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Upcoming Events

- Although it's still a long way off, be sure to mark your calendar for the 2011 CASA Conference in Niagara Falls next July.

Message From CASA's New President: Getting To Know Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells

Why did you decide to get into the field of education?

I decided to get into the field of education for several reasons.

Firstly, I believe that I possess a passion for education and the importance of education in an individual's life. I enjoy learning and supporting others in their education to acquire knowledge about the world, others and themselves.

Secondly, I wanted to make a contribution to the field of education by working with students and their families, along with colleagues in the field of education at all levels, to support the success of students so that they can learn, grow and prepare for their futures.

What sparked your interest and why?

I believe what sparked my interest in the field of education is that I find it to be chal-



Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells
CASA president

lenging, exciting and stimulating each and every day to encourage students and staff to achieve their full potential.

How has education changed the most since you first entered the field?

I believe what has changed the most is the access to information, communication and resources through technology. It is truly amazing what students can access via the internet and electronic communication

about any subject, topic, person, world event and up-to-the-minute news about the world. This change in education has supported the field of education as students are able to access information and electronic resources to enhance their knowledge at school and at home. Advances in technology continue to change our lives and will continue to change education and the world.

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Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells is the 2010-11 CASA president. Lee Ann is a Family of Schools superintendent of education overseeing 33 schools for the Niagara Catholic District School Board in Welland, Ontario. Lee Ann's portfolio also includes the Research, Assessment and Evaluation Department, EQAO Provincial Assessments, the Niagara Catholic Parent Involvement Committee and Catholic School Councils for the 60 schools in the Niagara Catholic District School Board. To learn more about Lee Ann's school district, visit www.niagararc.ca. You can reach your 2010-2011 CASA president by phone at (905) 735-0240, ext. 229, by email at leeann.forsythsell@ncdsb.com or through her administrative assistant Yvonne Anderson at (905) 735-0240, ext. 223, and yvonne.anderson@ncdsb.com.

Message From The Executive Director: Working Together To Improve Children's Mental Health

The CASA forum in Quebec City in early July brought together educators from across Canada to participate in considerations for the improvement of children's mental health. All of those in attendance recognized the negative impact of mental health problems on positive student achievement.

Our first keynote speaker, **Dr. Paula Barrett**, set the stage with a realistic outline of initiatives in Australia. Dr. Barrett reviewed programs that have been effective in relieving student stress and anxiety and avoiding youth depression. Her involvement has been in programs that have helped with assessment and provision of student assistance.

As we always do at CASA, we then moved to workshops that highlighted what is best in various provinces. We saw good models and practical solutions.

CASA members have identified children's mental health as a critical area that must be addressed in order to ease the learning of students.

The Quebec session brought focus on children's mental health. The programs presented and the discussions held were just the beginning of work in systems across the country. There are so many dimensions to this issue. CASA will continue to highlight best practices and interventions in the coming year.

Your national newsletter is an ideal vehicle for sharing initiatives and programs. If you would like to see the ones in your schools highlighted, do get in touch. If you have observed an approach elsewhere that intrigues you, let us know so we can put the spotlight on it. You'll find contact information on the last page of this issue.



Frank Kelly
CASA executive director

Message From CASA's New President, continued

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What has remained essentially the same?

I believe what has remained essentially the same in education from my experience is that as educators we are dealing with individuals, specifically students, staff and parents, who all have their own unique educational needs. Students require care, attention, and continuous support and encouragement to develop the confidence to be successful at all levels of education. Staff require professional development and training sessions to improve and enhance their instructional practices so that they feel comfortable delivering curriculum and assessments and to support the diverse needs of all students.

Finally, parents also need to be involved in their children's education, and to be connected to their school community so that there is a strong partnership between the home and the school supporting their students.

What are some of your board's most notable achievements in recent years?

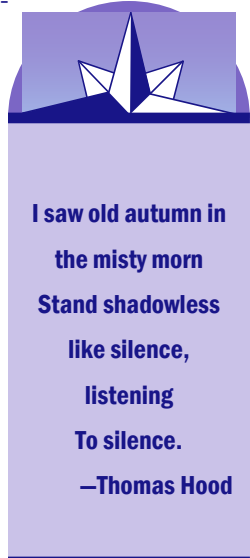
The Niagara Catholic District School Board has many notable achievements. Some of Niagara Catholic's most notable achievements are the Faith Formation program for all staff in the board, a focus on student achievement, Specialist High Skills' Major programs and the Mentor-Connector program.

The Faith Formation program enables all staff to develop spiritually as Catholic educators in our Catholic community supporting students and their families. As a Catholic school board, the focus is on the faith development of all partners in Catholic education.

In terms of a focus on the improvement of student achievement for all students, school administrators and staff work together with parents to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of all students. The results of the provincial assessments in reading, writing and mathematics at the elementary level, and mathematics and literacy at the secondary level, along with a graduation rate above the provincial percentage, attest to this achievement.

In addition, Niagara Catholic has implemented a number of Specialist High Skills' Major programs in the past few years for secondary students. Three of these programs are

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Message From CASA's New President, continued

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unique to the Niagara region and are based on partnerships with the community. The board has formed a partnership with the Niagara Region Horticulture School where students who are studying horticulture at the secondary school also achieve practical experience at the Horticultural School.

Another Specialist High Skills' Major is arts and culture, which is a partnership with the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Students study the arts at their secondary school and have performances at the Shaw Festival theatres. Niagara Catholic is also the only school board in Ontario with a classroom in a hotel offering a Specialist High Skills' Major program in hospitality to students who are pursuing culinary arts at the secondary level.

The Mentor-Connector program is another highlight of the board, as this program connects grade 7 to 12 students with teacher candidates from Brock University in St. Catharines and Niagara University in New York state for academic support and online assistance. The program continues to expand as more secondary students are seeking online assistance after school in all subject areas.

What sort of challenges has the board faced lately, and how is it meeting them?

