

## Mental Health Campaign Brings Awareness



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**“It makes me proud to work for an organization which sees mental health as important enough to make it a priority,” – Dan Connop**

During Mental Health Awareness Week in May, BCAA launched its first employee mental health awareness campaign. The 3-month campaign was a highly visible way for BCAA to demonstrate its commitment to its team’s mental health and to supporting employees who might experience challenges with mental illnesses. Its first goal was to get people talking.

A new, customized wellness area on BCAA’s employee intranet was launched as a central hub containing information and real-life stories. One very successful element of the website has proved to be an online discussion area where numerous employees have chosen to share personal challenges they’ve set themselves to work on their mental wellness and work/life balance – along with tips and ideas.

The campaign kicked off with a “Mental Health in the Workplace” presentation that was available for all employees to attend, and was mandatory for all BCAA leaders as well. This presentation included a video featuring BCAA employees talking about the steps they took to support their mental health and stay balanced.

Through a major storytelling initiative, several employees shared their mental health experiences in their own words in a series of intranet home-page feature stories. Their personal accounts of journeys through challenges including anxiety, depression and grief highlighted uplifting recovery stories and the importance of speaking out and seeking help – and attracted high levels of engagement with hundreds of ‘likes’ and comments posted by colleagues.

Employees were also invited to special events focused on aspects of mental health including webinars, lunch and learns and workshops.

Some of the main messages BCAA conveyed included:

1. **You're not alone.** There is support for employees experiencing mental health challenges, and for managers to support their employees.
2. **You can ask for help.** If an employee, or someone they know, is struggling – there are people ready to support them.
3. **It's not who you are; it's what you have.** Grounding it back to this fact helps to address any misplaced notions of stigma or discrimination.

Service Location Manager, Dan Connop, was one employee who shared his personal story on the organization's intranet. Dan talked about experiencing depression and anxiety, and how he identified it, sought help, and what he does to manage his symptoms. One excerpt from his powerful story included:

*"The most unexpected part of my experience has been discovering the amount of support and resources available,"*

After the story was posted, more than fifty colleagues got in touch with Dan to thank him for sharing his perspectives, and some asked to chat more about his experience. *"If you think that mental health isn't prevalent in your workplace, try having one person speak about their experiences. The number of people who will reach out afterwards, with their own stories, is an indication of how prevalent mental health is for Canadians,"* says Dan.

Mental health affects 1 out of every 5 Canadians, according to the Mental Health Commission. Mental health related issues is also the number one cause for leaves across Canada.

*"It makes me proud to work for an organization which sees mental health as important enough to make it a priority,"* he added.

While the initial campaign is wrapped up, the wellness website and resources are permanent, and BCAA continues to make mental health a focus. It offers webinars and lunch & learns on topics such as 'happiness', 'gratitude' and 'the impact of sleep on mental health'. It's increasing the emphasis on wellness in its onboarding program and finding more opportunities to raise awareness of resources available to support mental health. The campaign has started or formalized many grass-root wellness initiatives across the organization like team 'wellness walks', which BCAA is happy to support and share as part of its ongoing commitment to supporting its employees' mental health.