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Canadian Mental  
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*Mental health for all*

**YOUR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE:**

# A Conversation with Janis Stolson



As the Brooks Campus Coordinator for Medicine Hat College, Janis Stolson works with the Students' Association to build community among students. Although she's been in her role on campus for only a year, her connection to the Brooks community goes back twenty-three years.

Her campus role is a second career; she worked in a bank for fifteen years before taking time off to complete training as a Health and Life Coach. Other training experiences focused on the maintenance of healthy boundaries between work and relationships. The role on Brooks campus was a fit for her multifaceted array of skills.

Working on a smaller campus of only 300 students, Janis finds her office has become a space for face-to-face student engagement. "I'm going through about three pots of coffee between 9AM and 1PM," she jokes. **It's a safe and nourishing environment for students;** they can practice their English, seek support surrounding time management and burnout, or simply stop in for a brief snack to keep themselves fueled for the day.

"I work between their breaks. I try to engage with them, where they're at, and if they're struggling," Janis explains. When she's not directly communicating with students, she works on coordinating events around mental health.

She envisions these initiatives as taking proactive, preventative approaches to the regular stresses of campus life. "We're actively participating and understanding that stress is there, and taking steps to manage it."

**"...I try to engage with them, where they're at, and if they're struggling."**

Most recently, she worked on facilitating meditation sessions. Directly responding to student requests, the sessions provided a calm, comfortable space responding to student needs. Student-led initiatives are common on the Brooks campus, which provides a unique opportunity for **students to form their own projects or request mental health initiatives** that serve their specific needs.

Students have led activities such as lunchtime dance classes on campus, bringing the community together around shared interests. “We have the ability to connect on a deeper level with the instructors, counsellors, the library.” She explains that this includes the student body: **“You get to know these people, about their lives, and really connect that way.”**

Sharing the unique perspective of someone with deep family ties in the community, she tells me, “We’re really culturally diverse. The motto for Brooks is ‘The City of 100 Hellos.’” One of her primary roles on campus and in the community is to connect students to this larger community.

“It’s really important for the campus but also for the community that we find a way to engage people so they do find a connection and want to stay here.”

**“We’re actively participating and understanding that stress is there, and taking steps to manage it.”**

She specifically tries to engage students who are balancing work and school, planning activities that are accessible for working students to participate in. Events like an annual Christmas parade connect the campus, which is located on the outskirts of Brooks, to the larger community.

“We had students come and participate and give out candy. We have quite a few international students and it was their first parade, so they were FaceTiming family while they were doing it. It’s really exciting to have them take part and view the community in a different way,” she recounted.

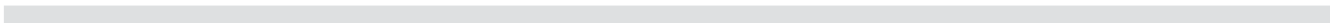
Building resilient students and campuses strengthens the larger community, Janis suggests, and much of her work involves building connections between the campus and the city to bolster overall wellness. Supportive spaces and student-led campus initiatives are key to this process.

**Building  
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Connecting with the main Medicine Hat College campus and Healthy Campus Alberta as a whole, Janis wants to provide students with all available tools to support their educational journeys. The result is a student community supported by initiatives across the province, which, in turn, helps create connection between campus community, and Brooks more generally.

She defines a community of wellness as “a welcoming, open community, where people can speak openly and discuss concerns with no judgement.” Through her work with students, **these safe spaces are built and sustained not only on campus, but for the benefit of the community at large.**

**"A community of wellness is a welcoming, open community... without judgement."**

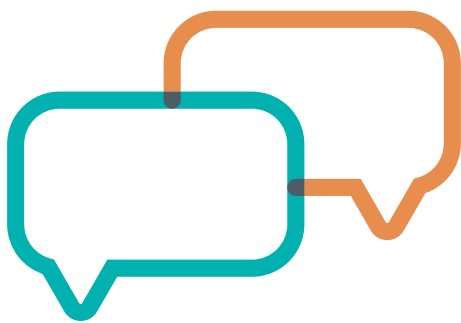


*This has been part of the Healthy Campus Alberta Project, "Your Community of Practice." To read more conversations with members of the community of practice, visit [healthycampusalberta.ca/about-us/our-community](https://healthycampusalberta.ca/about-us/our-community).*

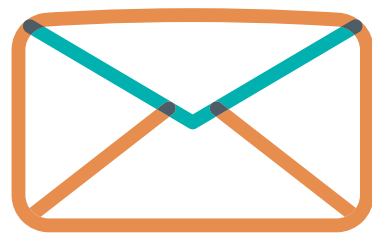
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