

Building Mental Health Resilience through Education

A Case for the Education for Student Mental Health Resilience Program

Faced with an urgent need for students to cope with the mounting number of societal stressors, the Faculty of Education is bridging the gap between research and practice by bringing essential mental health resilience strategies into the classroom.



Student mental health is in crisis: 1 in 4 students report having mental health issues, 1 in 10 have seriously considered attempting suicide, 91% are overwhelmed and 20% have conditions impacting their academic performance. In addition to rising diagnoses of chronic stress, depression and anxiety among students, educators are also struggling to maintain their mental health. With approximately 40% of teachers leaving the profession within their first five years due to stress, there is a pressing need to address mental health needs in the classroom.

McGill's Faculty of Education is leading the way in developing and disseminating best practices in building mental health resilience, so that students will have the tools and skills to not only survive, but also *thrive* in today's demanding world.

Bringing together award-winning scholars in mental health, pedagogy, education technology and health, the Faculty of Education is at the forefront of mental health research throughout Canada, led by the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology (ECP).

- ECP has a long history of advancing scientific knowledge through research in education and psychology, and the application of this knowledge to the development of progressive practices and policies locally, nationally and internationally.
- ECP programs and research examine the interplay between complex human systems (cognitive, social, emotional, behavioural and biological) to maximize learning, wellness (mental and physical), and human development in multiple settings and throughout the

MADE
by McGill

lifespan.

The Faculty of Education is committed to examining factors that affect students' mental health and developing best practices that improve their lives at McGill - and beyond.

On the cusp of our Third Century, McGill is poised to do even more.

Universities around the world are struggling with an unprecedented increase in student mental health difficulties: high levels of stress, difficulties in ability to cope with the demands of university, and feelings of isolation and alienation from the university being perceived as "not caring". Student services are challenged to meet the needs of these students, who do not meet clinical criteria for a mental illness or disorder.

The Faculty of Education's cutting-edge Education for Mental Health Resilience Program (MHRP) aims to improve student mental health resilience using an evidence based, interdisciplinary, whole-institution approach, that can be used not only in the McGill community, but in Canada and institutions around the world.

True education for mental health goes far beyond providing mental health information to students for mental health literacy. Our **unique interactive skills-based program** is poised to cultivate a critical culture change and ensure that campus environments are not only supportive of - but actively contribute to - supporting mental health resilience **across the board**.

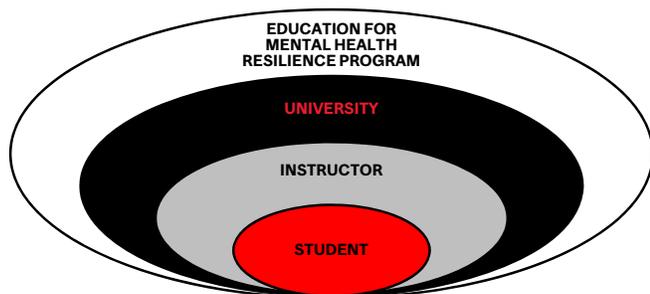


Figure 1. The Education for Mental Health Resilience Program (MHRP): a 3- pronged approach with Student MHRP, Instructor MHRP and University MHRP.

- **Student MHRP.** Development and deployment of a student instructional program with online tools (videos and resource library), co-created through multistakeholder/ interdisciplinary best practices exchange;
- **Instructors' MHRP.** Development and deployment of resources/recommendations for implementation of

classroom mental health resilience strategies, while maintaining the highest standards of academic practice; and

- **University MHRP.** Development of guidelines and materials to demystify and cultivate campus mental health resilience.

All these initiatives would be packaged with recommendations for / implementation of a **communications / implementation strategy** to maximize potential for impact.

