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YOUR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE:

A Conversation with Kelly Gallant



Kelly Gallant is a Career Specialist at the University of Calgary, where she also engages with student services and project management focused on mental health first aid certification. She sees career development as a misunderstood area, and believes it is deeply tied to mental health and wellness: **“there’s a lot of learning about yourself in times of transition.”** Her focus, consequently, is on helping students to develop self-knowledge and sustainable mental wellness practices in their career development journeys.

Kelly’s work in the criminal justice system and passion for public health and safety led her to work in mental health. Working with youth and families, she began a job search strategies program to support youth skills development. “I learned a lot from the data,” she says. “When youth transitioned into employment, they were struggling. So I wondered what would help youth manage their careers. It’s one thing to learn how to do a resume, but that’s only the first step.” **She wanted to equip youth for long-term success and sustainable self-care practices.** These experiences laid the foundation for her further education and work in career development.

Working with students in the Faculty of Social Work, she finds that mental health is particularly important. “I proposed we should work around decreasing the stigma around mental health, increase students’ helping skills, and filling gaps in the curriculum. Mental health is not being spoken about for themselves.”

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“People are starting to see that career health is affiliated with mental health,” she explains. “The holistic view is starting to come through.” Promoting awareness of this connection is a crucial goal of much of her work.

Kelly wants to empower students with progressive career education. “You open your eyes to opportunities when someone sees your strengths,” she tells me. Educating students about diverse career options gives them control over the period of transition between school and work, and develops long-lasting skills.

While stigma still exists, she sees it as being more impactful on students pursuing “helping” professions, such as social work.

“If we continue to progress in reducing the stigma and offering programs for awareness, we could really champion wellness for all students.” She wants to center emotional intelligence in wellness initiatives, focusing on empathy and community.

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In her time at the University of Calgary, and in her own work, Kelly has seen ongoing change surrounding discussions of mental health. For instance, the development of a definitive mental health strategy was foundational for research-based initiatives across campus.

Kelly views mental wellness as a continuum for individuals and communities. **“To be mentally well, it means I’m going to address my thoughts, challenge my thoughts, learn about growth,”** she says, envisioning all students having access to safe ways to learn and practice these skills.

Removing shame from mental health difficulty, she wants to promote self-awareness as crucial to long-term wellness.

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This has been part of the Healthy Campus Alberta Project, "Your Community of Practice." To read more conversations with members of the community of practice, visit healthycampusalberta.ca/about-us/our-community.

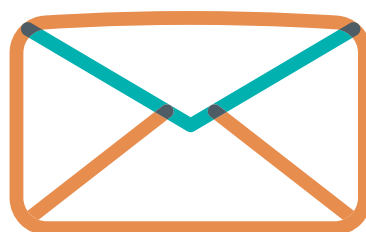
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