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# The Highlander

Thursday **December 7 2017** | Issue 317

**INSIDE: SCOTCH LINE IN TROUBLE AGAIN - PAGE 5**

**FREE**



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**COMMUNITY IN CRISIS**

Constable Dianna Dauphinee introduces the event's panelists at a youth wellness forum at Haliburton Highlands Secondary School, last Wednesday. *Photo by Mark Arike.*

## Young people must be part of solution

By Lisa Gervais

A community forum on 'supporting youth in wellness' was held last Wednesday in Haliburton, but despite repeated comments that young people must be part of a solution to what's been deemed a community in crisis, *The Highlander* only found one student in the middle gym.

Another current Grade 12 student told the paper she didn't know anything about the

Nov. 30 'Hurting to Hope' gathering. She hadn't heard about another one, Oct. 30, at the Haliburton Legion, either.

"We haven't been notified at all," the student told *The Highlander*. The forums have been advertised for 'all caring adults.' But, more and more, it's being acknowledged that students, and parents' voices must be heard.

Haliburton Highlands Secondary School

(HHSS) graduate Maddie Phippen was there last week. On social media, she's publicly condemned the school, Trillium Lakelands District School Board (TLDSB) and the police for a lack of action on bullying, which she and others say contributed to the sudden death of Grade 9 student Phoenix Acero last May – one of the deaths that has sparked this crisis in Haliburton County.

Phippen said police have claimed that bullying reports get seriously investigated but "that is far from the truth" and "the school does not do anything."

The TLDSB says schools in Haliburton County are tackling bullying and other issues that affect the well-being of students. Some of the supports they offer include assemblies, restorative practices for new

See "TLDSB" on page 2

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# Highlander news

## TLDSB and police 'take bullying seriously'

Continued from page 1

teachers and a mindful martial arts program (offered at HHSS), among others. They also say they work with local agencies to support students when "critical incidents" occur.

The Haliburton Highlands OPP says people must report incidents so they can conduct "thorough and detailed investigations." They say they strive to maintain bully-free environments. If laws are broken, "criminal charges will be laid" and then it's up to the courts to make a ruling, they say. (See related story on p. 3 by Mark Arike).

Amid all of this, educators and parents packed last week's forum to listen to a panel of experts.

Marg Cox, the executive director of Point in Time, which organized the forum, told *The Highlander* in an interview, "I think the TLDSB, and the high school specifically, are really trying hard to make a difference in a very difficult situation. It's very tricky when you know a lot of information and you're not able to share it. Parents could feel ... 'I'm not being heard, it's not being dealt with,' but I do know, in fact, it is being dealt with," Cox said.

The Grade 12 student, who spoke on condition of anonymity, conceded it's sometimes hard to prove bullying when students can use Snapchat, which erases messages in 10 seconds.

### Not enough being done

However, she's adamant not enough is being done to help students deal with their emotions, or about bullying.

"We are actually not allowed to speak about what happened to Phoenix. If a teacher overhears, they're mostly likely going to tell you, you just shouldn't talk

about it ... it's irritating."

She added that when Phoenix passed away, students wrote on his locker but she claims the school sanded it off twice until students threatened to bring power tools to remove the locker door and give it to Phoenix' mother, Dulce.

Catherine Shedden, spokeswoman for the TLDSB, did not address the locker issue specifically but said ways are provided for students to "respectfully acknowledge and honour a classmate who has died." For example, a book or poster board for comments and signatures, that are then given to the family.

She said that immediately following a student or staff death, grief counsellors are available at the school for as long as needed by students.

"It is important to note that teachers are not necessarily comfortable speaking about the death of a student beyond the initial sharing of the news. Also, teachers may be asked to not have class conversations about a particular situation as this may trigger an emotional response from one or more students. Teachers direct students to the supports available at the school," Shedden said. She added that teachers also feel the loss and students who need to talk need to go to the school guidance office.

Local counsellor Dianne Mathes told *The Highlander* in an interview a lot of teens have never experienced death, unless it's a grandparent, so to lose a peer, "threw them into a lot of chaos, confusion, grief and overwhelm."

She said when summer ended, and the shock abated in the fall, "that's when we

started seeing kids not wanting to go back to school, not being able to focus, saying 'I can't do this. I'm overwhelmed,' drinking more, using dope, because at this point they're into some very deep pain around the grief and they don't know what to do with it so they numb it out."

She thinks "both the high school and police could be doing much more around education" when it comes to grief and bullying. "Where do we have conflict resolution in our community? What do you do if someone steals your girlfriend and you're really angry and upset? Well, you text. You're mad and you say all sorts of stuff."

The Grade 12 student told us it's not just text bullying. She said she had a kid in class tell her to kill herself and claims "the teacher just looked at me, looked at him, looked at me and continued the lesson." Just the other day, she said some kids pelted her face with dimes, for no apparent reason.

