

# Draft Report of the Dean's Advisory Committee on Mental Health and Wellness

March 22, 2023

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## Introduction

The Dean's Advisory Committee on Mental Health and Wellness was given the following mandate:

*This year, I ask that the Committee monitor the implementation of the law school's Student Mental Health Action Plan and review the mental health training options available to our community. Additionally, I ask that the committee explore what would be entailed in developing the "culture of compassion" identified by last year's Committee.*

The Committee decided to form three subcommittees to address the Dean's mandate: 1) a subcommittee on the implementation of the Student Mental Health Action Plan; 2) a subcommittee on the Faculty's mental health training options; and 3) a subcommittee on the culture of compassion.

This draft report includes a summary of the work of each subcommittee followed by some recommendations flowing from that work.

## I Student Mental Health Action Plan Subcommittee

The student mental health action plan subcommittee reviewed the action plan (Appendix A) and itemized mental health activities, events and structure that support the plan as well as identified any gaps in services.

The plan includes objectives in three areas

- a. Creating a healthy community
- b. Increasing mental health literacy
- c. Provision of effective, accessible mental health services

The existence of the plan itself articulates a vision and goals regarding promoting student mental health and a healthy community.

Activities and output in this portfolio for the year included:

- Four Wellness Welcome sessions held in July to introduce the incoming 1L cohort to mental health supports and staff at the law school before orientation begins.
- Peer Mental Health Support Program connected 33 incoming 1L students with upper year mentors
- Two hundred PMP mentors and 20 ASP tutors received mental health training
- Six mindfulness workshops were delivered by the Mental Health Manager and two guest experts and a weekly mindfulness practice drop-in has been facilitated by the Mental Health Manager
- Weekly Wednesday Yoga offered for students, staff and faculty
- Mental Health Manager collaborated with the CDO on a 2L recruit session which was recorded and made available widely
- Mental Health Manager offered Office hours during the OCI period and on call day
- Mental health speaker series fall session featured three recent grads speaking on their experience with mental health in law school and while transitioning into the workplace
- Mental health speaker series Winter session featured three lawyers with 3-20 years experience sharing perspective on navigating mental health experience in the profession.
- Academic Success Program provided tutoring to 1L students through the year
- Mental Health Manager available for 1:1 appointments in person and virtually for all JD students
- Embedded mental health counselor provided individual sessions to JD students four days a week
- Embedded Accessibility Services Accessibility Advisor provided support and resources to JD students five days a week
- Two SGS mental health counselors are available by appointment for graduate students
- Elder in Residence available to any students interested in individual appointments
- Accommodations and Considerations Committee provided responsive and timely supports to JD students
- Mental Health Manager created and disseminated a monthly email bulletin listing upcoming mental health activities, events and opportunities at the law school and across the University of Toronto
- Mental Health Manager, with a workstudy student, worked to secure peer notetaking support for every course in which this resource was requested
- A Trauma Sensitive Lawyering session was offered in the Externship Seminar class

- Doggie Day was implemented before fall and winter exam periods
- Massage and healthy snacks made available to students during the exam period

Christine Bartha, Senior Executive Director, Student Mental Health, Systems, Policy and Strategy in the Office of the Vice Provost, Students was invited to visit and be in conversation with the committee and to offer perspective on how the law school plan and programming is situated within the context of the wider University community. Feedback provided indicated that while there is ongoing effort and increased uptake in mental health awareness at the University post-COVID, the law school's strategic action plan and the activities, resources and supports available, positioned the Faculty as a leader on campus in the area of student mental health and wellness.

## **II Mental Health Training Subcommittee**

The Faculty currently has an impressive array of mental health training options including:

- Identify, Assist, Refer online training;
- Living Works START;
- Bundle Teaching;
- Trauma informed/Trauma sensitive lawyering;
- Wellness Welcome sessions for 1Ls;
- Graduate online mental health module for GPLLMs;
- Mental health training for PMHSP mentors and academic tutors; and
- Mindfulness workshops and yoga

However, there is room for improvement in the awareness of existing training options, in facilitating opportunities for members of our community to engage in training and in creating new training opportunities. A key concern is balancing the need for more awareness and training with the difficulty in finding space in the already busy schedules of students, staff and faculty.

To this end, the subcommittee reached out to different divisions across the university including Medicine, Rotman, Engineering, the Vice-Provost's Office and Arts and Science to determine the training options and processes of other divisions. While there was helpful information from this outreach and more work is needed, it was clear the Faculty has a strong base of training options relative to other divisions. Stephanie Rei came to a Committee to describe the PMP and the training involved.