This leading-edge program is matchless in Canada - if not the world - thanks to its characteristics, including but not limited to:

- › **Unique interactive skills-based nature** that goes far beyond simply informing the student about what is mental health and illness;
- › **Use of best practice pedagogical principles** (effective teaching) to *actually teach* the skills (with guided practice and problem solving) involved in building effective stress management and coping;
- › **Evidence-based recommendations**, referencing the wealth of research indicating the effectiveness of the methods used;
- › **Co-creation with a broad diversity of students**, recognizing that McGill's exceptionally international student body, our place in a multilingual city, and a nation committed to diversity and openness are our most distinctive qualities and our greatest strengths, the program has
 - Student partners on the project team. A diversity of McGill students participate in the development and evaluation of the Program, from undergraduates to graduate/post-docs with degrees in relevant fields - who also bring their recent experience of being students; and
 - Salient tools built from students' examples, with references relevant to their stress and coping difficulties. All materials are developed to be appealing to students, and are meant to have a global relevance, incorporating critical references to the specific contexts of targeted students, i.e., students in demanding university settings;
- › **Co-presentation by peers with lived experience and mental health professionals;**
- › **Breadth and depth of approach**, with elements drawn from mindfulness, dialectical behavior therapy, cognitive therapy, positive psychology, health psychology, and more; and
- › **Designed for institutionalization**, i.e. integrated into the university as a valued element of the university mandate and curriculum, ensuring relevance to universities in Canada, in our regional partners in Asia, and potentially beyond.

The MHRP would be a key complement to the mental health ecosystem at McGill, with close collaboration and partnership with the departments of **ECP, Psychology, Psychiatry**, the

Rosy Student Wellness Hub, and student partners, including the **Student Mental Health Difficulties Advisory Committee**.

We are privileged to have **Dr. Nancy Heath**, a James McGill Professor and the Associate Dean (Research & Innovation) for the Faculty of Education, who brings her leadership and exceptional expertise as MHRP's team leader. A formidable researcher recognized internationally for 30+ years of work in mental health in educational settings, as well as a committed advocate for mental health resilience outreach and knowledge mobilization, Dr. Heath is currently part of a national coalition on mental health involving 19 other Canadian universities. Together, we can make an impact for mental health resilience.

Sustained, far-reaching impacts for improved mental health resilience

Thanks to this multipronged, multistakeholder program, we can create a community of practice for wraparound education for mental health resilience not only on our campuses, but - considering McGill's extensive global reach - also across Canada, our regional partners in Asia, and potentially beyond.

Once the program has been established, the Faculty of Education is committed to

- › maintaining the MHRP infrastructure, adapting the tools to ensure they remain updated and relevant, and supporting outreach activities to maximize campus impact;
- › sharing the MHRP tools, best practices, and lessons learned with other institutions; and,
- › working strategically with international partners interested in promoting MHRP/mental health resilience and student wellness on campus and beyond - beginning with our regional partners in Asia, through McGill's International Institute of Education in Hong Kong.

An invitation

On behalf of the academic leaders, research champions, inspiring faculty and dedicated students of McGill, we invite you to consider a philanthropic investment of CAD2,000,000 towards the McGill Faculty of Education's Education for Mental Health Resilience Program. We propose support be concentrated on the areas of immediate need across the three nested loci of Student, Instructor and University Mental Health Resilience Programs, described more fully in the Appendix.

Your gift will have a profound impact on the successful cultivation of campus cultures that actively contribute to mental health resilience, with administrators, faculty and students who are equipped with the knowledge they require to not only survive but also *thrive* in the face of today's mental health challenges.

Join us.

Made by McGill: THE CAMPAIGN FOR OUR THIRD CENTURY.

Funding priorities

McGill's Faculty of Education is committed to enhancing mental health resilience at McGill and beyond. The Faculty is seeking philanthropic support for the following initiatives to help bridge the gap between research and practice by integrating resilience-building skills for students around the world.

Online Student Mental Health Resilience Program

Student instructional program

Interactive Library of Mental Health Resilience Resources

Instructor Mental Health Resilience Program

Instructor materials: Development of guidelines/strategies and resources

University Mental Health Resilience Program

Development of turnkey implementation program, including videos and guidelines

Visibility and Outreach

Creation and broad dissemination of the tools and resources (including development of underlying infrastructure), with a global approach to reach a diversity of audiences

Appendix

The elements of the Education for Mental Health Resilience Program (MHRP) - applied university-wide, worldwide