A friend has been fat-shamed, she said, and despite complaining, it's been over a month and nothing's been done.

### Students afraid to go to school

"A lot of what we want is security," she says. "Because going to school is terrifying. I know people who cannot go to school because it makes them feel sick because the school doesn't do anything."

She said HHSS has tried, but there's been no follow through. For example, there was a grade assembly at the beginning of the year where she said kids were told bullying

would not be tolerated.

They were offered a chance to send their complaints online to be dealt with. But she said they're not acted on and kids can't be anonymous.

She said students won't go to the office to report bullying either since you "walk out with a target on your back the size of an elephant."

"What I think they need to do, and what I'm hoping will happen, is that they'll actually start cracking down on the things they said they were going to," the student said.

Shedden said the board can't respond to specific comments shared with *The Highlander* by students, other than to encourage them to speak to someone in the guidance office and "all concerns shared by students are investigated, and if necessary, acted upon."

Dr. Ian Manion, a clinical psychologist who specializes in youth mental health and suicide, told *The Highlander* "suicide is a complex phenomenon associated with many factors that interact together to put someone at risk." He said there is a link between bullying, both as a victim and as a perpetrator, and suicidal thoughts and behaviour.

However, he said, "It is not clear if the link is a direct association or related to other co-occurring factors, such as mental health status, sex and gender, social context, etc."

"Not everyone who has had suicidal thoughts or behaviours has been bullied," Dr. Manion said, "and not everyone who has been bullied has suicidal thoughts and behaviour." He said relational violence, including bullying, "clearly has an impact upon the mental health of those involved."

*I do know in fact, it is being dealt with.*

**Marg Cox**

Executive Director,  
Point in Time

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If you would like to get involved, please contact us at 705-457-2760 or [info@haliburtonhighlandsmuseum.com](mailto:info@haliburtonhighlandsmuseum.com).

# Highlander news



Five OPP officers were at the event. Photo by Mark Arike.

## Board and cops tight-lipped

By Mark Arike

When it comes to bullying in schools, the Trillium Lakelands District School Board (TLDSB) and the OPP say they take the issue very seriously and are doing their part to keep kids safe and maintain a healthy environment.

But, according to several parents and students who are sharing their thoughts on social media, it's not enough. Many of these recent comments have been directed at Haliburton Highlands Secondary School, where one young teen died suddenly in May. He, allegedly, was the victim of bullying.

In an effort to find out more, *The Highlander* has requested information regarding bullying incidents at HHSS. But what we've discovered is that statistics are hard to come by.

"Number of reports data is not gathered," said Catherine Shedden, the TLDSB's communications manager, when asked how many incidents have been reported to staff and administration in the last two years.

Instead, Shedden provided a chart of suspensions and expulsions across the board for the last eight years.

Her response was similar when asked how many parents or guardians have been called or mailed about bullying incidents in the same time period.

"The school and board does not gather data around numbers of calls and emails regarding any particular incident," she said.

According to the TLDSB's Bullying Response Strategy, if a complaint has been made against another student for bullying, the bully's parent is contacted by phone and sent a letter to inform them about it. They are also supposed to be told an investigation has confirmed there is substance to the complaint and they should speak to their child about their behaviour. Further complaints can lead to suspension, expulsion and police involvement.

Officers with the Haliburton Highlands OPP were unable to tell us how often they've had to investigate bullying incidents at the high school, citing confidentiality reasons. Several questions sent to Const. Dianna Dauphinee weren't directly answered.

"I believe the responses I have provided are appropriate given the scope of your questions," said Dauphinee. "The OPP is

not in a position to speak any further with regards to this matter."

OPP Sgt. Peter Leon suggested the paper file a Freedom of Information request for this information.

"The questions that you are seeking responses to pose a bit of an issue when it comes to the OPP providing a response," said Leon, who is the OPP's Central Region media relations officer. "Calls for service are operational in nature and not something that we can openly discuss due to privacy issues, the possibility of victim identification and that could lead to re-victimization in any number of forms."

In her first email, Dauphinee provided the same comment that appeared in other local media last month. It said the OPP provides "safe and positive learning environments and encourages victims of bullying to report these incidents." She added the OPP works closely with its partners and delivers "proactive messaging on how to effectively deal with bullying," and that incidents are investigated.

"Those who choose to break the law, will be held accountable for their actions both by the OPP and provisions contained within the Ontario Safe Schools Act."

As for Dauphinee's response, Joe Evans, interim detachment commander, said she is following orders from "corporate bureau and therefore myself."

Each school is required to have a PRISM plan. The acronym stands for Prevention strategies; Response to incidences of bullying reports; Intervention strategies; Support mechanisms for those affected by confirmed incidences of bullying; and Monitoring strategies. According to the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Procedure, schools must "communicate this to the school community and submit it to the superintendent of safe and accepting schools and the area superintendent."

Schools also have a Safe and Accepting School Team comprised of staff to discuss supports for students, school activities and initiatives, said Shedden.