The need for enhancing awareness of resources as well as increasing engagement with training led to a discussion of different levels of mental health training, with different approaches to communication and participation:

First Level: The first level involves general awareness of current options as well as training that does not involve a significant time commitment. Options for this level include:

- Ensuring that there are signs posted during the exam period to indicate the availability of mental health resources;
- Asking faculty to remind students of mental health resources at the end of term;
- Providing an option for Identify, Assist, Refer online training for 1Ls; and
- Increasing awareness of staff and faculty of the IAR training.

Second Level: The second level involves greater commitment and/or broader coverage of training. Options for this level include:

- Lunch and Learns for staff and faculty on mental health issues;
- Providing mental health training to all club leaders similar to the training for peer mentors.

Third Level: This level has the highest level of commitment. It requires more consultation to aid in developing an appropriate approach. Options for this level could, for example, include:

- Tying mental health training to participation in clinics (in addition to Trauma-informed lawyering training) similar to that for peer mentors;
- Expanding training options for not only student leaders but specific training for other members of the community;
- Considering launching a course (as at other law schools) on mindfulness and the law;
- Holding more in-depth mental health training sessions for staff (particularly student services staff) and faculty such as expanded training through a body like Life Works; and
- Exploring whether partnership opportunities exist with bodies such as the Law Society of Ontario for mental health training.

### **III Community of Kindness Subcommittee**

Last year's committee recommended the institution of a 'culture of compassion' at the law school. The subcommittee engaged in discussion and explored several definitions and understandings of the concept, coming to the conclusion that a "community of kindness" might

be an accessible and understandable concept and thus one that is more likely to be practically implemented and to take root.

There was significant openness to kindness as a value to be expressed at the Faculty and feedback was sought informally from a small sample of students.

The law school has no shortage of examples of kindness within the community

- Student sober volunteers at the Halloween Party
- Students volunteering their time to better the law school community, including SLS, GLSA, Dean's Committees etc.
- Students volunteering for public interest programs and clinics
- Staff and Faculty going above and beyond to support student learning and student experience
- Creating opportunities for the community to connect, such as J's Java
- Library staff taking initiative to provide games and puzzles etc.
- Staff appreciation events
- Staff tours of the law school (for anyone and particularly those who joined the law school during COVID)
- Opportunities to eat together (because busy, but also provides space for community)
- Holiday party (yay events team!)
- Staff PD Committee (and particularly, the two years in which there were culminating social/development events – (1) design thinking + social; and (2) session in the Rowell Room + bowling). For some staff, these events are the only opportunities they have to meet people who work in a different building or in very different portfolios and, in the case of the PD Committee, to collaborate and reduce friction in the work we do together.
- Bundle teachings (we hear this over and over and over!!) are a great example of positive community at the school.
- Doggie Day
- Exam time supports, including nutritional snacks and massages

There was exploration of what might constitute kindness to a student, a professor and a staff member and the importance of ensuring that initiatives are inclusive of our very diverse community. Several ideas were developed including a survey, Kindness Day, and a Kindness Board. Details are provided in the Appendix.

#### **IV Recommendations**

- Consider the following re: Mental Health Action Plan
  - Establish benchmarks for evaluation of student mental health program (awareness, participation, effectiveness, satisfaction)
  - Adding a mental health session to the 1L Joint Professionalism Series
  - Update action plan to reflect post COVID developments in mental health research literature, practice and University of Toronto data
  
- Consider the following re: Mental Health Training
  - Expand participation in IAR training for staff, faculty and students. Consider strongly encouraging 1L students to take IAR training during welcome week.
  - Instituting Lunch and Learns during the summer months focused on mental health and wellness issues.
  - Add Mental Health as a session topic in the 1L EDI series
  
- Ask next year's committee to:
  - consult on the desirability of and appropriate means for extending more in-depth training options (such as the examples set out under Level Two and Level Three above and mandatory IAR training for the whole law school community);
  
- Consider the following re: Culture of Kindness
  - Develop and implement a survey to collect feedback on the law school community's understanding of kindness ;
  - Plan and implement a Faculty-wide event for Kindness Day;
  - Install a Kindness Board to express messages and events around the school.
  - Promote random acts of kindness at the law school ongoing

#### **In Appreciation**

The committee co-chairs wish to thank all of the mental health committee members for their ongoing engagement, willingness to share experience, knowledge and ideas and resources and the spirit of collegiality, warmth and caring for the wellness of all members of our law school community. We also wish to acknowledge all of the students, staff, faculty and community members who give of their time and patience to help make the day-to-day experiences just a little more pleasant. The dedication and generosity offered within our community exemplifies the inclusive excellence of the law school's academic mission.

