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# THE VICKI & STAN ZACK FAMILY TEENAGE HEALTH UNIT

IMPACT REPORT  
OCTOBER 2023



# THE VICKI & STAN ZACK FAMILY TEENAGE HEALTH UNIT – A CLOSE-UP OF YOUR IMPACT

## The Current Situation

Since 2020, the worsening state of teenage mental health has become a growing concern of pandemic proportions.

According to statistics from the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec, between 2019 and 2021:

- Antidepressant use in children 14 years and younger increased by **28%**.
- Suicide attempts in those aged 15 to 19 increased by **23%**.
- ER visits by teens with mental health concerns increased by **120%**.

Your donations play a vital role in helping the Zack Family Teenage Health Unit significantly improve the lives of young people in communities across Montreal. Thank you so much.

**“Your support could not have come at a better time, and we are extremely grateful for it.” – Dr. Perry Adler, Director, Zack Family Teenage Health Unit and Psychology Internship & Training Program, Goldman Herzl Family Practice Centre, JGH**

## About the Zack Family Teenage Health Unit

The Zack Family Teenage Health Unit has been providing a wide range of healthcare services to young people between the ages of 13 and 19 since 1985. The donor-funded centre is a training site for adolescent medicine and psychotherapy where family medicine residents and psychology interns gain practical experience with the most current evidence-based approaches in adolescent health.

Delivering psychotherapy sessions in one-on-one and group settings, the unit offers mental health support to help teens suffering a wide variety of issues, such as depression, suicidal tendencies, anxiety disorders, self-mutilation, physical and sexual abuse, ADHD, eating disorders, substance abuse, bullying, family discord, anger management problems and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In addition to the healthcare services provided at the Goldman Herzl Family Practice Centre, the Zack Family Teenage Health Unit has an outreach program that serves approximately 40 high schools in the Montreal area. During school visits, physicians, residents and medical students interact with teenage students to discuss various topics including sexual health, mental health and substance use.



## An Outstanding Interdisciplinary Team

The Zack Family Teenage Health Unit's team ensures that each adolescent receives excellent services that best suit their medical and psychological needs.

Here's a look some of the team's contributors and how they're helping patients:

### Resident Physicians

Our resident physicians conduct the initial intake interviews for all new teenage patients, address their biomedical and psychosocial needs, and refer them to the most appropriate service, including psychology services available at the Zack Family Teenage Health Unit.

### Psychology Interns

The Zack Family Teenage Health Unit's four psychology interns are an important part of our interdisciplinary approach. Their main focus is providing psychotherapy to treat the teens' mental health problems. They also provide follow-up visits to help resident physicians refine psychological diagnoses, assess suicide risk levels, and check how patients are responding to antidepressant medication. The interns provide psychosocial consultative services to the medical and nursing staff.

### Team Nurse

Our nurse acts as a safety net for our patients, so they don't fall through the cracks in the healthcare system. She follows up on referrals, reaches out to teens at risk to ensure their safety, and sees that they're following their treatment plans. The nurse has been provided with an inexpensive cellphone, so that she is able to communicate by text, which most teens prefer, and carry out close follow-ups. She addresses adolescent issues that span across both biomedical and psychosocial domains and is an indispensable resource at the Zack Family Teenage Health Unit.

## What's New at the Zack Family Teenage Health Unit

Donor generosity has an enormous impact at the Zack Family Teenage Health Unit. Your ongoing support helps teens throughout the Montreal-area become stronger, more resilient individuals. Thank you.

### Individual and Group Therapies

The unit continues to offer individual and group therapy sessions for teens, providing close to 2000 psychotherapy sessions each year.

Individual psychotherapy is available in-person or via teleconferencing, depending on what works best for each adolescent.

Group therapy sessions are offered via teleconferencing and provide a safe space for adolescents to get the treatment they need. In each session, teen participants learn evidence-based strategies and techniques proven to be effective for a broad range of mental health



issues. As a result, they are better able to regulate strong and unpleasant emotions to help reduce the urge to engage in self-harming behaviours or suicide.

Approaches taught in group therapy include:

- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
- Mindfulness
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- Relationship and Interpersonal Effectiveness Training

The group therapy sessions create opportunities for young people dealing with similar issues to connect with each other – a crucial part of alleviating feelings of isolation and loneliness among the teen participants and contributing to their overall well-being.

### **Patient Screening**

With the increase of the teen suicide rate since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Zack Family Teenage Health Unit has modified their screening questionnaire to better assess an adolescent's suicide risk level.

### **Outreach**

Outreach programs are an important part of making important health information and mental health support accessible to as many young people as possible.

The Zack Family Teenage Health Unit's outreach program for high schools had another successful run this year and continues to support 8,750 to 10,000 high school students annually. Physicians and medical trainees visited two schools each month during the academic year. Teens had the opportunity to submit anonymous questions related to physical and mental health, which were answered by our medical experts.

The interactive sessions are well-received by students and staff, and greatly benefit the health and well-being of the teen participants on multiple levels.

### **School-based Training**

In a further effort to strengthen school-based adolescent mental health programs, the Zack Family Teenage Health Unit created a series of eight workshops for guidance counsellors, psychologists, social workers and other student services staff, so they can better address their students' worsening mental health issues.

The workshops equip student services staff with mental health strategies, which they can then teach to their students. Topics include:

- The Mind of an Adolescent
- Mindfulness: Becoming More Present
- Surfing the Wave: Emotion Regulation Strategies
- Distress Tolerance 101
- Managing Unhelpful Thoughts: Cognitive Restructuring and Thought Defusion Skills
- Managing Self-Harm and Suicidality
- An Intro to Exposure Therapy



To date, this series has been carried out at the English Montreal School Board and the Quebec Association for Independent Schools.

## What's Next

The Zack Family Teenage Health Unit is currently taking steps to make the eight-part workshop series available to a broader range of communities in Quebec.

We are collaborating with a First Nations school board to create a modified version of the workshops to provide culturally sensitive strategies that will meet the needs of Indigenous young people. Using a collaborative approach, First Nations student services staff, teachers, administrators, health representatives and community leaders will bring their knowledge of their community's language, culture, mental health issues and healing practices to help shape the evidence-based interventions in our workshops. This approach will ensure workshops are better designed to support Indigenous youth.

The workshop series will also be translated into French and delivered to student services staff in francophone schools across the province.

**Your donations allow the Zack Family Teenage Health Unit to offer ongoing mental health services that adapt to their ever-changing needs and circumstances of adolescents.**

**A HEARTFELT THANK YOU FROM  
THE TEAM AT THE ZACK FAMILY TEENAGE HEALTH  
UNIT.**

