

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

As part of our learning about literacy and mental health, we have been using a series titled *Well Aware*. It combines engaging texts written by award-winning Canadian authors with lessons that connect to strategies students can use on a daily basis to manage stressful situations.

One of these texts, titled *Red Carnation*, tells the true story of mental health advocate Alicia Raimundo when she was a 13-year-old girl. At that time, she was recovering in hospital from severe depression and a suicide attempt. The text, written in collaboration with author Deborah Ellis, describes her journey through the mental health system and the challenges and supports that she encountered while trying to find her way and manage her illness. Her story is one of help and hope. Alicia is now a university graduate who has worked to develop mental health programs and increase awareness across Canada and internationally.

As students work with the text, they explore issues of stigma that can interfere with understanding mental illness and prevent those in need from seeking help. They also examine ways to build resiliency and move forward from a difficult situation. The benefits of writing and creating to help us understand our thoughts and feelings are also discussed.

As caring adults, we all want to help our young people develop the skills necessary to be able to cope and thrive in all situations. This is why we continue to work to equip students with the tools they need to manage everyday stresses before they escalate into extreme situations. As teachers, we cannot diagnose or provide the appropriate care a child who is experiencing a mental health issue may need. What we can and will do, however, is open the doors to talking about mental health without shame, stigma, or judgment.

As part of our team, thank you for connecting with us concerning this important topic, and please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this work further.

Sincerely,