

# Red Deer students hope grad fundraiser raises awareness of mental health issues

Students at a high school in Red Deer are hoping to raise awareness of mental health issues, and \$40,000 for a foundation named after an alumnus who committed suicide.

Each year the graduating class from École Secondaire Notre Dame High School chooses a charity to raise funds for through their Grade Service Project. For the past 13 years, students have raised almost \$700,000 for student-chosen charities.

This year, students are completing a series of challenges March 8-12 to raise money for The Smiles Thru Lindsey Foundation. Lindsey More graduated 10 years ago and took her own life in September 2015. She was 22. The foundation is committed to providing mental health supports and proactive, early intervention for youth in Red Deer.

A YouTube video, *Are You Listening? A Pathway to Empathy*, features a fictional mental health worker speaking with teens, as well as experts in the field. It features Lindsey's father Rick More, as well as a teen who attempted suicide, mental health professionals, and Rev. Len Cadieux, who officiated at Lindsey's funeral.

In the last four years, Central Alberta residents have donated approximately \$350,000 to support the Smiles Thru Lindsey cause, and more \$40,000 has been donated to local school divisions for mental health first-aid training for educators.

"Our service project is a tradition of school pride and giving back," said Shannon Nivens, a student at École Secondaire Notre Dame High School. "It is a great opportunity to make a difference and learn about a charity that the students choose. This week impacts our students just as much as our community."

Each day, teams of six students, a team teacher and team parent worked together to compete in challenges and earn points. Prizes were awarded to the teams that earned the most points and raised the most money.

During this week, students will be involved in a series of challenges including designing a banner cut into eight puzzle pieces and starting with a blank canvass and completing an art therapy challenge. These art pieces will be auctioned off at the end of March.

Other challenges include completing five intentional acts of kindness, creating

a public service announcement on mental health support and participating in a virtual scavenger hunt.

The students say they hope to support Lindsey's dream to raise money and much-needed awareness to help break the stigma for children, teens and young adults who are fighting mental health issues.

"Mental health awareness has been a central focus at our school for several years," noted Rose McQuay, the principal at École Secondaire Notre Dame High School.

"We are honoured to partner and join resources with the Smiles Thru Lindsey Foundation; this partnership will support our theme to keep talking, listening and connecting with students who struggle with mental health issues. Lindsey was a vibrant part of Notre Dame and we are pleased to be able to keep her memory and message alive through this incredible service project."

For more information about the École Secondaire Notre Dame High School grad service project, please visit [notredamehigh.ca](http://notredamehigh.ca).