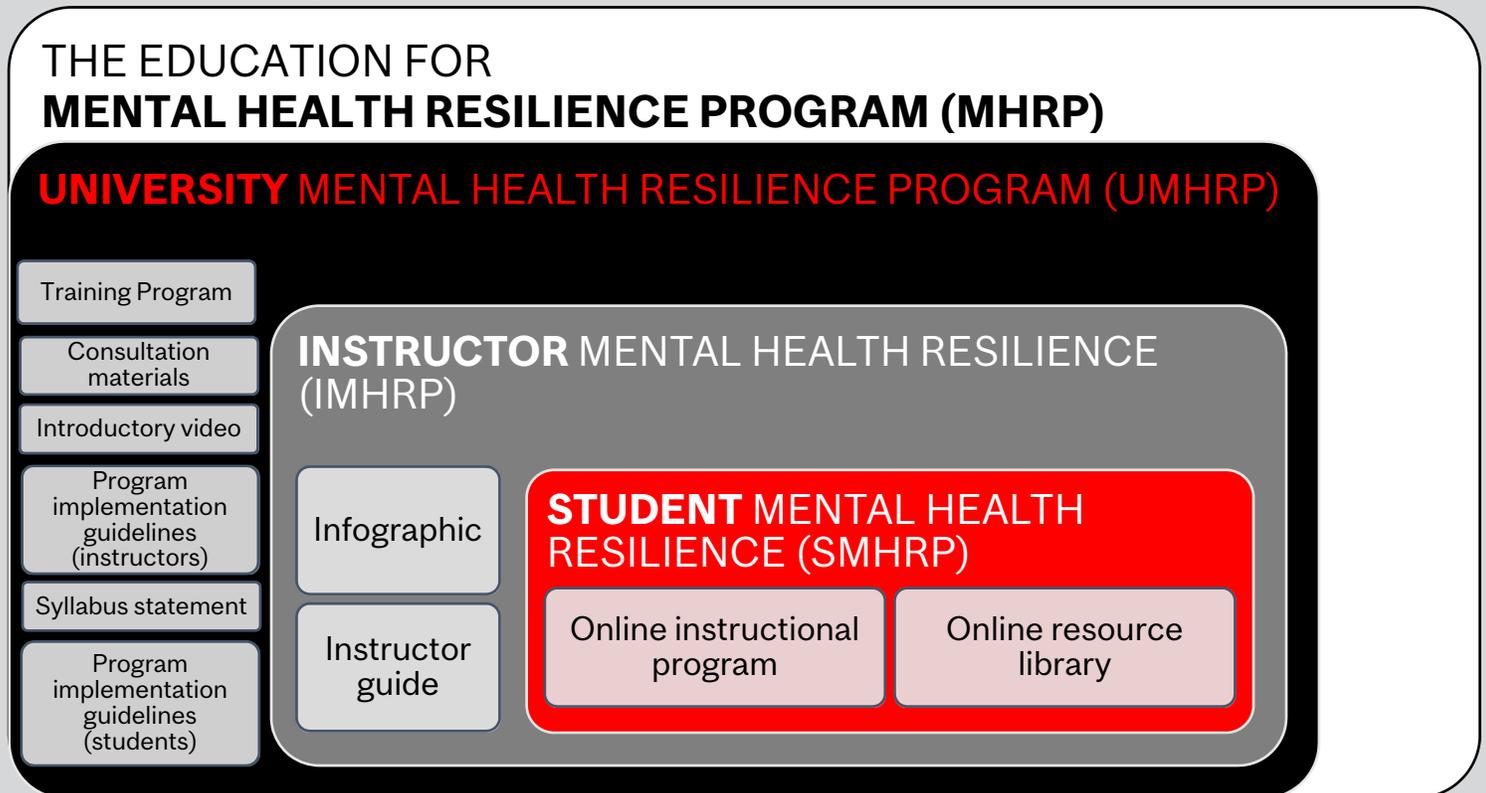


Figure 2. The Education for Mental Health Resilience Program: holistic delivery of the campus mental health resilience programming, with students at the core

Student Mental Health Resilience Program (SMHRP)

Deliverables include

- > Online instructional program, including videos (3), integrated with
- > An online resource library.

