneficial for his mental health.

Guilbert says athletics have helped by enabling him to connect with the community, learn what makes him feel good and ultimately help push him to be better.

He also believes participating in sports have built positive habits which help him in his everyday life will help him going forward.

"Playing sports as a kid and playing sports now really taught me how to live a healthy lifestyle," says Guilbert.

Guilbert feels participating in athletics have forced him to look after his physical health by getting him outside, ensuring he's eating right and helping keep his sleep on schedule.

He feels all these things make him feel better mentally, too.

"I usually find that participating in sports is beneficial for my mental health."

Lori Harasem, health promotions coordinator with Wellness Services at Lethbridge College says that exercise is proven to be beneficial to physical and mental health.

"I think everybody assumes you know when you're being active that it benefits our bones and our muscles and what not but our mental health too," says Harasem.

Harasem feels many of the non-physical benefits of exercise are often overlooked.

"Exercise is very related to lowering stress levels, building up resiliency and even our immune system, so being involved in sport is good for our well-being. There's a lot of research that shows it's benefiting us mentally and physically," says Harasem.



Cole Guilbert, Kodiaks track athlete, performs a shoulder press as part of his afternoon strength training workout in preparation for his 2022 season and to stay physically and mentally fit. Photo by Chase Chambers.

Guilbert feels there are a lot of lessons, skills and connections have been presented to him because of his participation in physical activities.

"Taking care of your mental health and eating right can also help your work when you eventually move on to your work."

Lethbridge College students, staff and community members can get started participating in physical activities to improve mental health by visiting the on-campus recreation services centre in the PE wing of Lethbridge College or participating in the Be Fit for Life fitness program.

Students looking to participate in can get started by visiting lethbridgecollege.ca/departments/be-fit-for-life to learn more about how to get started.

Recovery through the lens of an addict

Column by Allie Fytone

When we were told this edition of the Endeavour would be a mental health issue, I instantly thought of addictions. With my own struggles with addictions. I thought I would try to quit smoking and write about my own journey in becoming smoke-free. I bought a pack of cigarettes three days ago and have already had four while writing this article.

The stress of post-secondary can lead to the emergence of addictions in people. These include addictions to substances that are normally accepted in society, such as alcohol or nicotine in the form of cigarettes or more commonly now vapes.

Smoking, at least in the form of cigarettes, is no longer commonplace at most post-secondary campuses. But nicotine addictions across the country are on the rise.

According to the 2019 Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine survey completed by Statistics Canada, there has been an increase in adolescents who are active users of e-cigarettes containing nicotine. A total of 15 per cent of teenagers aged 15-19 vaped in the past 30 days, with the same percentage occurring in adults aged 20-24.

I started smoking cigarettes when I was 15-years-old. I had experienced my first heartbreak and was offered one by a friend. I smoked it with him and we laughed together. I turned 24 this year. It's been almost 10 years since my first drag. It has started to take its toll on my body. I cough in the morning and have trouble breathing at night. As young as I am, I no longer feel youthful.

It has long been said quitting nicotine is as difficult as quitting heroin.

Heroin addicts say it is easier to give up dope than it is to give up smoking," says Dr. Sharon Hall in an article titled "Nicotine: harder to kick... than heroin" published In The New York Times Magazine on March 29, 1987.

So how are you supposed to quit? Lori Harasem, health promotion coordinator at Lethbridge College



Tyler Eresman has been sober since his first year of university. Photo by Allie Fytone.

shared her own personal journey.

"It's hard. It's one of the hardest things I've done in my life. I smoked two packs a day, so I was a heavy smoker. I want to say I tried everything," Harasem says.

According to an article titled "Quitting Smoking? Expect a Lot of Failure Before You Succeed" published in July 12, 2016 on Healthline by Brian Kran the average smoker attempts to quit almost 30 times before the final attempt.

Harasem told me the real reason her last attempt was successful was because her five-year-old at the time told her smoking would kill her.

I've probably tried to quit six or seven times at this point. It is difficult. The withdrawals consume me every time I try to quit. I became irritable, prone to anger. No longer myself. I still keep trying to quit.

