



MEDIA INVITE

WSD Unveils Friendship Bench at Grant Park High School

Yellow Benches Remind Students of the Power of Hello

May 1, 2017 (Winnipeg, MB) – Winnipeg School Division (WSD) is pleased to invite Winnipeg media to Grant Park High School **on Thursday, May 4** for the unveiling of one of five yellow Friendship Benches being installed at five schools, located in five provinces, in five days.

The Grant Park High School Friendship Bench unveiling is part of WSD's Healthy Minds Week 2017 and Mental Health Awareness Week. Sam Fiorella, founder of The Friendship Bench, is traversing the country to install the benches and honor their reminder to students to talk with one another about depression and suicidal thoughts to help prevent tragedies.

What: Friendship Bench unveiling

When: 11:30 a.m., Thursday, May 4, 2017

Where: Grant Park High School, 450 Nathaniel Street, Winnipeg

Who: Sam Fiorella, founder of The Friendship Bench, Students and Staff from WSD and Grant Park High School

Each Friendship Bench is a permanent symbol to encourage students to take minute of out their day to sit, breathe and talk (or think) about their mental health and that of their peers. In only two years, there are already 27 benches in place on campuses across the country – not including the five being added during Mental Health Week. The benches and #YellowIsForHello campaign serve as a valuable resource to:

- Encourage peer-to-peer conversations about mental health.
- Via the on-bench web-address/hashtag, connect students with available on-campus mental health support service.
- Act as a tool to help inspire and augment existing on-campus mental health awareness efforts.

Tragically, Sam was inspired to found The Friendship Bench initiative after the loss of his son Lucas in 2014. At the time, Lucas was in his second year of university, and Sam and his family were utterly unaware that Lucas was suffering with depression. The shock and overwhelming loss shook Sam to his very core and, in Lucas' memory, he is determined to help others open up before it's too late.

"As a parent, learning that your child is suffering alone – when if you only knew, you could have helped, is your worst fear," says Sam Fiorella, father of Lucas Fiorella and co-founder of The Friendship Bench. "You can't rewrite the past but you can certainly change the future. Suicide is second leading cause of death among Canadians aged 15 – 34. No parent should find out their child is suffering when it's too late to do anything about it."

For a complete list of Healthy Minds Week events, please visit: www.winnipegsd.ca/healthyminds.

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