The Niagara Catholic District School Board is facing similar challenges as the other boards in Ontario of declining enrolment, shifting demographics and aging facilities. These three challenges involve the coordination of all departments in the board addressing the changes that these issues bring to bear on the students and their families.

These issues are interconnected with funding for new schools and replacement schools. This year our board has constructed two new schools in Grimsby, and Blessed Trinity Catholic Secondary School, also in Grimsby, is adding an 18-classroom addition to address the growth in the area. The Plant Department continues to implement facility renewal projects to address these challenges.

What do you feel are some of your own personal achievements in the field of education?

I believe that some of my own personal achievements in the field of education are my educational credentials, my educational experience, and my interest in education professionally and personally. I feel very fortunate to

have attained two graduate degrees, one in English Language and Literature and the other in Education.

In addition, I believe my extensive teaching experience from primary through to secondary, university and adult education, along with my 23 years of administrative experience, have assisted me in my chosen profession.

Finally, my interest and desire to be involved in professional and personal development in education and my contributions as an educator to the professional development of administrative, teaching and support staff is a personal achievement that I believe benefits educators, but more importantly the students in the classrooms.

What are you most proud of when it comes to your work as someone in education?

I am most proud of my work as an educator when I can assist, support and improve on a situation for the benefit of all involved in an educational setting. Each day is a new learning experience and I am proud when I can make a difference in the life of an individual to provide a better learning experience for now and in the future.

Outside of your work in education, what is your greatest achievement or most proud moment and why?

Outside of my work in education I am most proud of my family for their continuous love, support and encouragement. As a family, we love each other and every day we work together to achieve our goals as a family and as individuals. Currently our two daughters are attending two Ontario universities, and we are very proud of their accomplishments.

What is the greatest lesson you have learned as a teacher/ education administrator? How did you learn it, or who or what taught you this lesson?

As humans we have feelings, concerns and needs that require attention, and we need to communicate with each other to reach our full potential every day. Experience is a good teacher and I am grateful for my educational experience thus far in my life and I am looking forward to more in the future.

Thank you, Lee Ann.

Thank you for these questions and I am looking forward to working with all members of CASA to continue to foster excellence in Canadian education for all students.



Taking Care Of Teen Mental Health At Cardinal Newman: The Peer Mentor Club And iMATTER Project

Marisa Mariella is a guidance counsellor and Student Success teacher at Cardinal Newman Catholic Secondary School, a high school within the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board. She's been with the district for 25 years, and has served as the teacher advisor for the Cardinal Newman Peer Mentor Club for nearly a decade. In active collaboration with the Peer Mentors, Marisa created and carried out a student-led, teacher-facilitated project called iMATTER: Taking Care of Teen Mental Health. This initiative targets the need for school-based mental health education as a means of ensuring the well-being of students.

In this issue of *Leaders & Learners*, we examine the iMATTER project from both the perspective of Marisa, the educator, and the students. Several of the Peer Mentors have graciously contributed thoughts on their experiences with the project (see page 10). CASA members who attended this year's annual conference in Quebec City may have had the chance to take in the iMATTER presentation, and certainly would have taken notice of the Cardinal Newman Peer Mentors (wearing their distinctive blue team shirts) participating in many of the other sessions.

Cardinal Newman has over 1,800 students from grade 9 to 12. The school has a 35-year tradition of academic excellence and thriving athletic and co-instructional programs. According to the recently released *Report Card on Ontario's Secondary Schools*, CNCSS was ranked the number one high school in all of Hamilton's 20 secondary schools. For more information on the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board, visit www.hwcdsb.on.ca.

What is iMATTER?

iMATTER: Taking Care of Teen Mental Health involves groups of Peer Mentors delivering a series of lessons on mental wellness (adapted from the *Mental Health and High School Guide* by the Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA]) to all grade 9 Religion Classes. Topics include dispelling myths about mental illness, brain chemistry, symptoms of mental unwellness and resources. The Mentors are responsible for small group interaction with the students as an extension of the teacher's lesson on the particular topic. Training is obviously an important component for the successful implementation of this initiative.

Peer Mentor training includes attendance at "safe TALK," a



Peer Mentors practising one of the ice-breaking activities they do with grade 9 students on Orientation Day.

All photos courtesy Marisa Mariella

suicide prevention training session delivered by qualified professionals from the Living Works Corporation. Other training sessions include attending a TAMI (Talking About Mental Illness) presentation delivered by adults who are successfully coping with mental illness.

At a later training session, they are instructed on their specific duties in the classroom with an emphasis on group management and effective communication skills. The lessons are hands-on activities that quickly engage the group of grade 9 students. Exercises include a true/false questionnaire, placemat activities, a "walk a mile in my shoes" activity and more. Each lesson ends with some product created by each group so as to leave a visual reminder in the classroom. A Mentor-created newsletter and a pen/highlighter with the name of the initiative is also distributed.

Why is teen mental health an educational issue and not, say, just a health issue? Why is it important to address teen mental health in the school environment?

With the attention on student success and student engagement, it is obvious that the issue of mental health must be addressed within the context of education. A proactive approach among educators can not only de-

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Fall is my favorite season in Los Angeles, watching the birds change color and fall from the trees.

—David Letterman

Taking Care Of Teen Mental Health At Cardinal Newman: The Peer Mentor Club And iMATTER project, continued

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crease the fear of stigma associated with mental illness, but it can also diminish the resulting discrimination facing identified students and their families. Educators can empower students, who in turn nurture a school atmosphere where seeking help is perceived as a strength, not a weakness. An opportunity to explore and confront some of the most challenging attitudinal issues about mental illness will bring about a more educated view. A change in culture will require the combined efforts of people in all age groups and at all levels of authority.

How do mental health issues affect learning at the secondary level? How common are these issues in teens?

According to teenmentalhealth.org, “mental health refers to the maintenance of successful mental activity such as productive daily activities and fulfilling relationships with others. It includes maintaining the abilities to change and to cope with stresses.” A 2001 World Health Organization report states that “mental health is as important as physical health to the overall well-being of individuals, societies and countries.” It has an invasive effect in almost all of our lives, directly or indirectly, and yet we rarely speak of it.

