

NEWS RELEASE

Valley students smash pumpkins for a strong cause

For immediate release

2 November 2018

COMOX VALLEY, B.C. – Secondary students at G.P. Vanier are raising awareness on a little-known organization in the Comox Valley that has been steadily growing in notoriety over the past three years.

The organization is called as Jack Dot Org (www.jack.org), Canada's only charity that trains and empowers youth and young adults to revolutionize mental health. Through key activities including *Jack Talks*, *Jack Chapters*, and *Jack Summits* young leaders are educated on how to identify and tackle barriers to positive mental health in their communities.

In the Comox Valley community, the *Jack Chapter* resides at Vanier Secondary and was brought into the school by a former student who was keenly interested in promoting support strategies for mental health. Jack.org is now in its third year at Vanier, and school counsellor Heather Riedle has been overseeing her young leaders apply the principles of the program to heighten awareness.

“We have had some really great students to take on the position as leaders and encourage the school to remove the stigma around mental health,” explained Riedle. “That’s our number one message.”

This school year, the Jack Chapter leaders at Vanier include Madison (Maddy) Judson, Nicolette Vinnedge and Kristin Johnson who have picked up the torch from their predecessors. Building on the positive culture created at their school, each year student leaders organize activities to help schoolmates feel included, welcomed and more at ease rather than feel alone and isolated.

Riedle explains the Jack Chapter leaders’ role is not in a counselling capacity but rather in an encouragement role. Students are trained to promote easier ways to seek resources for mental health while also helping to break down barriers of the “us versus them” stigma attached to someone who may be suffering.

Friday 2 November, the girls hosted a very successful event, *Smash the Stigma* involving the annihilation of several pumpkins after the Halloween festivities came to a close. Several students participating by writing a word or thought regarding mental health onto a pumpkin and then thrusting it into the ground until it broke apart into several pieces. Students got into the action cheering one another on and feeling fulfilled by the symbolic gesture the event created.

All the pumpkin remains will be donated to composting efforts in the Comox Valley.





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Check out the Jack Chapter in action on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/jrqQCTcvHxk>

For more information about Jack.org visit www.jack.org or visit the Vanier Chapter on Facebook @jack.orggpvanier

IMAGE: *Smash the Stigma*, a mental health awareness activity hosted by the Jack.org G.P. Vanier Chapter involving a smash up of pumpkins.