



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Champlain East

**Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale**
Champlain Est

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CMHA Wellness College Celebrates Success of First Course

Introducing the Wellness College and What's Next

Submitted by Jennifer Meyer, Mental Health Promoter, CMHA Champlain East

CMHA Champlain-East would like to formally introduce its newest Community Program called the Wellness College. The CMHA Wellness College is a free community-based learning initiative that promotes mental health, social connection, and personal growth through inclusive and interactive education. Grounded in the internationally recognized Recovery College model, the program offers courses that are co-created and co-facilitated by a CMHA Mental Health Promoter (MHP) alongside trained community volunteers with lived or living experience related to the course topic. By bringing together professional knowledge and lived experience, the CMHA Wellness College strives to empower individuals and strengthen communities. The courses help build resilience, reduce isolation, and foster mental wellness in a supportive, peer-driven environment.

Since its launch this spring, the Wellness College has offered its inaugural course, *Choosing Joy After Grief*, three times, reaching a total of 43 participants. The course has provided a supportive space for individuals to explore their grief journey, connect with others, and develop strategies for healing and resilience.

As the program continues to grow, the Wellness College is guided by local needs assessments and community research to identify gaps in services, supports, and mental health education. Based on these findings, the next Wellness College course will focus on the mental health and well-being of newcomers. This topic was identified as an important area of need, recognizing the unique challenges that individuals and families may face as they adjust to life in a new community and country.

CMHA organizations across Canada have been including newcomers Mental Health in their awareness and education programs and conclude that addressing the mental health needs of newcomers to Canada as well as the barriers associated with the social determinants of health is essential for early identification of concerns and for connecting newcomers to appropriate support. Addressing mental health challenges will promote successful settlement, prevent long-term consequences, and enhance the overall community well-being. The findings underscore the need for tailored support programs and interventions to address mental health challenges, improve access to services, and alleviate financial pressures related to housing and food security.

Arriving and settling in a new country can be stressful for individuals and families, according to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, common stressors can include:

- Culture shock and identity shifts that happen when adjusting to new social norms, systems, and expectations.
- Loneliness or isolation, especially when social networks are limited.
- Financial and employment stress, like difficulties finding housing, navigating job markets, and credential recognition.



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- Pre-migration trauma, including exposure to conflict, displacement, or loss.

The Wellness College is seeking to connect with community members who identify with these experiences as newcomer to Canada and who are interested in co-creating or co-facilitating this new course. Through sharing their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives, these individuals can help create a supportive learning environment that fosters hope, resilience, and belonging for others navigating similar journeys.

Individuals with lived or living experience bring valuable insight and can play an important role in helping newcomers build confidence, strengthen social connections, and access the resources they need to thrive in their new communities.

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a co-creator or co-facilitator for our upcoming Wellness College course on newcomer mental health and well-being, please contact Jennifer Meyer, Mental Health Promoter at CMHA Champlain East, at 613-551-2490 or meyerj@cmha-east.on.ca. Preliminary planning and course development will begin this fall.

The Wellness College is made possible through the generous support of United Way Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry and United Way East Ontario, whose funding helps create free, community-based learning opportunities that promote mental health, resilience, and social connection.

DO YOU NEED HELP?

Dial or text 2-1-1 for free and confidential service that easily connects people to the critical social and community supports they need.

If you are thinking of suicide, please call 9-8-8 which is a mental health crisis and suicide prevention line.

The information provided is not a substitute for professional advice. If you need advice, please consult a qualified health care professional. For further information or if you want to access our services at CMHA, please call 1-800-493-8271 or visit our web site at www.cmha-east.on.ca