Information on positive mental health, mental health problems and mental illness is particularly important for teenagers because of statistical data on incidences among this age group. The first symptoms of severe, chronic forms of mental illness (such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression and anxiety disorders) generally appear between the ages of 15 and 24, according to the CMHA. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people in this same age group. At least 90 per cent of those who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental illness.

Early detection and treatment of mental illness can greatly improve the chances that someone can recover and return to a full and active life. Unfortunately, it is estimated that two-thirds of people with mental health problems do not seek treatment. For some, the illness itself may make it difficult for the person to see that he or she is ill. In some cases, the person wants help but doesn't know how to get it, or there are practical barriers to treatment such as cost, language and limited services. For many teens, they are simply just too ashamed to seek help due to stigma.

Teens' mental health is an educational issue. It impacts

learning on a daily basis, quietly disguising itself in patterns of behaviours that many just label as “lazy” or “apathetic.” Sometimes the effects of the impact on learning seem explosive, as seen in cases where a student's negative behaviour is quickly reflected in dropping grades and attendance. In either case, mental health problems create obstacles that foil the school's role in promoting success. Poor attendance, lack of motivation, drug and alcohol use, and poor problem solving are among some of the barriers to success. Considering that as many as one in five teenagers have experienced a major mental disorder, a school can expect to have 20 per cent of the population exhibiting signs of mental health problems.

What is the role of the educator and educational administrator in addressing teen mental health issues?

A recent study published in *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health* on school-based intervention shows that best practices include generic empathy-building approaches for young children, direct contact with individuals who have been treated for a mental illness and education. Not surprisingly, the study also recommends that peers be highly involved in each of these approaches. With this special attention to the whole person, this approach aligns itself well with promoting Catholic values and Christ-like behaviour. This untapped resource of using peers is nothing new but seriously underutilized in school. Consequently, the role of the educational administrator become very clear—to unleash the power of teen leaders!

What are the biggest barriers to positive teen mental health?

Positive mental health refers to more than just the absence of mental illness. Most experts agree that positive mental health refers to the capacity to enjoy everyday life, while effectively coping with daily demands, changes and challenges, even in the face of adversity, disappointment and tragedy.

A school setting provides students with constant reminders on the importance of good grades. Many students and parents equate grades with intelligence. If you get good grades, then you must be intelligent. The reverse then must also be true. The bigger picture of life, however, does not focus on intelligence, as defined by a mark, but by emotional intelligence.

This newly recognized area of intelligence, described by **Daniel Goleman**, seems to be a better predictor of success.

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**October's poplars
are flaming torches
lighting the way to
winter.**

—Nova Bair

Taking Care Of Teen Mental Health At Cardinal Newman: The Peer Mentor Club And iMATTER project, continued

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It involves five domains: knowing your emotions, managing your own emotions, motivating yourself, recognizing and understanding other people's emotions, and managing relationships. For students to show positive mental health, I think that they must first be able to accurately identify their emotions. It has been my experience that for many teens and adults, this preliminary step becomes the first barrier. Being able to recognize that you are feeling isolated or rejected or overwhelmed would then ideally be followed by being able to identify



Peer Mentors
Cassandra Snow
(right) and
Nathaly Pesentez
prepare signs to
welcome grade 9
students to their
school.

the source of that emotion and ultimately, being able to manage the emotion in a socially-acceptable way. Since teens are notoriously self-conscious, they may not be able to realize that many of the emotions that they are feeling are normal. In fact, many may not have the vocabulary to even label the emotion. Certainly, when a person says that they are so depressed, they are not truly understanding the significant difference between feeling really sad and clinically depressed. Managing emotions involves understanding the variety of effective short-term and long-term methods of relieving the many undesirable emotions that are commonly experienced in life.

For some teens, even if they do accurately identify their emotions, they make poor decisions in dealing with them. In turn, they are left with the original set of emotions plus the negative consequences of their poor decisions. I think that for many teens who begin to feel the symptoms of a mental illness now either quickly or slowly slip into a pattern of poor decisions. Faced with the stigma that society has associated with mental illness, a person who has not developed emotional intelligence will not recognize the importance of seeking treatment. The downward cycle becomes a painful journey for the individual and his/her loved ones.

Why is it important to include peers in addressing teen mental health issues?

Research has clearly established three steps that leaders

follow to create organizational culture. These are to declare values, to model those values in practice, and to gather feedback and improve accordingly. When a Peer Mentor begins a meaningful discussion on the myths of mental health as part of the iMATTER initiative, students quickly begin to understand that mental illness is not a taboo word. As the activity continues, the discussion is guided by the Mentor as to build empathy and respect for those who are affected by the illness in the same way that one would treat someone suffering from cancer. Although the teacher could certainly lead the interactive sessions, the impact of the message is certainly more significant coming from a peer.

How is the topic of mental health incorporated into the curriculum at Cardinal Newman?

Although the topic of mental wellness can be incorporated in many subject areas, thanks to the support of the former and present department head of Religious Studies, the initiative is delivered through the grade 9 Religion classes each semester. The nature of religion curriculum allows for a natural and unique connection to this topic within several units.

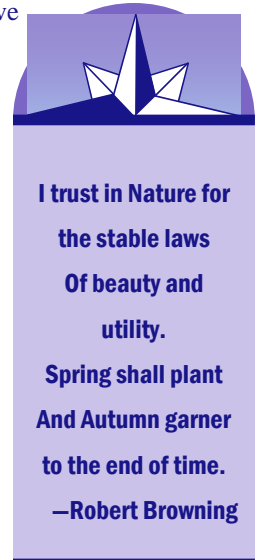
Unit 2, Be Alive, focuses on identifying ways we can cooperate with God in caring for our bodies, both physically and emotionally. Our social responsibility to care for one another in accordance to God's plan underlies the importance of increasing the awareness of the many resources available in our community to those who are mentally unwell.

