

Student shaves stigma from mental illness

By Brice Roy
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Last Friday (April 27) Owen Hanmer finally cut his long curly locks.

Hanmer decided to finally make the hairstyle change in support of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Foundation with a fundraiser he called Shave the Mane.

The 16-year-old student at MacLachlan College has had long hair since Grade 3, but it had never been this long.

"I've only cut it short once since then. It's going to be quite a change. I've never had it this long either because I've been growing it for the event," said Hanmer.

Diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Hanmer knows what is like to be affected by mental illness.

"I myself have OCD, so it is not uncommon to me," said Hanmer.

"However, I was only recently exposed to the stigma that surrounds mental illness and how people look down on others who suffer from (mental illness)."

Recently, Hanmer's parents shared a story that struck a nerve with him.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

LOST LOCKS: MacLachlan College student Owen Hanmer cut his hair last Friday in Shave the Maine, raising \$5,000 in support of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Foundation.

"My parents said a lot of people told them not to get me help because I didn't need it. They weren't accepting mental illness as an actual problem," said Hanmer.

"They were saying it was something I needed to get over myself, when really it is actually physical changes in the brain, not something that just changes

by willpower." Inspired to combat this stigma, Hanmer just needed a means to do it.

"My teacher, Miss Jennifer Syrota, suggested the idea of cutting my hair to raise awareness. I thought it was a great idea so I went along with it."

With the support of his teachers and

principal, Hanmer made speeches at several assemblies and wrote a letter that every student took home, hoping to get his message across.

"I'm hoping that they'll understand that mental illness isn't something to look down on and it's not easy to deal with alone. People should be able to reach out for help when they need it

and others should be willing to help. Sometimes everyone needs a little bit of help."

The students' response to the cause very quickly surpassed the \$2,000 goal Hanmer set for the project.

"The school raised about \$1,500 and online we raised about \$1,600. So far the total is about \$3,100," said Hanmer.

"Donations are still coming in so if people are still willing to donate then there is no reason to close it."

In addition to the funds raised already, Hanmer learned the community still had more to give.

"We were informed of an anonymous donor who was willing to pay the difference between our total and \$5,000, which is way above our original goal and that's fantastic," said Hanmer.

Aside from much shorter hair, the experience has left Hanmer determined to continue to help.

"I'm definitely going to jump on any opportunity that I think of. If I come up with another idea then I'll try again. The response was great. People want change and whatever way will motivate them, we're going to try it."

To donate to Hanmer's cause, visit www.supportcamh.ca/shavethemane.

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