

Mental Health at the Multinational Frontline

How a Toronto-based Non-profit is supporting a global community

TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA, March 1, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Toronto-based mental health education non-profit Reach Out Together recently held its inaugural Frontline Mental Health Training, and participants' feedback continues to inspire its work on an international scale.

In the wake of the training, the global initiative has found new members, new formats and new connections by putting emphasis on the universality of its message and, this month, on the basics of mental health.

Among Reach Out Together's newest team members is the Content Supervisor, Alinka Avendaño, who currently lives in León, Nicaragua. Avendaño has taken the lead in translating the non-profit's work into Spanish.

As a psychologist with several years of experience in the mental health field, working especially with children, she also sees the importance of basic understanding and support beyond the professional sphere, into the "frontline" of our day-to-day living.

"That's what mental health is about...being engaged with activities that make you feel happy. It's about everyday life," she says.

It's this approach that frames Reach Out Together's mission statement of healing the world "community by community, conversation by conversation."

In a live interview for the organization's weekly Mental Health Impact Series, Aman Chahal, a U.K.- based post-grad law student, food blogger, and mental health advocate relates her experience with "post-graduate depression" in the context of an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic



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As much as the pandemic has stunted our ability to do a lot of things, what it has also done is increased that virtual connection. Reach out! You'll be surprised by the amount of support you receive."

Saakhi-Yashica Anandani

and national lockdown.

Chahal recalls returning from a trip to India for one week of "normalcy" before the introduction of public health measures.

"I went from seeing a lot of people, socializing all of the time, to being in a lockdown," she says.

"Going for a walk every once in a while was probably the most exciting thing...It was four walls, every single day. I'd wake up, I'd study, and then I'd go to sleep. I was just very

exhausted. I didn't really feel connected to my degree, I just knew I had to finish it."

Reach Out Together's Frontline Mental Health Training emphasizes both the importance of self-care and the need for an ongoing dialogue with our support networks and communities.

Chahal says that a self-care routine involving exercise and logging off of social media has helped, but that was one part of an overall strategy. She highlights a moment when having the right support network in place during the pandemic, and being exposed to mental health education, led to a shift from "talking for the sake of it" to actively relating with others around mental health.

"Lockdown made me realize that everyone is dealing with, and has dealt with, mental health," she says. "What we need to do is talk about it and raise awareness so that it's not a subject that we leave in the closet."

Aashni Sawjani, Reach Out Together's Marketing Manager, relates to the experience of working to maintain positive mental health while finding herself somewhere new.

A woman with Indian heritage who since moved from Kenya to the U.K., Sawjani describes herself as "a multicultural, multilingual girl, just trying to find her space in the world."

In her podcast, *Okay, Is This Awkward?* Sawjani and her co-host sometimes discuss "awkward", stigmatized, and taboo topics, including consent and mental health.

"I think the best way [to break stigma] is to educate, to communicate," she says. "Talk to your parents about mental health. Talk to your siblings! Talk to your friends!"

As a 27-year-old law graduate & investigative journalism graduate living in Leicester, U.K., she takes her 'ambassadorial' role to her former countries of residence seriously.

Speaking about what she calls a lack of help for those struggling with mental health in Kenya, she says that she keeps in touch with friends and believes the situation there has improved “a little bit,” but there is still progress to make in getting access to mental health resources.

“It’s unfortunate that there isn’t a direct place they can go to,” she says. “I encourage them to reach out to us at Reach Out Together.”

Sawjani describes her participation in Frontline Mental Health Training as a watershed moment.

“It started with just a recommendation, but I’ve stayed because everything that the foundation does resonates with my worldview,” she says.

Priya Puthankar, a Global Labelling Strategy Manager with Sanofi Pharmaceuticals, sees the training as a tool to educate people about what to look for in their own behaviours.

“Just have a check-in with yourself, to see if you need to change the way you’re doing things,” she advises, adding that it’s important to have a comfort zone, but to know when to step in or out of it.

Saakhi-Yashica Anandani, a Content Writer at Reach Out Together, joined the organization with a motive to break stigma around mental health discussions in the South Asian community in Vancouver, where she currently lives, and beyond. Speaking in another Mental Health Impact Series episode, she relates her own experience and that of her support network with trying to break stigma.

“My husband is a huge advocate for mental health, as well. Any time he spoke up about it, there would be subtle comments in the community, like ‘Just fix it.’”

While openly frustrated that stigma still exists, Anandani says she is undeterred from continuing to speak out, not only because she believes it can help others, but because it’s a cathartic experience to talk openly. She emphasizes that self-care is a necessary first step. As she puts it, “Before you check in with somebody else, check in with yourself!”

Her advice for mental health advocates is to keep going, even if they “start small”, and even or especially when it might be difficult.

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For more information and to register for the April session of Reach Out Together’s Frontline Mental Health Training, see the event listing and visit reachouttogether.com.

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