Unit 5, Be Obedient, focuses on how the dignity of the human person requires the pursuit of the common good and how legitimate authority improves the conditions for human life. By understanding how mental illnesses can have a biological basis, students can begin to see how these illnesses require medical attention.

Unit 8, Be Generous, focuses on the importance of being "pure in heart" so that we are able to love and give generously. By recognizing the way that mental illness can impact on a person's life, students can begin to remove the stigma of seeking assistance and treatment.

What sort of investment was made to bring about this project? What kind of support was in place?

I have submitted several applications for
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Taking Care Of Teen Mental Health At Cardinal Newman: The Peer Mentor Club And iMATTER project, continued

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support and I am grateful and honoured that this initiative was selected to receive funding from many organizations. It was awarded the Hamilton Community Foundation Youth-Led Community Action Project Funding for iMATTER in May 2010, the Michael Carty Award for improving, developing and enhancing aspects of Catholic education that contribute to the whole person for iMATTER in October 2010, and awarded the Board Managing Information for Student Achievement grant for the use of evidence to inform practice and increase student achievement for iMATTER in December 2009. It also received funding for many Peer Mentor initiatives (including iMATTER) through the Ontario Ministry of Education Speak Up Grants in the 2009-2010 and 2008-2009 school years.

The support from the school and board administration has been amazing. Right from the very beginning, my principal **Sara Cannon** and my superintendent **Jackie Bajus** supported the initiative. In fact, it was Ms. Bajus and Mrs. Cannon who suggested that I submit an application for the CASA conference. When I found out that it was accepted, they did not hesitate to ensure that they would be present at the workshop. Understanding the significant role that the Mentors play, they also supported the full participation of four Mentors as facilitators at the conference. It meant so much to me and the Mentors to have them present. My colleague **Halina Saliccioli** has also been instrumental in the planning and implementation of all the Peer Mentor initiatives. My present principal **Michael Gravina** has also been extremely supportive.

What exactly is a Peer Mentor? What is the Peer Mentor Club? What role does the Peer Mentor play in the school?

For the past several years, the role of Peer Mentors at Cardinal Newman Catholic Secondary has certainly evolved into a leadership program for role models in the school. The members identify the needs of the school community, create and implement new initiatives, and continue to improve the club's yearly events. The Newman Peer Mentor Club is a vibrant group of grade 9 to 12 students whose leadership skills and passion for helping others not only nurture a sense of belonging but also promote success among students. The student-designed crest shows their focus on Catholic values, academics and the spirit of helping. Guided by their motto "A good example is worth twice the advice," the members play

an important role in the school. Identified with their Mentor uniform top, the members have recently designed a second uniform item as inspired by their commitment to mental health. The design on the back clearly shows the "I can help!" slogan.

Many of the club's initiatives deal with transition from elementary school to high school. The activities are led by students and facilitated by teachers. Their training includes public-speaking skills, effective communication, leadership and problem solving. The members have presented workshops to other high schools that are interested in organizing a similar club. Newman Mentors have also presented at the board level to administrators and at the Student Success Leader Symposium at the Ministry of Education Conference in 2008. From playing minor roles like "Instant Buddy" for new students who transfer into the school throughout the semester to classroom presentations on study skills, exam preparation and emotional intelligence, the club targets grade 8s and their parents, grade 9s and other students looking for support. Without doubt, the CN Mentors have earned the respect of both staff and students.

What indicators of success have you seen with the project?

The Peer Mentors have certainly appreciated the opportunity to connect with the grade 9s in such a significant way. On a personal level, they have commented on how much more informed they are about mental illnesses and mental health problems. The safeTALK training, the TAMI presentations and the in-house training have equipped them with tools that make them a more supportive and understanding son or daughter, friend, student and more.

The target group, the grade 9s, have commented on the value of the presentations both casually and via the survey. At the beginning of the first lesson, a few students raised the question "Why are we doing this stuff?" One student who was not a Mentor replied "Because it's important to know." This type of peer pressure certainly increases the chances that participants will feel connected to the topic.

Results of the surveys indicate that the great majority of students found significant value in the presentations and that 92 per cent of the participants recommend that iMATTER continue for next year's group of grade 9 students. They felt that dealing with the myths regard-

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Taking Care Of Teen Mental Health At Cardinal Newman: The Peer Mentor Club And iMATTER project, continued

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ing mental health gave them a better understanding of mental illness. Students noted how helpful it was to have peers deliver the sessions. Comments included signs of appreciation and meaningful learning. A comparison between the number of correct responses in the pre-test and post-test also indicates that over 21 per cent of students improved their overall knowledge of mental illness, mental health problems, and resources. This value is even more noteworthy in light of the fact that the post-test occurred two weeks after the presentations. Surprisingly, students still seem unclear as to whether or not pressure to succeed at school triggers a mental illness. Perhaps the statement's wording needs review. Surveys of the TAMI presentation indicated an overwhelming positive response. Students included supportive comments to the speakers and an appreciation for sharing their personal stories.

On a personal note, I found that as opportunities arose to inform other adults of this initiative, in most cases the adults shared how mental illness has touched their lives, whether directly or indirectly. The fact that the adults were so willing to share their experience in the classroom is a hopeful sign that we are truly in the midst of a culture shift to remove stigma. For the students who shared disclosure, they commented on how relieved they felt. For one student whose father had died by suicide last summer, the sessions gave him tools to help deal with his personal experience. He shared insightful comments with his group and he was a great participant. In one session, an educational assistant felt comfortable to share her son's personal experience with mental illness. Students showed support and understanding during her recounting of the difficult yet hopeful journey. Also, several students were either teacher-referred, Mentor-referred or even self-referred to me. In almost all the cases, after further discussion with the student, parent contact was made to ensure a medical referral.

How many Peer Mentors are there at the school? How many were there when the program first started?

While only nine students founded the club seven years ago, it now attracts over 60 dedicated members.

The Peer Mentors have a uniform top. How and when is the uniform used, and why was it important for these

students to have a readily identifiable uniform?