A copy of the high school's PRISM plan was provided to *The Highlander*. See the full document on our website at thehighlander.ca.

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# Highlander news

## Youth drop-in centre for county under development

By Mark Arike

Young people will need to be part of the solution when it comes to improving the health and wellness of their peers, says Dr. Ian Manion, a clinical psychologist who specializes in youth mental health and suicide.

“Engage the youth to lead in the solution, so that it happens,” Manion told community members who gathered in the high school’s

gymnasium Nov. 29 for “Hurting to Hope,” one of two recent forums for “a community in crisis.”

He gave examples of successful youth programs in other parts of the world. One is Headspace, a youth mental health foundation in Australia that offers integrated services. This includes mental health, addictions, physical health, housing and vocational supports. Manion said it has

increased access to services for those who wouldn’t typically access them.

Organizations in the community, including Haliburton Highlands Health Services and Point in Time, are in the midst of developing a youth hub. In addition to including youth, Manion said it will require multiple services and input from families.

Some provincial funding might be available, but it shouldn’t be the deciding factor.

“I say if you do it, don’t do it because there’s government funding available. Do

it because it’s the right thing to do for your community,” he said. “Then start looking at how you do it.”

During the forum, Marg Cox, executive director of Point in Time, said that Sticks and Stones Productions is interviewing young people for a video on establishing a drop-in centre. “Youth I’ve talked to over several years feel they need a safe place, a place where they can engage in activities, decide what that space would look like and how it would be operated,” said Cox. “It’s an opportunity for people in the community to come together with youth to put in a proposal for a youth wellness hub.”

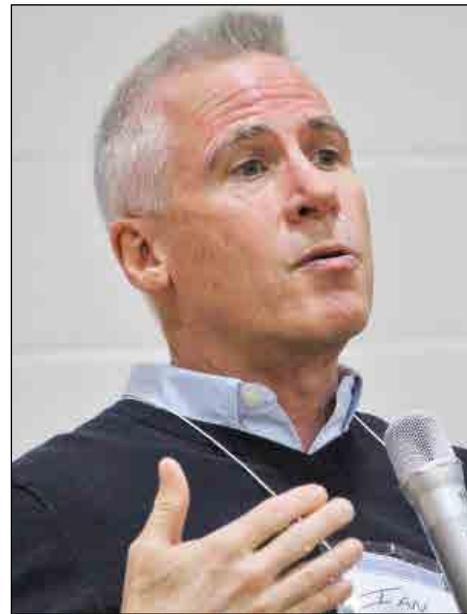
The hub would offer physical care and mental health services to 12-25-year-olds, she said. Point In Time is seeking letters of support for the initiative.

In addition to Cox and Manion, fellow panelists from local agencies answered audience questions about bullying, social media, school policies and other topics. Current services in the community were highlighted.

School board trustee Gary Brohman thought the information was valuable and that it’s important to talk about bullying.

“It’s a complicated issue, but from what I heard ... is we must address this. It’s no different from a knee injury, a shoulder injury or something we go see the doctor about,” said Brohman.

To get involved or join Point in Time’s contact list, call Lindsay at 705-457-5345 or email [lindsayk@pointintime.ca](mailto:lindsayk@pointintime.ca).



Dr. Ian Manion, a clinical psychologist who specializes in youth mental health and suicide, spoke about successful health hubs and issues facing youth. Photo by Mark Arike.

## Do we have enough resources?

By Lisa Gervais

Local counsellor Dianne Mathes wants to make sure that programs for students are staffed by people with the skills and expertise needed.

“Do they have a clinical plan, a safety plan and protocol for talking to these kids so they’re knowing what sort of emotional state and thoughts are going through these kid’s heads as they’re leaving these programs?” Mathes asked, during an interview with *The Highlander*.

She added that a really big question for local organizations is “are you upping your crisis response services? If these kids are really struggling, what’s the wraparound blanket that holds them in this?”

“Parents aren’t therapists. Kids may or may not talk to parents. Once parents recognize, ‘ok, more help is needed,’ there’s not the wraparound blanket without putting kids through a whole assessment with a psychiatrist,” she said.

“We need additional funding now. We’re in a community crisis.”

Marg Cox, executive director of Point in Time, said in an interview that funding and resources are a piece of the puzzle, noting children’s mental health services have only had a three per cent funding increase in Ontario in the past 25 years. She said she’s concerned about it and plans to meet with MPP Laurie Scott.

She added Point in Time’s umbrella organization, Kinark Child and Family Services, is involved. “They’ve been working very hard trying to work with the hospital in Peterborough. We’ve heard from parents and youth that they’ve had some challenging times trying to access regional hospital services. We’re working very hard with other service providers to try to come up with better pathways in, from our community in Haliburton.

“We know we need a multi-level approach and different things from different people. We want everybody around the table together.”

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## COMMUNITY IN CRISIS

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