

# Teacher's 225-kilometre ride raises thousands for suicide prevention

With his departed friend Chris and his junior high students top of mind, Tyler Weber pushed himself to a personal best bike ride of 225.8 kilometres in just over nine hours in a journey to raise awareness of suicide prevention.

The Grade 9 teacher at St. Mary's Catholic High School in Sexsmith, Alta., eclipsed his previous peak distance of 175 kilometres April 20 to raise awareness and funds for the Resource Centre for Suicide Prevention in Grande Prairie, Alta.

Weber had hoped to raise \$1,000 through this grassroots fundraiser, but ultimately shattered that target four-fold as \$4,320 was accrued by the time the donation platform closed.

"I just put this out to my family and friends to support the cause, but it has definitely turned into something way bigger through word of mouth and I'm grateful," said Weber.

While Weber has always considered himself an active outdoorsman, also forging a brand as a nature photographer, he only became an avid bike rider during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rock climbing was a core sport he participated in with his buddy Chris, who committed suicide in the autumn.

"He was my climbing partner for years. I knew him for a decade and he became one of my best friends. He was such a good guy," said Weber. "He moved away from Grande Prairie to the Calgary area, so I couldn't see him as much as I would like, but we remained close."

It was during a period of contemplation and reflection Weber felt a desire to raise awareness for mental health and suicide.

Completing this pursuit for his students was also key for Weber as he and his wife Kate, also a teacher, have borne witness to how students have been dealt a difficult emotional, mental and social challenge over the past 14 months.

"Everyday we come home and lose sleep over our students. They are struggling, especially the kids in high school who are kind of in limbo in regards to things like postsecondary education," he said.

Weber originally intended to complete the ride April 22 to commemorate his 38th birthday, but favourable weather conditions compelled him to bump this initiative up 48 hours. He describes the route he chose as a "ring road of all the communities in the county of Grande Prairie."

Weber expresses his gratitude for his St. Mary's colleagues for organizing the logistics to make it possible for nearly the entire student body – over 200 kids – to co-ride in an eight-kilometre loop of his route (the same path used for the annual Terry Fox Run). Some of the younger students walked a portion of that course.

While the deadline to participate in his fundraiser has passed, Weber recommends Canadians seriously look into donating funds to mental health causes in their community.

“I wanted to have the conversation. It was less about raising money and more about just letting people know I've struggled and I have had friends who have struggled. And even as a male, a lot of us don't talk about the stuff we should talk about until it's too late. I'm just trying to make it easier for everybody to broach the subject.”