Guided by their motto "A good example is worth twice the advice," the members are role models in the school, easily identified by their two Mentor uniform tops. The most recent ones, designed by the Mentors, was just introduced in September. The Mentors, besides the members of Student Council, are the only students who have acceptable alternate uniform items identifying their club membership. Mentors are encouraged to wear these items as much as possible, and especially on high-profile days like a school Mass or assembly. It is important for the student body to easily recognize these leaders. The Mentors also understand that I am guided by my personal motto: Act as if the whole world is watching. They understand that with or without the shirt, they are seen as leaders and that their words and actions will be judged by others. For this reason, the Mentors respect their uniform items and they work hard to practise integrity.



Marie Volaric and Marco Di Tullio.

What are the overall goals of the Peer Mentor Club?

The Peer Mentor Club is an ideal opportunity to promote leadership in students from all streams. The members identify the needs of the

school community, create and implement new initiatives, and continue to improve the club's yearly events. The Newman Peer Mentor Club is a vibrant group of grade 9 to 12 students whose leadership skills and passion for helping others not only nurture a sense of belonging but also promote success among students. The student-designed crest shows their focus on Catholic values, academics and the spirit of helping. Many of the club's initiatives deal with transition from elementary school to high school. The activities are student led and teacher facilitated. The training includes public-speaking skills, effective communication, leadership and problem solving. The members have presented workshops to other high schools that are interested in organizing a similar club. Newman Mentors have presented at the board level to administrators and at the Student Success Leader Symposium at the Ministry of Education Conference in 2008. We are also honoured to be representing the HWCDSB at the When Faith Meets Pedagogy Con-

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**Autumn, the year's
last, loveliest smile.**

**—William Cullen
Bryant**

Taking Care Of Teen Mental Health At Cardinal Newman: The Peer Mentor Club And iMATTER project, continued

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ference in Toronto in October to present the iMATTER initiative.

The Peer Mentors have earned the respect from both staff and students. Their high profile at school is established and maintained by their very active involvement in other clubs and sports. They participate in video announcements and various assemblies. A display case proudly shows photos and information about their activities. The yearbook and school magazine feature articles written by the Mentors. The school and board websites also feature articles and photos showcasing their events.

Some of the club's initiatives include Anytime Tutoring; Meet, Greet & Eat; Emotional Intelligence: Build Bridges, Not Walls; Top 9 Tips for Grade 9 Success; Welcome Grade 9s—You Are Now One of Us!; CN Mentors Newsletter; Lunch 'n' Learn; Rent-A-Mentor; Use It or Lose It: Making Your Brain Work Harder For You; Exam Prep 101; Instant Buddy Program; and various fundraising events to support charities. They also help with parent-teacher interviews and other school- and faith-based activities, deliver presentations outside of the school community, take part in a yearly retreat and help at parish transition activities.

All in all, each year the Mentors will collectively volunteer thousands of hours to increase student achievement by creating an inclusive and engaging school environment within the context of our faith. We help others, but in the end, we are the ones that gain so much!

What has been the most rewarding part of working with the students involved with the Peer Mentor Club? Unbeknownst to the Peer Mentors, they undergo a transformation over the years of involvement with the club. The reserved and shy become more confident public speakers and the extrovert members learn to gently guide others into an active and meaningful team attitude. I can't tell you how many times graduating Peer Mentors express how much more confident they feel, not only in situations that require public speaking or meeting new people, but also in dealing with negative peer pressure. Their sense of integrity is strengthened and their drive to make a difference becomes more evident. For me, watching this journey from child to adult is certainly the most rewarding.

Secondly, how could I not acknowledge the effect that

the club has on students? There are so many seemingly trivial acts of kindness as when a Mentor guides a grade 9 student on how to open a lock or how to read their timetable. Other more significant acts involve times when a Mentor is another set of eyes and ears caring for students in need. These experiences are also deeply rewarding for me.

What has been your impression of the Mentors?

I really believe that an untapped resource exists among us! It has the potential to inspire, motivate, guide, nurture, lead and move to action. This great resource is students. Teachers, coaches, and staff advisors can easily identify these young leaders in their classrooms and sport fields by their genuine eagerness to help and their strong academic accomplishments. My Peer Mentors are my students and my teachers. They help to shed light to the needs of the student body and they help me understand the most effective ways of reaching out to them.

Is there anything else you would like our readers to know about the Peer Mentor Club and the iMATTER project?

I would urge all schools to consider establishing a Peer Mentor group to address the needs of the students. I would also strongly encourage all educators to become more knowledgeable about mental illness and mental health problems. The only way that we can truly serve the students that we meet every day is we must recognize that many of them are silently suffering with no one to guide them. Suddenly, knowing that four to five students in each classroom may be showing signs of mental illness, assignments and tests take on a different value. Certainly I am not suggesting that we abandon our curriculum and assessment, but just as we would support a student with cancer, we need to show the same sensitivity and respect for those teens dealing with mental illness.

Our next steps will be to create a Mental Awareness Campaign using posters, video announcements, morning prayers, etc. for May, Mental Health Awareness Month.

Presenting at CASA with my colleagues and a small sample of Peer Mentors was certainly one of my career highlights. Networking with other educators and allowing the students to get a glimpse of the adult version of mentors was so valuable to me.

Thank you, Marisa, for your work with the Mentors and sharing this story.



Talking With The Cardinal Newman Peer Mentors: Young Leaders Already Making A Difference

Rather than just share the perspective of the staff member leading the Peer Mentor Club, *Leaders & Learners* is very proud to present the thoughts of four of the Peer Mentors themselves.

Jeffrey Doyle is a 16-year-old grade 12 student from Hamilton. His favourite subject is art and he is also a strong sciences student. He has been involved with the school volleyball team since grade 9.

Daniel Mariella is a 16-year-old grade 11 student. His favourite and strongest subjects are English, the arts and the sciences. He is also involved with Student Council as publicity coordinator, Run 4 Their Lives (whose members support local charity runs), CN Players Drama Club, Stage Crew, Tech Crew, Chaplaincy Team, Mock Trial Team, Culture of Life Team, Athletic Council, CN Concert Band and ultimate Frisbee. His hobbies include swimming, sketching, reading and playing videogames.