## Appendix

*JD Student Mental Health and Wellness Strategic Action Plan*

<https://www.law.utoronto.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mhstrategicactionplan2020.pdf>

### *Reports*

University of Toronto Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health

[Presidential & Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health \(utoronto.ca\)](#)

### *Training Resources*

Identify, Assist, Refer online training prepares you with skills and information to support individuals experiencing different types of challenges that impact mental health:

[Identify, Assist, Refer Online Training - UofT Student Life \(utoronto.ca\)](#)

More Feet on the Ground - [Welcome to More Feet on the Ground! - More Feet on the Ground](#) The goal of this website is to help you better understand mental health on your campus and help your fellow students. This course prepares you to support students on your campus who may be living with mental health concerns.

### *Mental Health and Compassion in Education Reading List*

- Compassion: a Critical Skill for Law Students, Marquette Benefits and Social Welfare Law Review:  
<https://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1073&context=benefits>
- Developing Compassionate Academic Leadership: The Practice of Kindness, Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, Kathryn Waddington  
[https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/download/d117d530d1077411f9e58f67687a33df46049a29f1a2147f6a309f4d9ef6632a/256815/Waddington%282018%29\\_JPAAP\\_Published.pdf](https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/download/d117d530d1077411f9e58f67687a33df46049a29f1a2147f6a309f4d9ef6632a/256815/Waddington%282018%29_JPAAP_Published.pdf)
- The Pedagogy of Compassion at the Heart of Higher Education, Paul Gibbs  
<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-319-57783-8.pdf>
- Compassionate education from preschool to graduate school: Bringing a culture of compassion into the classroom, Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching and Learning, Hooria Jazaieri  
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JRIT-08-2017-0017/full/html>

- How Does Kindness Spread in a Community ([https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_kindness\\_spreads\\_in\\_a\\_community](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_kindness_spreads_in_a_community))
- “How Empathy Works – and Sympathy Can’t”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1f0eSejlzLo>
- [Presidential & Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health \(utoronto.ca\)](https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/)
- <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>
- <https://self-compassion.org> Research shows relationship between self-compassion and proactive behaviour, motivation and learning, among many other findings.
- Caring Campus : Faculty Leadership in Student Success [Caring Campus: Faculty Leadership in Student Success \(columbia.edu\)](https://www.columbia.edu/~c3/caringcampus/)

### *Community of Kindness Ideas*

- Kindness Resolution Board in the New Year
- Kindness Decals on law school entrances (You are entering a kind environment.....)
- QR Codes that lead to resource lists, lighthearted videos, etc.
- Random Acts of Kindness
- Headline conversations about kindness at the top of Legal Methods
- Article in UV about work of the committee (including a student, faculty member and staff)
- Opportunities to showcase staff and their accomplishments (make them ‘people’ not just jobs)

### *Kindness Day Ideas*

World Kindness Day is an international observance on 13 November. It was introduced in 1998 by the World Kindness Movement, a coalition of nations’ kindness NGOs.

Random Acts of Kindness Day was on February 17. It originated in 1993 in Denver, Colorado and has since spread internationally. The idea is to make the world a little brighter and better through simple kind gestures, words and actions. Some thoughts for the law school include:

- Managers can bring treats and appreciation notes for staff
- Kindness pop-ups throughout the law school (Atrium, DLS, Falconer Hall) – staffed by members of the MHW Committee (and others), treats distributed, random acts of kindness bowl, etc.
- Treats taped under chairs throughout the law school to be discovered by occupants
- Treats handed out to certain stakeholders (members of SLS and GLSA, CDO, staff and faculty) with nice messages taped on them to be handed out on the random throughout the day to people they encounter as they move throughout the building.
- Could give the café small chocolates with nice messages and ask that they hand one out with each coffee, tea, snack, etc. purchased.



