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Girl Guides of Canada Takes a Stand to Help Improve Mental Health in Girls and Young Women

Introducing Mighty Minds: new mental health education program developed in partnership with The Psychology Foundation of Canada and Kids Help Phone

Cheryl Pounder, two-time Canadian Olympic Women's Hockey Gold Medalist, partners with Girl Guides of Canada to shine a light on mental health

The world can be a challenging place for young girls. School, relationships, body image, family and the pressures of social media leave many girls struggling with mental health issues from an early age including low self-esteem, depression, self-harm and suicidal thoughts.

Girl Guides of Canada (GGC) is making the mental health of young girls a top priority. This month, GGC is launching **Mighty Minds**, a new national program created in collaboration with experts at The Psychology Foundation of Canada and Kids Help Phone focused on educating girls as young as five years old about mental health issues.



These five and six-year old girls from a Toronto Sparks unit participate in a Mighty Minds activity, the new mental health programming from Girl Guides of Canada.

“Guiding has an important role to play in helping girls develop the skills that will take them far in life,” says Jill Zelmanovits, CEO, Girl Guides of Canada. “We know that many young girls struggle with mental health issues and that’s why we’ve developed Mighty Minds: to get girls talking about mental health so they feel confident to tackle any challenge that comes their way.”

Mighty Minds is the first program of its kind in Canada. Through a series of engaging, interactive activities, over 70,000 girls will explore how to develop positive mental health, resiliency and how to understand stigma while practicing skills they can use to cope with daily challenges. Programming is designed for all Guiding members age 5-17 starting with Sparks right up to Rangers.

“I think every girl has had a moment in time where they haven't been okay mentally, including me. Mental health is something that affects everyone, but it can be combated if we all come together and share our stories,” says Andrea, a member of the Girl Guides organization who participates in a Ranger unit based in Toronto.

Girl Guides Unite to Shine a Light on Mental Health

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Through the light of thousands of candles, Girl Guides of Canada will **Shine A Light on Mental Health** during the month of January. Public candle-lighting ceremonies in dozens of communities across Canada will mark the launch of Mighty Minds, bring attention to mental health and celebrate the sisterhood of Guiding. A signature event will be held at **Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto on Saturday, January 21, 2017 at 5:30 pm** with special guest, Cheryl Pounder, two-time Canadian Olympic Women's Hockey Gold Medalist.

"Positive mental health is integral to maintaining good physical health," says Ms. Pounder, who has made mental health a priority in achieving elite athlete status. "We all face challenges when it comes to mental health whether it results from anxiety, performance, social pressures, body image or depression. This program is important because even though the statistics say one in five are impacted by mental health issues, it actually affects everyone around that person. Mighty Minds will be helping girls identify issues in themselves and understand how to help others."

Sobering Statistics

"Research shows that by grade 10, girls experience poorer mental health than boys," says Dr. Robin Alter, clinical child psychologist with The Psychology Foundation of Canada and author of *Anxiety and the Gift of Imagination* and the *Anxiety Workbook for Kids*. "Early education around mental health, such as the new Mighty Minds program, can make a significant, long-lasting impact and help young women lead healthy, positive and productive lives."

Mental health is a growing concern for youth in Canada, particularly in respect to young girls:

- Of 26,000 Canadian students surveyed, approximately one-third of girls feel depressed or low on a weekly basis¹
- One-third of girls keep mental health concerns to themselves²
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people in Canada,³ with young women experiencing nearly three times the rate of hospitalization for suicide attempts than young men.⁴

"Kids Help Phone research has shown that serious issues such as body or self-image concerns, or thoughts of suicide, are experienced more often by teenage girls than their male peers," says Alisa Simon, Vice-President, Counselling Services and Programs, Kids Help Phone. "It's critical that girls learn how to talk about these issues early and ask for help when they need it."

Mighty Minds will become a permanent part of Girl Guides programming, as a supplement to the core programming. For more information on Mighty Minds visit www.girlguides.ca. Follow the conversation online at **#MightyMindsGGC**.

¹ "The Health of Canada's Young People." Public Health Agency of Canada, accessed December 2016 <http://bit.ly/2hOxOIA>

² "Silent Families, Suffering Children and Youth." RBC Children's Mental Health Project, accessed December 2016 <http://bit.ly/2hMVBNM>

³ "Suicide and Youth" Canadian Mental Health Association, accessed October 2016

⁴ "Healthy Minds Start Here." Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, accessed December 2016 <http://bit.ly/2j1B1Kq>

Shine A Light On Mental Health events are scheduled across the country. You are invited to attend and show your support. RSVP for the Toronto event on the GGC Facebook Events Page or visit www.girlguides.ca to find events in your neighbourhood.

About Girl Guides of Canada

Girl Guides of Canada provides a safe environment that invites girls and young women to challenge themselves, to find their voice, meet new friends, have fun and make a difference in the world. Girl Guides of Canada (GGC) strives to ensure that girls and women from all walks of life, identities and lived experiences feel a sense of belonging and can fully participate. Girl Guides is an organization with more than 105 years of history and a strong and growing future.

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