Harasem eventually found success quitting smoking through different methods.

See the full story at LethbridgeCampusMedia.ca.



Akashdeep Singh (left) and Arshdeep Singh Randhawa (right), both international students, are seen playing table tennis in The Cave. Variety of new indoor activities are available for international students to socialize and can help them during the winter months. Photo by Zach Lalin.

Seasonal Affective Disorder on International Students

Story by Zach Lalin

Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, has affected the mental health of several students, whether they are in high school or attending post-secondary. SAD is a type of depression caused by seasonal changes, often happening during the winter season.

According to a study on international students in Canada, many suffer from loneliness, mental exhaustion, panic attacks amid pandemic. This study was published in studyinternational.com on Jan. 22, 2022 by Anil Varughese and Saul Schwartz. 55 per cent of international students were at risk of depression.

Students who develop seasonal depression during winter cope with it in different ways. For international students, some may be experiencing it for the first time since moving to a new country.

These students may develop seasonal depression because they are away from their families to attend

post-secondary for the first time.

According to a study on depression among international students published by Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences, by Omodona Oluwakemi Oluwafunmilola published in January 2012, says new international students face many changes. Those experience a new culture, new people and probably a new language all joined together can be culture shock when students study abroad.

Culture shock is one of the factors that can contribute to developing seasonal depression. Some people may be challenged to adapt to the differences on how another country handles everyday tasks.

Some international students who move to a new country without knowing or having anyone with them can make them feel desolate. It can also be hard for them to develop new friendships with strangers which can contribute to developing seasonal depression.

Full story on LethbridgeCampusMedia.ca.



International student Donabel Bigtas Castro and classmate Hunter Graves catch up in the hallways of Lethbridge College on Nov. 17. Photo by Kathleen Bernal.

Lethbridge College international students rely on one another to overcome challenges

Story by Kathleen Bernal

As the holiday season approaches, international students at Lethbridge College are looking for support to deal with homesickness.

Donabel Bigtas Castro, a first-year business administration student at the college, said she has been away from her home country of the Philippines for over 19 years.

"Being away from home is tough, especially when you meet some problems along the way. I was in Manila for seven years after graduation and then I moved to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and I stayed there for 12 years before I moved to Canada," said Bigtas Castro.

She said the best way for her to deal with homesickness is to divulge herself in activities around the community.

"I was able to be a part of a community where people know how it feels when you're away from home, so they make me feel like I'm family," said Bigtas Castro.

Moving to Lethbridge was difficult for her because she did not have any relatives in the country. Luckily, Bigtas Castro has found some ways to cope with homesickness.

"I always tend to reach out to Filipino communities or church communities where I can spend the time with them. I like to call my family every two days so I could be kept informed of what's happening at home and what's happening with my parents," said Bigtas Castro.

Marizchelle Cruz, a student council member at the college, believes many international students suffer from homesickness and culture shock. Cruz said many international students rely on each other for support through various Facebook groups.

Lethbridge College has a service for students to rely on if they are struggling. International Services help students adjust to the new environment. They also assist with cultural adjustment to Canada and international students are able to contact the Student Support Program to speak to a counsellor.

See the full story at LethbridgeCampusMedia.ca.

How technology helps with homesickness

Story by Noreve Belarmino

A study from Baylor University published in June 2015 by Grace Pardede revealed homesickness in the modern age can lead to severe psychological distress. According to the study, the cultural relocation and variations are bound to be factors influencing homesickness and culture shock for international students.

One of the struggles for international students is the language barrier. Karenys Cuicas, an international student taking English as a Second Language (ESL) at Lethbridge College said because English is not her first language, she has concerns about people making fun of her.

Karenys Cuicas is a nurse from Venezuela. She moved to Lethbridge to widen her knowledge in English. By taking the ESL program, she is working on improving her communication skills.

Moving to Canada has also set her apart from her fiancé and her mother. Because of this, she had a few misgivings of moving abroad at first. However, with the use of modern technology, she can talk to them at any time and feel. Talking to them behind the screen has relieved her anxiety a great deal. "Technology is a wonderful tool that makes us stay connected with those we love and thus shortens distances," Cuicas said.

