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University of Lethbridge first Canadian post-secondary school to introduce 7 Cups of Tea Student Support

Even the best mental health supports cannot be effective if students don't feel comfortable accessing them or they are not available when a student is most vulnerable. The University of Lethbridge's Counselling & Career Services Office is looking to bridge that gap by becoming the first Canadian post-secondary school to participate in the 7 Cups of Tea Student Support System.

An on-demand, 24/7, text-based, worldwide Internet support network, 7 Cups of Tea provides targeted and specialized support to students who need help when they need it most.

"We have excellent mental health resources here for our students at the U of L and we've worked hard over the last few years to really socialize that and break down stigmas of asking for help," says Mark Slomp, the U of L's Counselling Services manager. "This program is a really great way to reach those students who aren't comfortable making an appointment to talk with someone, and the fact that it's text-based and offered around the clock, it gives a student the option of seeking help at any time."

7 Cups of Tea is the premier emotional support system for the Internet. Founded in 2013 by a licensed psychologist, it was designed as an emotional support system with the simple premise that everyone should have access to a great listener. Users can go online or open an app on their Apple and Android devices and, within seconds, exchange texts with trained active listeners, including student peers, registered psychologist and mental health professionals. The company currently boasts more than 120,000 listeners providing support in 140 languages across 180 countries worldwide.

"Depression and anxiety are among the leading factors inhibiting academic performance," says Slomp. "Recent studies have shown that 64 per cent of students who drop out of post-secondary school do so because of mental health reasons, and 50 per cent of students never access campus-provided mental health resources. Through 7 Cups of Tea, we're trying to provide another avenue for support."

How It Works

For student users

- Students log in on the web or through a smartphone app (it's all free for students).
- They choose a trained active listener they feel comfortable with. Listeners can be other students from their school or from pre-selected criteria they choose, including mental health professionals.
- They chat about whatever is bothering them - all conversations are 100 per cent confidential and anonymous and can be deleted at any time.
- Students can also access 32 personalized growth paths that address the most common challenges people face. They take simple steps each day to learn research-backed ways to overcome issues like depression, anxiety, work stress and financial challenges.

For student listeners

- Students receive an invitation to become an active listener on the site.
- Interested students join the free training program and complete an online course in active listening, which culminates in an examination.
- Students who pass the examination are now eligible to become listeners on the site, where they can provide confidential emotional support for their peers.

The introduction of 7 Cups of Tea, which will be offered free to U of L students, follows the announcement of the University's partnership with The Jed & Clinton Health Matters Campus Program in October 2015. That program consists of a four-year commitment to work to evaluate and identify opportunities to augment mental health activities on campus.

"In the end, we hope that students will feel comfortable to access help in any way, shape or form," adds Slomp. "If this program first gets them talking, then that's great, and eventually if it leads them to come in and take advantage of our supports here on campus, that's even better."

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Contact:

Trevor Kenney, News & Information Manager
403-329-2710
403-360-7639 (cell)

trevor.kenney@uleth.ca

Mark Slomp, Manager, Counselling & Career Services

403-394-3960

mark.slomp@uleth.ca