

May 2, 2017

BARRIE BOY MAKES 'TRACKS' TO BREAK DOWN THE STIGMA OF MENTAL HEALTH

Zach Hofer, 12, is lacing up his running shoes to make a difference for area kids struggling with mental health issues. Zach will be running, biking, walking from Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre (RVH) to Parliament Hill in Ottawa starting on August 13.

Zach was joined by Barrie Mayor Jeff Lehman, Janice Skot, RVH president and CEO, David McCullough, chair RVH Foundation, representatives from the Simcoe County District School Board, Principal Peter McLean, his sponsors and fellow students at the official launch of his fundraising campaign - *Zach Makes Tracks* - at Codrington Street Public School. During the launch, Zach spoke of his passion to make a difference for kids struggling with mental health issues.

"I'm raising funds and awareness for kid's mental health," says Zach. "I want to help kids so they can live a normal life and do normal things. I think kids should know that they can talk to someone if they aren't happy."

North Simcoe Muskoka is currently the only region in Ontario that does not have a hospital-based child and youth mental health program. In November 2016, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care Dr. Eric Hoskins announced \$3.2 million in annual operating funds for a regional Child and Youth Mental Health program. The funding will enable RVH to construct an eight-bed inpatient unit which will care for up to 300 young people a year. A comprehensive day hospital program will provide an additional 3,000 outpatient visits annually.

The construction contract was recently awarded to with the RVH Foundation committing \$5 million through its Hearts and Minds fundraising campaign for the construction, equipment and furnishing of the unit. Funds raised by Zach, who has a \$10,000 goal, will support the program, slated to open in late 2017.

"What Zach is doing to ensure kids have access to mental health services is just amazing," says Skot. "It's this kind of passion and community support that is bringing care closer to home for kids in need. In fact, we just awarded the construction contract and work will begin very soon on the inpatient unit. This young man has an incredibly generous nature and is so driven that we all know he'll not just meet, but exceed his goals."

Zach is being supported by many sponsors including the Hitch House and Thor Motors who have generously donated a RV for the journey; personal training by Mind to Muscle; Cyncor promotional wear among others.

For more details and to donate visit www.zachmakestracks.ca

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For more Information:

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