



BGC of Bonnyville staff members Kim and Hailey are helping youth through 12 weekly Flex Your Head sessions.



Kathryn and Kathy at BGC of Wetaskiwin are breaking down stigmas with Flex Your Head.

Preparing for life's ups and downs

FLEX YOUR HEAD PROMOTES YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Across Canada, Boys and Girls Club staff members are ready to flex.

A national program promoting mental health and well-being for youth, Flex Your Head is being offered by a growing number of Clubs in 2016, thanks to a new online training module and downloadable guide that gives staff the knowledge and skills to facilitate youth

group collaboration and dialogue.

Created by Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada with the support of AstraZeneca's Young Health Program, Flex Your Head encourages youth aged 13 and up to recognize that anxiety and pain are normal.

The program typically runs over 12 weeks and begins with youth leadership training followed by a variety of fun group activities that

prompt discussions about emotions and well-being.

Young people are introduced to strategies for recognizing emotional cues and identifying thoughts that seem to occur automatically in different situations.

"I just love the program's language and approach," says Kim Reed, program director with Boys and Girls Club of Bonnyville. "Anxiety and sadness are unavoidable. It's just life. But dealing with these emotions is a skill that can be learned."

With over 10 years' experience as a high school counsellor, Kim saw a lot of young people overwhelmed by depression and worry. "I would certainly have used this program in a school setting to help the kids manage their distress," she says.

Flex Your Head has a menu of activities that teens can choose from that are designed to tease out concepts and strategies like mindfulness, maintaining good relationships and asserting needs in a youth-friendly and engaging way.

Kathryn Robertson and Kathy Hodges of the Boys and Girls Club of Wetaskiwin both enjoyed the online Flex Your Head training and are offering the program to Club teens this year.

"I love the activities that teach youth about mental wellness," Kathryn says. "The program really breaks down the stigma around mental illness."

Kathy agrees, adding that a relaxed and teen-friendly space allows the youth to problem solve as a group in a very supportive way. "We're giving our young people a safe place to talk about feelings and think about the kind of person they want to be." ❄️