Video Instruction. A series (3) of short instructional videos animated by an engaging mix of relatable peers and mental health professionals, these videos are the foundation of the program and are integrated with the online resource library (see below). They include

- 1) *Introduction to the principles of stress management and effective coping in demanding environments*, featuring skills based instruction and practice for key strategies in each domain of resilience. *Examples:*
 - psychoeducation about mental health, decreasing stress response;
 - managing self-criticism, increasing appreciation and positive feelings;
 - coping techniques;
 - social connection, self-care and help-seeking etc.);

- 2) *Dealing with Challenges*: discussing the common difficulties in using the strategies and recommended solutions; and
- 3) *Lasting Change*: addressing the challenge of continuing to use the strategies, and committing to healthier coping going forward, highlighting evidence-based recommendations from the field of health psychology regarding behavioural change.

Online Resource Library. The online resource library is comprised of a series of resources that fall within one or more of the domains of resilience and common stressors (e.g., decreasing stress in the moment, coping with fear of failure in exams, managing self-criticism, dealing with stress of parental expectations, increasing positive feelings, improving social connection, self-care, help-seeking, etc.). These downloadable resources – developed specifically for young adults – are in diverse formats, including but not limited to:

- skills practice video clips;
- guided strategy practice audios;
- podcasts featuring relatable peers led by mental health professional illustrating principles of strategy use;
- infographics;
- coping strategy tip sheets;
- research briefs documenting evidence; and
- lists of other resources.

Integration. Throughout the foundation videos, reference is made to the specific strategies that can be accessed through the online resource library. Peers and the mental health professional illustrate how these can be used in difficult situations commonly experienced by students (e.g., before an exam, feeling alone in a large class, dealing with family demands).

Communication and outreach. These resources would be accessible online through a dedicated website, where they could be shared and cross-promoted on campuses through the complementary MHRPs for instructors and universities (described below).

Instructors' Mental Health Resilience Program (IMHRP)

Deliverables include:

- > Infographic, and
- > An instructor guide to classroom resilience strategies.

Infographic. Instructors at the university would be provided with a short infographic highlighting

- the need for the program;
- the research evidence supporting the program; and
- key elements of the program.

Guide. A brief guide for instructors on how they could integrate use of relevant strategies into their classroom at appropriate times, with the supporting links to the corresponding tools available in the online resource library.

Example: As an instructor, I would learn that before a mid-term exam, when many students are feeling test-anxiety, I could click on a provided link to play a 3-minute guided progressive muscle relaxation exercise, shown by research to help students calm down and focus.

Professors would be given a list of links to strategies that they could play at different times.

Materials directed towards instructors would emphasize that inclusion of these strategies into the university classroom can be done without compromising the curriculum.

Individual universities could then adapt accordingly, ex.

- recommend professors use some of the program strategy links
 - regularly; or
 - before exams; or
- require that professors do so at least once a month.

University Mental Health Resilience Program (UMHRP)

The UMHRP goal is to demonstrate to universities the institutional benefits of embracing a university-wide commitment to enhancing student mental health resilience. A turnkey consultation package would include

- > Consultation materials
- > Introductory video
- > Program implementation guidelines (instructors)
- > Template syllabus statement
- > Program implementation guidelines (students)

The UMHRP would be developed in collaboration with experts in university administration, policymaking, public relations, communications and marketing to challenge the stigma around mental health and increase participation across campus.

Initial consultation materials would include two (2) videos:

- *Testimonial video.* McGill's student services leaders, central

administrators (e.g., Dean of Students), and student association leaders, all addressing the feasibility and benefits of following the program; and

– *Program overview video* highlighting the program elements.

Mental Health Resilience Essentials Video. This 10-minute video would focus on basic information about mental health resilience, challenging myths and misconceptions, and introducing the program as well as highlighting other institution-specific supports as relevant.

This video could be shared widely with the university community to challenge stigma and increase student and faculty participation in the program.

Instructor Guidelines. This resource would provide guidance for universities on how to introduce the recommendations and program to their instructors.

Syllabus statement. This in-course syllabus statement would be associated with a short description of the program; a link to the student program and other institutional specific supports; and reference to the institutional valuing of excellence, with recognition about the high expectations held for students and the commitment of the institution to support students in developing the needed skills to succeed.

Student Guidelines. This resource would provide guidance for universities on how to involve student leaders, and materials to share with students.

