

SHSM Student Leaders



Students as leaders

Students' grades	11 and 12
School board	Simcoe County District School Board
Staff contact	Dawn Franks, dfranks@scdsb.on.ca
Initiative period	January to June 2023
Caring adults involved	Guidance Counsellor, Well-Being Facilitator, Child and Youth Worker

OVERVIEW

A cohort of grade 11 and 12 secondary students in the Health and Wellness Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program participated as learners in the [MH LIT: Student Mental Health in Action](#) lessons. These lessons were delivered to the group by the guidance lead. Following the learning, the board's well-being facilitator (WBF) met with the group to gather feedback and consult students on how to share this learning with the grade 7 and 8 students. Students decided they wanted to be involved in bringing the content to younger students and that they would be responsible for delivering the lessons to them, initiating this project. SHSM students decided which modules they wanted to deliver. They collaborated with their peers to adjust the content and prepared to teach it to younger students.

The WBF and guidance teacher supported students in carrying out these lessons for younger students. The WBF arranged a schedule with two of the partner elementary schools and the guidance lead arranged transportation. The SHSM students went to each of the grade 7 and 8 classes and shared the MH LIT lessons. The WBF and guidance teacher were available to support students, as they needed, but largely remained in the background as the SHSM students managed the class and delivered the content.

As a result of the cross-panel collaboration, the guidance leads articulated that there was increased support for students in their transition from grade 8 to grade 9. Elementary students were surveyed to see the impact and it was noted that there were great gains in mental health literacy. SHSM students felt empowered and were then invited to participate as leaders at the board's "Choose Your Own Well-Being Adventure Conference."

As this project was initiated by students, and students carried out all phases of the project, engaging with both the process and outcomes, students were engaged as leaders.





STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

“Connecting with the fellow grade 7-8 students was my favourite part of this project. With mental health often being a difficult and touchy topic to discuss, it was great knowing that our school, teachers, staff, and our board were working together to break down the stigma associated with mental health and making the space a far more comfortable, safe, and open-minded environment. If I had to change one thing, I would say to start this conversation and project for earlier grades, granted that the materials provided are age appropriate. It was great knowing we had impacted and supported students who were in grades 7-8 but as we further progress in this project, it would be great to see more grades and more students of different age ranges being involved into this discussion.

The adults throughout the entire experience truly emphasized the importance of this project being student-led. Students prepared the lessons, provided feedback, and facilitated the lessons. The adults were there to provide any additional information and support but for the most part, it was all student-based and led, which isn't something you truly see a lot especially when it comes to supporting fellow students, making an impact, and discussing topics that may be hard to discuss with students. Having it focused on being student-led allows for us to feel heard. I also want to emphasize that the adults didn't just ask for our feedback but also implemented the feedback back into the project—for example, when students were going through the material and being trained, our feedback was crucial on what we felt was appropriate to keep in and what not to keep in, and the adults truly listened to us.

This experience has allowed me to gain a few different skills and knowledge such as improving my presentation skills and a broader understanding of mental health. Mental health has always been a passion of mine and it was wonderful knowing I made an impact and was able to be a part of putting this passion of mine from words into practice.” – Grade 12 Student Trustee

STAFF PERSPECTIVE

“Authentic student engagement from the elementary learners was a highlight of the program. The questions asked and the discussion with their secondary school peers was much deeper than expected and pleasantly surprising. Logistics, like transportation and scheduling, required some extra effort from our team to coordinate. During the delivery of MH LIT lessons to the SHSM cohort, the team allocated extra time to explore why the students felt this particular learning experience was crucial for their younger counterparts. This deliberate effort contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the students' perspectives and strengthened the overall engagement process.” – Well-Being Facilitator

