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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Parents may be the last to know when a teen or young adult is struggling with depression and other mental health issues**

Surrey, B.C. – While many parents may worry about their kids achieving good grades, following curfews and getting into university, Angela Wilson is simply trying to keep her 17-year-old daughter alive.

Wilson's daughter, Natasha, attempted suicide at the age of 15 by overdosing on 40 Extra Strength Tylenol®. The damage to her liver was so extreme that, initially, the health care team treating her didn't think she would make it. She was eventually transferred to Surrey Memorial Hospital (SMH) where she recovered.

Wilson learned that the suicide attempt was the big tell of a depression that had hounded Natasha since grade 6. In those intervening years, Natasha also suffered from social anxiety, and started cutting and acting out, and made other attempts on her life.

Natasha returned to SMH of her own volition a year ago after a close friend's suicide triggered a relapse. She is now back at home and a straight-A student with plans to attend university. However, her mother continues to worry about her.

"A lot of people don't understand what it's like to have a child with a mental health issue. I can't lock her up in her room because that's the worst thing for her, but every time she goes out, I'm afraid of what may happen. I even check in on her in the middle of the night because I'm afraid I'm going to wake up one morning and she's not going to be there," said Wilson.

Looking back at the build-up of her depression, Natasha wishes there had been more resources available to her, a place to go where she wasn't subjected to the stigma she encounters even now while in recovery.

"I felt isolated and alone. I wasn't comfortable confiding in my mom. I needed to learn more about depression and have a safe place to go where other kids had problems similar to me," said Natasha.

More than 60 per cent of Canadian teens and young adults, aged 15 to 25, who experience a mental health issue do not seek professional help. Speak Up, a program funded by Coast Capital Savings and Fraser Health, was launched last month to address this very problem. The program's goal is to get teens and young adults to join the conversation about mental health before their issues mushroom and become worse, requiring intensive treatment such as hospitalization.

According to recent studies out of the University of Melbourne, certain mental health information websites have been found to improve mental health literacy and reduce symptoms of depression. Speak Up offers an interactive web page at [www.mindcheck.ca/speakup](http://www.mindcheck.ca/speakup) where teens and young adults can respond – in privacy – to mental health questions, share tips for dealing with mental health challenges as well as movies and books that inspire them, and generally express themselves by uploading photos, videos, writing and music.

“Speak Up’s mandate is early intervention and giving teens and young adults a chance to engage in discourse about mental health. We want to connect with them before they reach a crisis point or as they start to experience feelings of depression or anxiety. Mental health issues start at this time of life, and are the primary health concern for this age range compared to other health conditions. But, it can be difficult for parents to know if something is going on with their teen or young adult,” said Dr. Karen Tee, Fraser Health’s manager of Child, Youth & Young Adult Mental Health & Substance Use Services.

Signs that a teen or young adult may be dealing with a mental health issue are noticeable changes such as: loss of interest or pleasure in activities; not wanting to be with family or friends and withdrawing from activities; having problems sleeping; and being grumpy and irritable with family and friends.

The Speak Up program is also bringing the mental health conversation into Fraser Health region schools. Over the next three years, mental health educators will talk about the signs and symptoms of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, psychosis and substance misuse, and youth peer mentors will share their lived experiences. Teachers across the region will be offered a mental health lesson plan to support students in joining this important conversation.

Established in 1992, Surrey Memorial Hospital Foundation has raised more than \$60 million to purchase medical equipment, fund innovative programs, and support training and research.

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