

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

What do a semicolon tattoo, the phrase “To Write Love on Her Arms” and cycling all have in common? They are all social media movements dedicated to inspire and encourage discussion about mental illness, recovery and hope. At first glance, it is unclear how these three things connect to mental illness. The fact is, not many of us will take the time to understand these social media movements until we know *why* they matter.

In any given year, one in five people in Canada will experience a mental health problem or illness, with a cost to the economy in excess of \$50 billion. Only one in three people who experience a mental health problem will seek out and receive treatment. Of the approximately 4,000 Canadians who die every year as a result of suicide, many were confronting a mental health problem or illness.

I urge you to take a moment to read some of the personal stories being shared in connection with these movements. The stories of struggle, recovery and hope are uniting voices that often go unheard; messages like there’s no health without mental health and you are not alone resonate powerfully. Leveraging the conversation about reducing the stigma of mental illness can be simple yet inspiring. Project Semi-Colon uses a simple semicolon symbol to carry a powerful message – their website says that a semicolon is used when an author could’ve chosen to end their sentence, but chose not to. The author is you and the sentence is your life.

September 10th is World Suicide Prevention Day, an annual event to reduce stigma and promote dialogue. This year’s theme is Preventing Suicide: Reaching Out and Saving Lives. It serves as a call to action to both individuals and organizations. We all have a role to play in preventing suicide by offering support; we can make a difference and help save lives.

If you or someone you care about is in crisis, help is available, call 1-888-353-2273 (1-888-353-CARE) or visit the following websites for information: <http://www.crisiscentre.bc.ca> and <http://youthinbc.com>.

To learn more about these social media movements and to read personal stories that inspire hope visit <http://www.projectsemicolon.org/>, <https://twloha.com/> and <http://ridedonthide.com/bc/>