Kristie Vucic is a grade 12 student who grew up in Stoney Creek. Her strongest subjects are mathematics and sciences. She has enjoyed hobbies such as soccer, volleyball, running, swimming and piano since she was younger. Aside from her hobbies and school work, she is also a piano teacher at the Conservatory of Musical Studies where she is able to teach others something that she has enjoyed her entire life.

Danielle de Laat is a 17-year-old grade 12 student from Stoney Creek. Her favourite subjects are biology and advanced functions. She is involved with a variety of school sports and clubs including girls varsity field hockey, Chaplaincy Team, Athletic Council, badminton, ultimate Frisbee, the Language Club and “best of all, peer mentoring.” She says that coming to Cardinal Newman is the best decision she has ever made.

Were you in attendance at the 2010 CASA Conference in Quebec City? If so, what did it mean to you to be part of the Cardinal Newman presentation for educational leaders from across the country? What did you hope these administrators and educators would learn from your presentation?

Jeffrey: Yes, I was at the Quebec City conference and I thought it was great that there were so many people so dedicated to teaching other people about mental health. I thought that each presentation was presented well and raised many good points about mental health. It felt good to be part of a conference with so many caring and good people. From our presentation, I hoped that all the educators developed a little empathy for others, especially people coping with mental illness.

Daniel: I attended the 2010 CASA Conference in Quebec City. It was a huge honour to be able to present to educational representatives from all across Canada. It was truly eye-opening and even lots of fun. Through my part of the presentation, I hoped that the representatives would gain a deeper understanding of the stigma surrounding mental illness and how schools can implement student-led programs to help break that stigma.

Kristie: Not only was I lucky enough to attend the 2010 CASA Conference in Quebec City, but I was also lucky enough to be a part of the iMATTER: Taking Care of

Teen Mental Health presentation. I felt honoured being able to listen to such inspiring and valuable presentations, and to have a role in helping spread the word about mental illnesses and how schools can promote mental wellness. I hope that from our presentation, the administrators were able to learn that not just adults can help with the issue of mental illness but students as well.

Danielle: Yes, I attended. It was an honour for me to be invited to meet with so many educational leaders from across the country. As a facilitator of the iMATTER workshop, I appreciated the opportunity to further develop my leadership and communication skills.

In your own words, briefly describe your school for our readers, who may not be familiar with the school or the community it serves.

Jeffrey: Cardinal Newman is a medium-sized high school in Stoney Creek. The school has many great teachers and outgoing students. There are also many clubs and sports to choose for a student looking to get involved.

Daniel: It is a fantastic institution. The
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**Listen! the wind is
rising, and the air is
wild with leaves,
We have had our
summer evenings,
now for October
eves!**

—Humbert Wolfe

Talking With The Cardinal Newman Peer Mentors: Young Leaders Already Making A Difference, continued

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teachers are all very kind and dedicated to helping you succeed. The facility itself is beautiful, and our clubs and sport teams have enjoyed many successes.

Kristie: It is a very reputable high school. Our motto, "To grow is to change," and our namesake, the Blessed Cardinal **John Henry Newman**, play an important role.

Danielle: Cardinal Newman Catholic Secondary School is a school with excellent academics, athletics and clubs/activities. Located in Stoney Creek, Cardinal Newman has recently been ranked number one in Hamilton. With approximately 1,800 students, Cardinal Newman enhances school spirit on a daily basis, bringing about the best of our school community.

Why did you want to join the Peer Mentor Club? How did you become a Peer Mentor?

Jeffrey: My brother originally introduced me to the Peer Mentors and I liked the idea of what they did. I asked Mrs. Mariella if I could join and she said to just come to the meetings. It did not take very long to become a Peer Mentor but it takes a while to become a good one. As Peer Mentors, we receive out-of-school training like TAMI (Talking About Mental Health) and safeTALK. Mostly Mrs. Mariella prepares us in the meetings for anything we were going to do. She focuses on communication skills, problem-solving skills, group management and leadership skills. I think that the only thing you must have to be in the Peer Mentor Club is the desire to help people and everything else will follow that desire.

Daniel: I joined the Peer Mentor Club simply because I have a deep love for helping and teaching students. I joined right up in grade 9 and I was very excited to be involved in such a high-profile group. Personally, I would not even say that the Peer Mentors are a club, but an organization dedicated to increasing the morality and quality of education for students. The selection process for the Peer Mentors is quite simple. If you are very committed, dedicated, diligent and have marks high enough that you can tutor, then filling out the application form for the Peer Mentors is no problem. However, there is on-the-job training that comes with being a Peer Mentor. For every presentation that we do, we receive extensive training in such areas as communication and group management skills.

Kristie: When I entered grade 9 at Cardinal Newman, I



Jeffrey Doyle making Anna Olsen's recipe for s'mores to sell at a Peer Mentor bakesale fundraiser.

never expected to be a part of such a large group and take on so many important initiatives. After my first year at Cardinal Newman, I had realized that in order to truly experience all the aspects of high school I needed to become a part of a club. A friend of mine who was a Peer Mentor at the time suggested that I go to one of the meetings to see what the club was about. After I attended the first meeting, I knew that this was a club I wanted to be a part of so I went to see Mrs. Mariella, the coordinator of this club. To become a Peer Mentor, I had to fill out an application form and get teacher and vice principal approval, have an interview with Mrs. Mariella and maintain my honour roll status in all of my classes. Fortunately I was successful in all of these aspects and was invited to become a part of the Peer Mentor Club. During the year, Mrs. Mariella meets with us individually to discuss our academic goals or any issues we may be having.

Danielle: I wanted to be the change and make a difference in our school. I've always appreciated the times that people assisted me when I needed a hand or when I had a question to be answered, so as a Peer Mentor, I feel like I can return the favour. It gives me such a great sense of pride when I help a student in some way to make their life a little bit easier. I became a Peer Mentor by first filling out an application form. Shortly after, Mrs. Mariella said that she first just needed to

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The leaves fall, the
wind blows, and the
farm country slowly
changes from the
summer cottons into
its winter wools.