Proposed summary of philanthropic commitment by the Asia Advisory Board (all amounts in thousands, in CAD)

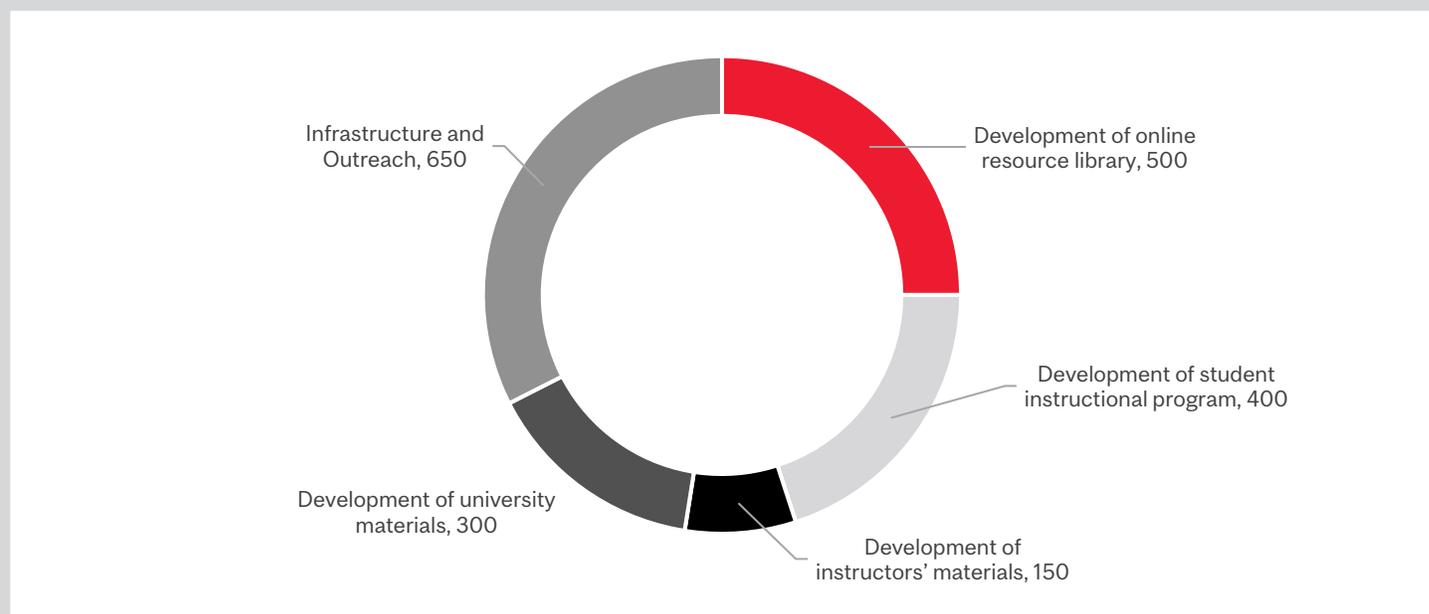
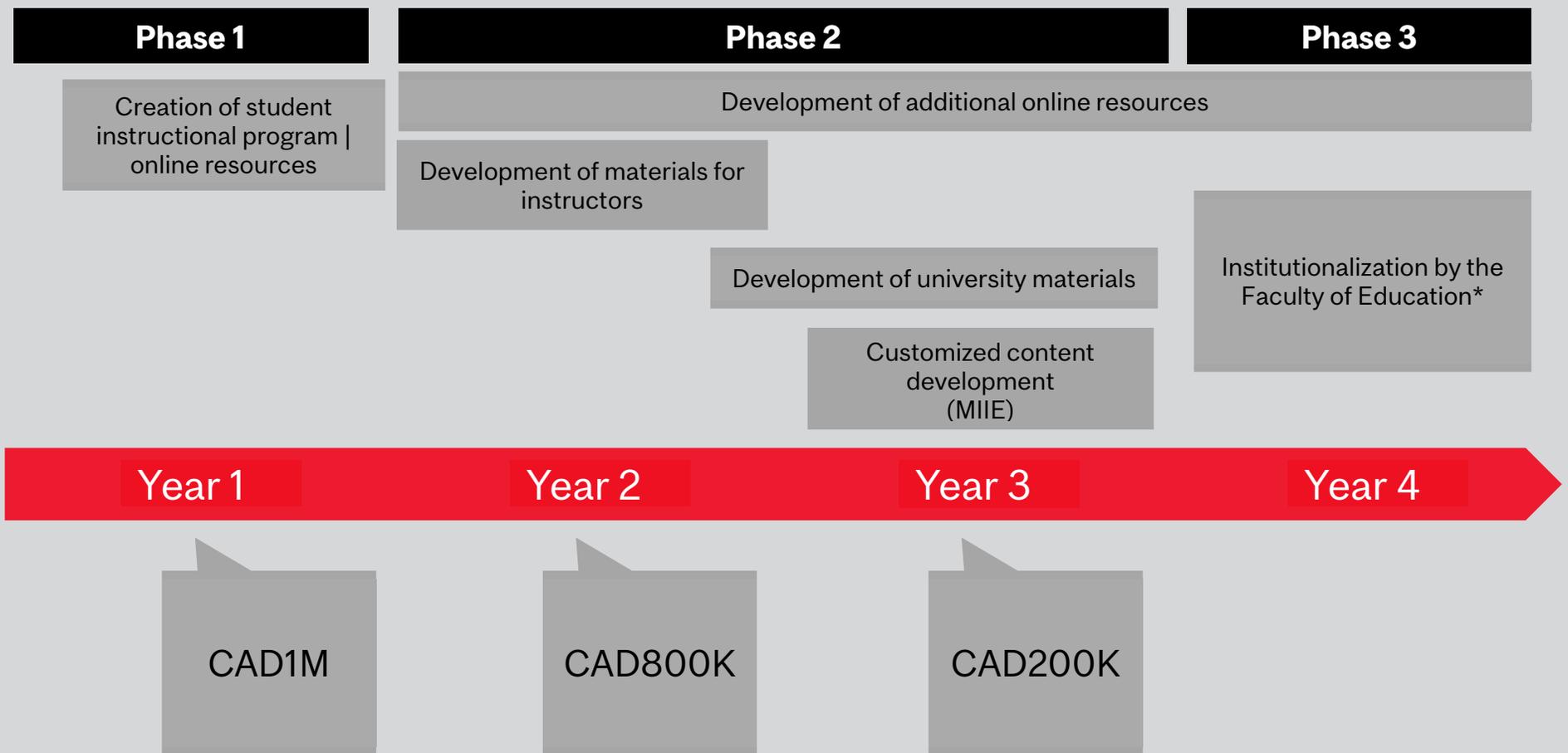