There are services offered at the college to help support international students like International Services and Wellness Services, and of course, the support from their own instructors.

Herbert Claxton, ESL instructor, said he motivates students by learning what their interests are and just being there when his students are having troubles in class.

According to Claxton, when a student is having difficulty adjusting, they often show behaviours. His approach is talking to the student about what the cause might be or seeking out help through Wellness Services when it's something that needs



Karenys Cuicas, ESL student during one of her classes in the Lethbridge College Buchanan library. Photo by Noreve Belarmino.

to be addressed in a deeper way.

Claxton said the ESL program is not just a program that teaches English, but also a support network for students within the classroom. Moreover, taking advantage of today's technology and using social media is a great way of establishing relationships with fellow students.

Teaching in the ESL program has been something Claxton has always been passionate about. While he is the expert in English, his students are experts of their own languages and cultures. According to him this is the reason why everyone in his class— including him— are on equal grounds. "For myself, I haven't been outside of Canada travelling. So when I'm with the students, it's a way to learn about different cultures and different ways of thinking about the world," Claxton said.



Métis sashes on display, the sash is a symbol of honour presented to those who serve the Métis nation. Photo provided by the Lethbridge College.

Using culture to cope through tough times

Story by Keiran Emard

With the end of the semester approaching many students are finding it difficult to manage the stress of finals week.

However, some students are finding solace in the many cultural events that are hosted by the college.

Events such as Métis Day, not only was it a first for Lethbridge College, but it also saw many students take part in the events activities.

Brittany Lee, the event organizer for Métis Day, says hosting events like this helps other students feel more welcome in the college.

“A sense of belonging, to feel like you’re at home when you’re not at home, I think that’s really important,” she said.

Roderick McCloud, a Métis elder at the event, says events like this helps many students feel at home and welcome, which can improve their mental health.

“To give an example there was a young girl from Nigeria and she was really interested in the culture and we had some things that we did the same, like

they used beading, not the Métis-type beading, but they did beading on some of their clothes, so we had a bit of a connection.”

It’s not only McCloud who thinks this way either. There are many studies that suggest participation in cultural activities helps to relieve stress and anxiety.

According to a study published on the National Library of Medicine in 2019 by Daisy Fancourt and Andrew Steptoe, when individuals engage in cultural activity, they are 48 per cent less likely to experience depression over a 12 year period.

Furthermore, when accounting for socio-economic status, the study still found a decrease in depression.

“When controlling for SES variables, the relationship between cultural engagement and depression remained significant, with cultural engagement still associated with a 25 per cent lower odds of experiencing depression over a 12 year period.”

With the semester coming to an end soon it is more important now than ever to destress.

Volunteering can help beat winter blues

Story by Scott Holman

Winter is coming in at full force, meaning the lack of daylight and the change in temperature is beginning to have an impact on people's mental health.

The most common form of challenges during the winter months is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), or as it's commonly known as winter-onset SAD.

Symptoms of winter-onset SAD often include oversleeping, weight gain due to changes in appetite and low energy. One solution to feel better is involving yourself in the community by volunteering.

Volunteering doesn't have to be spending time at the shelter handing out meals and providing care for others. While those options still exist, other options for volunteering can be anything from helping out at a local event for the day performing certain jobs or walking dogs at the animal shelter.

These activities may seem simple and mundane, but they result in providing aid to those who need it. Doing so can cause increased gratefulness in your own life and in turn lead to better mental health.

Lori Harasem, Lethbridge College's health promotion coordinator, says volunteering your time to help make life better for someone for a moment can return several benefits for your own health.

"If you're kind of feeling funky or stressed out, it's a good way to spend an hour or two of your time and kind of refresh you to come back to your own life," says Harasem.

Volunteer Lethbridge is a local non-profit that works with local businesses and organizations to provide volunteers for any events they may be hosting. Amanda Jensen, executive director of Volunteer Lethbridge says the organization currently has a 20:1 ratio of volunteers to events respectfully.