—Henry Beston

Talking With The Cardinal Newman Peer Mentors: Young Leaders Already Making A Difference, continued

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see if I met the requirements to be accepted. These requirements include maintaining an honour roll status, having a one-on-one interview and demonstrating a fair amount of leadership skills.

What has been the most rewarding part of your experience as a Peer Mentor? What has been the biggest challenge?

Jeffrey: I think that the most rewarding part of being a Peer Mentor is that you are able to help people learn. The satisfaction that you made a difference is all the reward you need. I think the biggest challenge for me has been to speak clearly and effectively.

Daniel: The most rewarding part has been the opportunity to come to Quebec to participate in the CASA presentation. The biggest challenge I have is participation in meetings. Being so involved in my school, I cannot always make the meetings for the Peer Mentors. However, Mrs. Mariella is very understanding and flexible, and I can always come to her on my lunch to get the information I missed. In fact, she encourages members to be highly involved in the school community and so she is very accommodating if we have to miss a meeting.

Kristie: Since becoming a Peer Mentor, there have been several rewarding parts of my experience. The most rewarding aspect of being a Peer Mentor would be knowing that I have made a huge difference in both the community and in many individuals. When I present the many topics we have prepared, an example being iMATTER, I feel such a great sense of accomplishment to see the difference I am making right before my eyes. By the end of the presentations, I see through facial expressions, body language and student comments that I have challenged their stereotypical views of mental illness or that I have provided guidance or support for the students. Aside from the several rewarding parts of my experience as a Peer Mentor, the one obstacle I have had to learn to overcome is balancing my involvement with the club and community with my school work.

Danielle: Knowing that every day I make a difference by helping students, by demonstrating positive behaviours and by being involved. Personally I am guided by



Nicole Burnison with the Peer Mentor display.

the simple question "Would you want help in the time of need?" I answer yes, and so every day my motivation is to treat others the way I would want to be treated. I know that I am making a difference, even if it is just a simple task to help a grade 9 or to give a hand to Mrs. Mariella for an upcoming presentation. The biggest challenge for myself has been balancing my academics and extracurricular activities on a daily basis. Maintaining honour roll status is both a challenge and an achievement. In fact,

being a Peer Mentor inspires me to feel even more dedicated to my studies.

What has been the most important thing you have learned or experienced in your time as Peer Mentor?

Jeffrey: Leadership skills. It's great to be able to stand in front of a class and present ideas and lessons. It really helps in school presentations and builds your self-confidence too!

Daniel: My responsibilities as a leader and role model in the school. I have also learned about the importance of educating others in the area of mental health. Whenever I wear the Peer Mentor sweater and even sometimes when I am not, I am recognized as belonging to this esteemed group. I need to be constantly setting an example of how a Catholic student should act at all times. I need to be a leader not just inside of school, but outside of school so that people can see how great students from Cardinal Newman are. The lessons I learned from mental health are also incredibly important to me. They have not only broken the stigma that I once had, but I know how to teach others how to remove theirs.

Kristie: It only takes a few seconds of your time to change someone's life. Before joining, I never knew how big of a difference a single hello to someone in the hallways could make.

Danielle: I have learned that time management is key for success. One of the goals of being a Peer Mentor is to demonstrate positive and effective strategies for success. As a Mentor, we deliver presentations on effective study skills,

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Autumn wins you
best by this
its mute appeal
to sympathy for
its decay.

—Robert Browning

Talking With The Cardinal Newman Peer Mentors: Young Leaders Already Making A Difference, continued

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mental wellness, emotional intelligence and on how to be successful in high school. If I am going to be standing at the front of a class making these presentations, then I have to also practise what I preach. The information we give at the presentations has really helped me too!

What advice can you offer to educators and administrators across Canada who may be interested in developing something like the Peer Mentor Club in their own schools?

Jeffrey: The first thing you will need is an amazing teacher that will devote a lot of their time to the running and planning of the club. After that, there are students in the school who will have leadership skills and caring hearts. They will come to that teacher just attracted by the idea of this club. The club may start off small but eventually it will grow in numbers and the club will be able to do more to help the school. The hardest thing is probably getting the club started and thinking of what the club can do.

Daniel: Two very important things are needed. The first is a very hard-working teacher that is willing to dedicate hours and hours to prepare presentations and lessons for the Peer Mentors. The second thing you will need are students—not just any students, but diligent, committed and caring students who will be able to be leaders in their school and in their community.

Kristie: Remember that students are an incredibly large resource and that they will be able to reach other students more directly.

Danielle: I would encourage educators and teachers across Canada because a club for peer mentoring can change the school community in an instant. I say this because the Peer Mentor Club at Cardinal Newman has



At the Quebec CASA Conference in July 2010.

Front row, left to right: superintendent **Jackie Bajus**, **Marisa Mariella**, student success teacher **Halina Salciccioli**, principal **Sara Cannon**.
Back row, left to right: Peer Mentors **Alessandra Mariella**, **Daniel Mariella**, **Kristie Vucic**, **Danielle deLaat**, **Jeffrey Doyle**.

allowed the transition for grade 9s into high school to be much smoother. The Peer Mentor Club also enhances leadership skills among its members and it performs numerous presentations to develop the students' ability to become more successful.

What advice can you offer to students who may be interested in developing something like the Peer Mentor Club in their own schools?

Jeffrey: First there must be a teacher willing and then the club can start right there. Advertise the club on the announcement and talk to other people about the club and students will be attracted to it.

Kristie: Remember that this club is not something that will come together overnight. It takes a lot of preparation and planning to get everything organized. Have a few students in charge of the entire club while the other students do more of the presentations. If the tasks are divided, it becomes easier to manage the entire club.

Danielle: I encourage students to take the initiative to make a club like the Peer Mentors in their school because then they are able to join and enhance their leadership skills as well. They would also be making a difference in their school community, one student at a time. The members can brainstorm a new idea to make their school a better place and to develop the skills of all students within their community.