Figure 3. Summary of component costs for the proposed Education for Mental Health Resilience Program (in thousands of Canadian dollars)

Naming opportunities would be commensurate with the philanthropic gift (in whole or in part) in according to *McGill's Named Gift Opportunities and Funding Minima Guidelines*.

Proposed timeline and milestones for the Education for Mental Health Resilience Program (MHRP)



* Beyond Year 3, the Faculty is considering alternative sources of potential revenue to sustain the MHRP, such as delivering private client consultation services to develop customized tools, smooth implementation, and maintain the program. Any net revenues would be reinvested in the Faculty.

Thank you

For more than 150 years, the Faculty of Education has been at the forefront of teaching, learning and groundbreaking research in all aspects of education and human development. With philanthropic support of the Education for Mental Health Resilience Program, we can redefine the 21st century classroom experience for both teachers and students, and better support the next generations' ability to be resilient in the face of mental health challenges: to achieve success not only in their academic careers, but potentially enduring over the course of their lifetimes.

The impact that your giving will have across the University and the field is irrefutable.

By creating accessible online resources using best practice pedagogical principles, you will allow us to make tools that research has shown would be most effective in cultivating student mental health resilience.

By creating instructor programming for mental health resilience, you will help faculty members create a classroom environment that contributes to mental health resilience for their students, and potentially for themselves.

By developing university-level strategies for cultivating campus mental health resilience, you will provide higher education institutions with the tools to strengthen mental health resilience in the campus environment. And finally...

By offering forward-looking investment in mental health programming, you will allow students across the world to access evidence-based tools and skills – studying in campus and classroom environments that actively contribute to their mental health resilience – to not only survive, but also *thrive* in today's demanding world.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal and for your encouragement of McGill and the Faculty of Education's ambitious plan. It is only through the continued generosity and vision of our donors that we can create the tools needed in order to create a holistic Program for mental health resilience – built on our body of excellent knowledge in service to this field – for the members of our campus, communities, and our world.

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