One of the partners of Volunteer Lethbridge works with is Christmas Hope, who is hosting this year's Christmas Tree Festival to raise funds for the Chinook Regional Hospital.

Jensen says in the past volunteers have been looking for opportunities that are both semi-permanent and long-term, but over time the act of volun-



Becky Basowisty volunteers to accept donations for auction tickets at the 28th Annual Christmas Tree Festival at the Enmax Centre on Nov. 20. Photo by Scott Holman.

teering has become episodic or when it is convenient for the volunteer.

"Episodic volunteering is where you know they can come in and come out as it fits their schedule. I would say that is one of the major changes that we've seen," says Jensen.

Jensen says most of the population wants to volunteer and be a part of their community since volunteering provides a sense of fulfillment, and this sense of fulfillment can be beneficial for mental health.

The pandemic has lowered the number of those looking to volunteer due to health concerns while interacting with members of the public, however those numbers have begun to rise again and more people are now reaching out to volunteer again according to Jensen.

If you are interested in becoming more involved in the community Volunteer Lethbridge encourages you to reach out and find out which opportunities are right for you. You can sign up to become a volunteer by visiting volunteerlethbridge.com.

LCSA

THIRSTY THURSDAY

11:00AM - 1:00PM 18+

DEC. 1/22 STUDENTS, STAFF & INVITED GUESTS

BEARLY HANGIN' ON

LISTENING PARTY 12:00PM

LOTS OF CHANCES TO WIN GIFT CARDS, SWAG AND MORE!

The CAVE

THE Kodiak
ONLINE RADIO FUSION

Animals create emotional connections

Story by Jesse Wikdahl

Humans have depended on animals for a long-time. Dogs and horses along with other animals have been our best friends for thousands of years.

We connect and communicate with them to overcome and accomplish amazing things.

Animal-assisted therapy helps use this connection between the animal, the professional and the client to achieve a goal specific to meet their individual needs.

This type of therapy can prove to be a great benefit for almost anyone and is usually coupled with other forms of counselling or therapy.

"Animal-assisted therapy is part of a larger umbrella term called animal-assisted interventions," says Kayla Shore, registered provisional psychologist, M.Ed. and owner of Shore Psychological Services. "Included under the umbrella is animal-assisted interventions, animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy."

The modality takes its form in many ways as every animal is unique. It takes years of training to understand and learn their capabilities and how they can best help their client. Counsellors and therapists spend much of their time with the animals and consider them more partner than pet.

Marvin Vandenhoeck registered therapist and owner of Blue Rein Ranch just outside Lethbridge and a Canadian certified counsellor who works mainly with horses and tells us they are his "co-therapists."

"The horses provide what we call biofeedback and that means that horses will reflect to the person the emotion that, that person is feeling," says Vandenhoeck.

Vandenhoeck says when somebody is feeling anxious, the horse will naturally also be anxious. The opposite is true as well. When you have a calm horse, it will help the person to feel calmer. The emotional connection going back and forth between the animal and the person really helps people to get in touch with their emotions, which is another huge part of counselling.



Karma Davis and Halo enjoy some playtime on their walk after a long day of school on Nov. 21, 2022. Photo by Jesse Wikdahl.

Currently in Canada there is no regulation of animal-assisted interventions but both Shore and Vandenhoeck hope to see some coming very soon.

Shore is a member of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association in the animal-assisted therapy in counselling chapter that have developed a core competency document outlining the many standards that professionals should be following to provide adequate care of both the client and the animal.

"In Canada, we have organizations that provide training, courses and certification in these areas as well. We are very close to having Canadian national standards for working with animals in practice and these will be the first government standards globally," says Shore.

Animal assisted therapy is only one of many modalities of therapy or counselling available.

If you or anyone you know needs help reach out.

For immediate 24-hour assistance call the Lethbridge distress line at 403-327-7905 or call the Mental Health Help Line at 1-877-303-2642. You can also connect with the Canadian Mental Health Association online at cmha.ca.