- Self-Care and/or Kindness “Challenge”. Faculty, staff and students can participate. Sign up as a team or individuals added to a team and practice kindness for themselves and others. See what’s being done at OISE: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOas\\_600bfA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOas_600bfA)
- Kindness raffle?
- Students could acknowledge their appreciation for faculty (as a class, on their own)

*Potential Random Acts of Kindness:*

- Smile
- Go talk to someone you have not met before
- Make plans to catch up with a friend
- Give a compliment
- Drink more water
- Say something positive about yourself
- Share your favorite book with someone
- Take a snack and share it with someone
- *Leave an encouraging post-it note in a book at the library/on the table before you leave class?*
- Make someone laugh by telling them an uplifting joke
- Write a note to a Professor whose class you enjoyed
- Listen to your favorite song
- Ask for a friend/coworker’s birthday and add it to your calendar
- Share something that made a positive difference in your life
- Say hi to at least three people
- Say hi to the person behind you in class
- Sit next to someone you do not know
- Ask & remember the names of the people you see daily (security guard, front desk, library staff, IT staff, etc... )
- Share your best self-care tip with a friend
- Send a note to the last person who was kind to you
- Hold the door open for someone
- Do something today that makes you happy
- Call a friend and reminisce about a wonderful memory you have together
- Ask a colleague or friend to tell you one thing they appreciate about you. Do the same for them.
- Acknowledge/appreciate someone for something (heck, do it more than once)
- Tell a friend why you think they are amazing
- Give someone at the law school a compliment and mean it
- Buy someone a coffee
- Really listen and ask thoughtful questions of the next person you speak to
- Text or call someone you haven’t spoken to in a while and tell them you care

**Kindness Day Activities**

| Activity | To Do | Notes/Needs | Person |
|----------|-------|-------------|--------|
|----------|-------|-------------|--------|

|   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p>Email to students, faculty and staff</p> |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage Faculty to do temperature checks</li> </ul>   |  |
| <p>Kindness Bowl in the Atrium</p>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bowl or buckets in which there are several 'acts of kindness' from which people can draw and act on</li> <li>• Second bowl with blank pieces of paper on which one can write their own 'acts of kindness'</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop list of acts of kindness (ideas to draw from: <a href="https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-ideas">https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-ideas</a>, <a href="https://www.signupgenius.com/groups/random-acts-of-kindness-ideas.cfm">https://www.signupgenius.com/groups/random-acts-of-kindness-ideas.cfm</a>)</li> <li>• Cut up scrap pieces of paper</li> <li>• Acquire bowls</li> <li>• Work with events team to set-up a table and chairs</li> <li>• Signage?</li> <li>• Snacks and fruit for table</li> </ul> | <p>Please indicate when you are free to help man the table:</p> <p>10:30-11:30<br/>(Terry)</p> |
| <p>Kindness Board</p>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange with events team to have the rolling white board placed</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange with events team to have the kindness board placed in the Atrium</li> <li>• Add prompts and examples to the board</li> <li>• Cut up pieces of multi-coloured paper on which people can write 'kind' comments</li> <li>• We could also set up a Kudo kindness board so others can bear witness to the nice things people have to say to others</li> </ul>  |  |

|                            |   |   |  |
|----------------------------|---|---|--|
|                            | in the Atrium   |   |  |
| Treats, Snacks and Goodies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bowl or buckets for the different snacks or goodies to be given out</li> <li>•</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buy snacks and goodies</li> <li>• Snacks should take into considerations different dietary restrictions.</li> <li>• Acquire markers (multi-coloured) that staff, students, and faculty can use to write notes</li> <li>• Tape to adhere notes to board?</li> <li>• Treats at the table that participants can take after engaging</li> <li>•</li> </ul> |  |
| Kindness Ambassadors       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student, staff and faculty members of committee (and others?) hand out 'treats' as they move around the law school (chocolate, gum, granola bars, highlighters, etc.)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase supplies to be handed out</li> <li>• Solicit volunteers to distribute goodies (all times of day needed)</li> <li>• Print nice notes and apply to goodies</li> <li>• Package bags to be given to volunteers</li> </ul>   |  |
| Kindness for Staff         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers to do something nice for their staff</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>   |  |

|                               |   |   |  |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|
| DLS Kindness Pop-up           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebration of students</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DLS representative to make appropriate arrangements</li> </ul> |  |
| Falconer Hall Kindness Pop-up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>   |  |

| SIGN-UP |             |               |
|---------|-------------|---------------|
| TIME    | TABLE/BOARD | AMBASSADOR(S) |
| 9-10AM  |             |               |
| 10-11AM |             |               |
| 11-12PM |             |               |
| 12-1PM  |             |               |
| 1-2PM   |             |               |
| 2-3PM   |             |               |
| 3-4PM   |             |               |
| 4-5PM   |             |               |