



3292 East Broadway
Vancouver, B.C. V5M 1Z8
info@ldsociety.ca | 604.873.8139
ldsociety.ca

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LDS Announces Free Mental Health and Learning Differences Forum

Charity Provides Support and Tools for Young Learners Disproportionately Impacted by Mental Health Challenges

Vancouver, B.C., May 17, 2023 – In recognition of May as Mental Health Awareness Month, [LDS](http://ldsociety.ca) (Learning Disabilities Society) is launching a free [Mental Health and Learning Differences](#) forum for parents, guardians, caregivers, educators and members of the public. Children and youth with learning disabilities experience significantly higher rates of mental health challenges than their peers. This is why LDS is on a mission to raise awareness and to provide support, so that each person can reach their full potential.

“As young people who experience both learning differences and mental health challenges develop, they need an expanding set of tools, support, and self-advocacy skills. Finding these supports can be difficult,” said Rachel Forbes, Executive Director, LDS. “By bringing together experts and those with lived experience in our Mental Health and Learning Differences forum, we can offer accessible resources that are no cost or low cost, including tools, skills, strategies and support to those who support youth with current or potential mental health challenges.”

“Self-reported data from the Canadian census evidenced that youth with learning differences aged 15-21 years experience higher rates of mental health challenges than their peers, with 46% of male students and 65% of female students impacted¹. Mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression, can be compounded by feelings of shame, stigma and low self-esteem, with students at a greater risk for bullying and social isolation,” said Dr. Jennifer Fane, Director of Education, LDS. “Supporting children and youth in navigating learning and mental health challenges empowers them to recognize their own strengths, gain confidence and achieve lifelong confidence and success inside and outside the classroom, and beyond.”

The interactive [Mental Health and Learning Differences](#) forum will feature experts, advocates and individuals with lived experience, and is free to attend. This event is available to the public online and has limited in person seats. Participating organizations—LDS, Stigma Free Society, the Foundry and the Boys Club—provide services throughout British Columbia.

- Panellists:
 - Dr. Jennifer Fane, Director of Education, LDS
 - Lee Laufer, Indigenous Youth Worker, POWER Alternative School
 - Lyn Heinemann, MSc.OT, Clinical Coordinator, Rehabilitation Services, Foundry BC
 - Willow MacDonald, Health Advocate and Reality TV Star

¹ Wilson, A. M., Deri Armstrong, C., Furrrie, A., & Walcot, E. (2009). The mental health of Canadians with self-reported learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42(1), 24-40.



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- Samara Liberman, Programs Manager, Stigma-Free Society
- Panel host:
 - Walter Mustapich, President of Boys Club Network
- Thursday, May 25, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm PST
- Free to attend
- Virtual, with select number of in-person spaces available at LDS's East Vancouver location, at 3292 East Broadway
 - Registration available at <https://ldsociety.ca/mental-health-forum/>

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Media Contact:

Rachel S. Forbes
Executive Director, LDS
P: 604.873.8139
M: 604.345.9129
ed@ldsociety.ca

About LDS (Learning Disabilities Society):

Founded in 1970, LDS is a nonprofit charity that serves children, youth and adults with suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities by providing customized learning support. LDS' Research-informed Individualized Student Education (RISE) program enables students to understand their unique strengths and find success in the classroom and beyond. LDS is committed to making high-quality, affordable learning support accessible to all families, regardless of circumstance. Visit <https://ldsociety.ca/>.