

Kanata EMC

Disney star performs at Earl of March, Event to kick off high school's mental health week

Posted May 10, 2012 By Brier Dodge

EMC news - High school students were treated to dynamic performances from Disney star Jasmine Richards, rapper Errol Lee and his break dancers as part of an anti-bullying presentation to kick off Mental Health Week at Earl of March Secondary School on Monday, May 7.

A.Y. Jackson students also attended the event in the school auditorium, which included speeches from high school students who were anti-bullying advocates and Olympic medalist Elizabeth Manley.

Richards, who is best known for her roles in Camp Rock and Naturally Sadie, wrote a song called "You Have the Power," which promotes anti-bullying.

She returned to her high school, Iroquois Ridge in Oakville, to produce the video with students who currently attend the school.

They travelled with Richards to Ottawa to introduce the video and talk about the work that they've done in their school community to promote anti-bullying as part of the Safe Schools Action team. They are currently producing an educational resource package.

After Richards performed the song, Mike Baine of the Youth Services Bureau (YSB) spoke to the students, encouraging them to download the song.

Funds raised from the song's download that day, May 7, went directly to the Ottawa YSB.

The YSB is trying to increase funding to add additional operating hours for its free walk-in mental health clinic for youth 12 to 20 years old.

"Thank you for honouring Jamie's memory with that beautiful song," Baine said, referring to Kanata South Coun. Allan Hubley's son and a former A.Y. Jackson Secondary School student, whose image appears in the music video.

Elizabeth Manley, an Olympic medalist, also spoke to the students about her own battles with depression.

At 16, she had lost all of her hair from the stress and pressure of being a competitive figure skater and growing up in a family that had to make many financial sacrifices for her to do so.

"I wore the same clothes every day," she told students. "I physically started to show signs of depression, I felt really alone."

She eventually quit skating, not knowing who to turn to or where to go. Stigmatized mental illnesses often involved costly treatment that wasn't accessible, or much-known about.

She overcame her mental illness to go on to win a silver medal in figure skating.

"It's not a skating medal, it's a medal that I can overcome," she said. "You can achieve. You can learn to live your life fulfilled."

Canterbury High School Grade 11 student Hannah Brunson also spoke to students about her own challenges dealing with depression.

"Hi, I'm Hannah. I'm five foot two, just learned to drive, and I have a mental illness," she said.

"I'm one of the one in five who used to lie," said the bubbly teenager, who also talked about her love for drama and singing. "It was the anti-Hannah walking around like a zombie."

Her mother was concerned, and after the suicide of Daron Richardson, daughter of Ottawa Senators assistant coach Luke Richardson, she sat her daughter down and said she thought she may be depressed. She was concerned with Brunson's lack of interest in activities and low energy.

"I started to realize that I wanted people to know because if I didn't know I had depression, how were they

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Brier Dodge, Metroland

Disney star Jasmine Richards was at Earl of March Secondary School on May 7 to perform her single 'You Have the Power' to Earl of March and AY Jackson students. Richards is known for her roles in Camp Rock and Naturally Sadie.

supposed to?" she told students. "Then I kind of started to own it."

Since she was diagnosed with depression, Brunsdon has put on a play she wrote as a fundraiser, and spoke out about recognizing the signs of depression.

"A year ago, I was lying in my bed, and this year I'm a teen mental health activist," she said. "So answer the question honestly when someone asks you how you are today."

Brunsdon and Manley were just two of the guests at the event, also joined by police Chief Charles Bordeleau, Mayor Jim Watson and Hubley.

The performance closed with songs and dance from Toronto's Errol Lee, who had the students up, singing and dancing throughout the auditorium.

"We're celebrating this community for standing up and making a difference," he said.

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