

THE TOP SEVEN YOUTH DISORDERS

About one in five children and adolescents suffers from a mental, emotional or behavioural disorder that is severe enough to seriously affect the young person's daily functioning at home, school or within the community.

Here are the most common conditions:

Anxiety disorders are the most frequently occurring mental health problem, affecting about 6.5 per cent of young people.

Everyone feels anxious from time to time but a disorder can occur when anxiety doesn't go away, causes distress, is out of proportion, or interferes with daily living.

There are various conditions, including separation anxiety disorder, social phobia and panic disorder.

Depression affects about five per cent of young people in

Canada. While being sad occasionally is a normal part of life, it is diagnosed when it persists, interferes with a person's ability to function and leads to thoughts of death or suicide.

Conduct disorder affects between three and five per cent of children and adolescents.

A child with conduct disorder has both emotional and behavioural problems and will often take dangerous risks.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder occurs in three to four per cent of children and youth. It typically begins before age seven and can continue into adulthood.

Many children are impulsive, impulsive and hyperactive, and they have trouble in school and interacting with their peers.

Eating disorders are most common among teenage girls. Anorexia affects about one per cent of adolescent girls and bulimia about three per cent of girls, along with a much smaller number of boys.

Boys with eating disorders are far less likely to die with low self-esteem.

Subsidiary affects about 1 per cent of children but it can be very disabling. Young people with schizophrenia find it hard to control the way they think and act.

Bipolar disorder typically develops in late adolescence or early adulthood and even in children less than 10 per cent.

While everyone goes through ups and downs of emotion, bipolar disorder causes dramatic mood swings, often for prolonged periods.

Source: Children's Mental Health Ontario



Bronwyn Loucks, who once suffered from depression and anxiety, is now 20 and recovered. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE GLOBE AND MAIL

# 'Kids get better'

Many people believe mental-health problems are life-long afflictions. Experts beg to differ, saying the vast majority of patients recover

BY ANDRÉ PICARD

Near the end of primary school, Bronwyn Loucks began to suffer from increasingly frequent and severe bouts of sadness and worry. "Sometimes my heart would be racing so fast. I felt like I was going to pass out," she says. "Other times, I would come home from school and just collapse in a heap."

In junior high, the problems grew worse and Ms. Loucks developed an eating disorder, bulimia, in addition to anxiety disorder and depression. "I really felt like I was going to die but I felt like I deserved to die."

Then one day, she's not sure why, the teenager from Chesley, a small Ontario town south of Owen Sound, reached out. She called the Kids Help Phone, and was urged to confide in a trusted adult and get help.

At a loss about how to express the depth of her despair, she wrote a long letter and handed it to her mother. Before Mom had even finished reading it, the two were on their way to the local emergency room.

Ms. Loucks saw a battery of doctors, from a pediatrician through to a psychiatrist, and ended up in a residential treatment program run by Keystone Child, Youth and Family Services in Owen Sound.

Today, at 20, Ms. Loucks is a third-

versity in Kingston, Ont. She has not only recovered from mental illness, but is thriving.

Her story, says Dr. Stanley Kutcher, the Sun Life Financial chair in adolescent mental health at Dalhousie University, illustrates a very important point: "Kids get better."

While mental-health problems are often seen as life-long affliction, the vast majority of people who get sick from mental illness, like those with physical illnesses, recover.

"Of course, illnesses of the brain, like illnesses of the body, come in different varieties and different severities," Dr. Kutcher says, "but with the treatments we have and the knowledge we have, we can do quite a bit these days."

The keys are early intervention and good follow-up, he says. Unfortunately, most people only seek help when crisis strikes.

About 22 per cent of all mental illnesses have their onset in youth, before the age of 25, with a peak in the volatile adolescent years.

One in five Canadians will suffer from a bout of diagnosable mental illness, with depression and anxiety being the most common.

Getting better usually requires a combination of factors.

Ms. Loucks underwent traditional treatments like prescription anti-de-

pression. But an essential element in her healing was becoming an active volunteer.

After treatment at Keystone, Ms. Loucks was invited to join the group's board to provide an all-important patient perspective. She also joined The New Mentality, a youth group that lobbies for better mental health treatments and to combat stigma. She is also on the youth advisory committee of Children's Mental Health Ontario, and volunteers doing art therapy with children and adolescents suffering severe mental-health problems.

Participation in these groups has been the best treatment possible, Ms. Loucks says. "I felt my experience could make other people's lives better and that, in turn, made me better. It allowed me to dream and have goals. It gave me a reason to live."

That glimmer of hope is essential to recovery from mental illness: "Once you realize that you can get better, it's huge."

Dr. Kutcher says the challenge for medical professionals, and the health system writ large, is to not be satisfied with treating acute episodes of mental illness but to ensure that recovery is lasting.

"We have to help people—and young people in particular—get well, stay well and keep well," he says.

André Picard is the Globe's public health