Thank you, each one of you, for being so generous with your time and for sharing your valuable insight into the experiences of Peer Mentors at Cardinal Newman.

Danielle: I would like to thank the organizing committee for allowing us the opportunity to participate in the 2010 CASA Conference. It was a life-changing experience and I am extremely grateful for being a part of it.



Autumn's the
mellow time.

—Robert Browning

CASA PEOPLE: Faces In The Crowd



Laura Poloz
Alberta

Laura became the superintendent for the High Prairie School Division in 2008. She first came to High Prairie as a student when her mother began teaching as the high school French teacher. Laura received her B. Ed. from the University of Calgary, then began teaching in Hines Creek and then in Paddle Prairie for Fairview College. Four years later she returned to her hometown as an elementary phys. ed. teacher. In 1997, she received her Master's in Educational Leadership. From 1997-2002, she was a junior high vice principal and principal. She became assistant superintendent of HR in 2002.

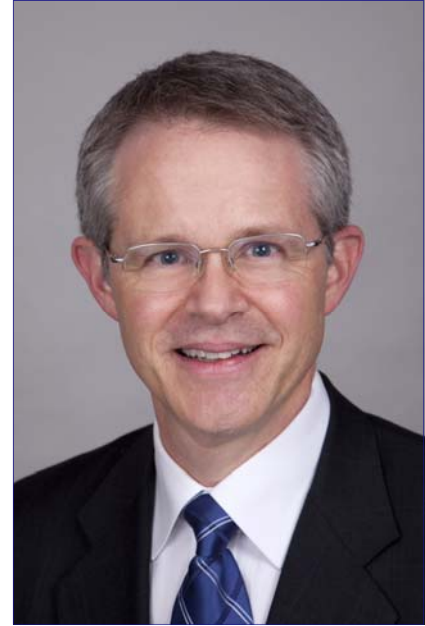
Laura lives on a farm with her husband and two teenaged children. She is very involved in the local dance club, gymnastics club and the community association. She is an avid fan of the arts, and also enjoys golfing, gardening, curling and reading.



Jo Anne Payne
Ontario

Jo Anne is the senior administrator of Educational Services at the Limestone District School Board in Kingston. She coordinates the clinical and counselling staff and the board's multidisciplinary Behaviour Action Team. With LDSB since 1991, Jo Anne was previously with the Frontenac County Board of Education.

She has received a provincial crime prevention award and national recognition in the area of safe schools, the City of Kingston Child Benefit Award and an Outstanding Service Award from FCBE. She has presented at many conferences, including CASA's 2010 conference where she led a workshop on developing a school board and community agency threat assessment team. Jo Anne has extensive training and experience in child crisis counselling. She is also the author of many publications and documents on the topic.



John Malloy
Ontario

John is the director of education for the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. He has worked in many school districts, including Toronto, Durham and York Region, and has served as a teacher, guidance counsellor, vice principal, principal and superintendent. As superintendent, he served elementary and secondary schools, and was involved in staff development, student success, leadership development, labour relations and compensatory education. He was also seconded for three years to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education where he taught in the pre-service teacher education program.

As director of education, John carries out the board's strategic direction, makes sure internal and external communications are effective, and builds relationships with public and private sector industries, organizations and other academic institutions.

CONTACT CASA:

1123 Glenashton Drive
Oakville, ON
L6H 5M1
Canada

T: (905) 845-2345
F: (905) 845-2044
frank_kelly@opsoa.org

www.casa-acas.ca

Editor: Tara Lee Wittchen
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Our Mission:

CASA will advance quality public education and excellence in system level leadership through advocacy and national collaboration.



Our Beliefs:

CASA believes that:

- Cultural diversity is a unique strength that enriches our nation.
- Communication and collaboration with parents and other partners is integral to successful student learning.
- Quality public education provides the best opportunity for a nation to enhance the lives of all its citizens.
- Effective system, provincial and national level leadership enables and supports excellence in teaching and learning.
- A comprehensive education, equitable and accessible to all, is the key to meeting the diverse needs and securing a successful future for our youth.

Specific strategies to advance the mission:

- Establish position papers on specific topics as they relate to the beliefs and interests of the association.
- Recruit new people.
- Establish a national representation.
- Establish a three-tier public relations and publications strategy.
- Establish a funding team to create an operating budget.

How To Put Your School Division In The Spotlight: Contribute To *Leaders & Learners*

Just as the front page of this newsletter states, *Leaders & Learners* is the voice of the Canadian Association of School Administrators. We want to hear your voice. Consider putting forth your ideas, articles and photos for future editions.

Maybe there is a success story happening in your neck of the woods and you want to share it. Perhaps there is an issue in education you would like to see discussed by a cross-country panel. You may want to share your reaction to what a panelist said at a recent CASA conference, at your provincial affiliate's meeting or at other education events. *Leaders & Learners* would like to hear about your ideas.

You don't have to worry about being a professional wordsmith to contribute. Your newsletter editor can help you. Your rough ideas can be written into full-length articles for you, and your submitted articles and photographs can be professionally edited.

Regular readers of *Leaders & Learners* know that in most issues we run a feature called "Faces In The Crowd."

It is a section in the newsletter set aside to allow our members to get to know one another a little better. This isn't always easy when CASA members are spread out across such a huge but sparsely populated country with only a few opportunities each year to meet in person. We hope that this feature helps to bridge the distances between us.

Do you know a CASA member who deserves to be in the spotlight? Is there a colleague that you would like everyone to meet? Maybe you'd even like to share your own story in a future "Faces In The Crowd." Don't be bashful! Please get in touch and share the news about your colleagues or yourself.

Regular editions of the newsletter come out six times a year, with a special double issue following the annual summer leadership academy. Give yourself at least six to eight weeks lead time if your idea is at all time sensitive.

If you have story ideas, questions, concerns or comments, please contact the editor, **Tara Lee Wittchen**, via email at tarawittchen@eastlink.ca.