Student raises funds for mental health

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BEACH RADIO **1075**

Cole Strilchuk is ready for this year's ride. (CMHA)

By Kate Bouey

RIDE DON'T HIDE

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His family has raised more than $40,000 for local youth mental health in Vernon since 2013 but Cole Strilchuk is on a mission to do more.

The Kalamalka Secondary student enlisted the help of other students, as well as teachers and parents, to organize and run a garage sale in April that raised more than $1,800 for the Canadian Mental Health Association's 'Ride Don't Hide' biking event in Vernon.

"Everyone was on board and said, 'Yes, let's do this'," he said.

Strilchuk's enthusiasm for the bike event started in 2010 when Vernon's Michael Schratter began a world-wide cycling journey to combat the stigma of mental illness.

Strilchuk, along with his parents and younger brother, became involved when Schratter, a school teacher living with bipolar disorder, rode through Vernon.

As a nine-year-old, Strilchuk was incredibly excited to have the opportunity to join Schratter on the ride.

His enthusiasm led to featuring Schratter's journey as his school heritage project.

"It was a great experience that has stuck with me ever since," Strilchuk said. "It was really neat to be there at the beginning and amazing to see how the ride has changed and grown since then."

His family bikes in 'Ride Don't Hide' every year.

Suicide continues to be the second leading cause of death among 15 to 24-year-olds in B.C., after motor vehicle accidents, according to a CMHA press release.

Mental illnesses are also surprisingly common in children and youth, with about one in seven young people in BC experiencing a mental illness at some point, the release stated.

"To some degree people don't talk about it a lot, because it is such a serious topic, but you see more conversations with people in their close circles," Strilchuk said.

The young man said it was important to speak about mental health in everyday life to help end stigma that prevents people from getting the help they need.

"Every conversation matters. Talking about it can help others in ways you don't even know. Every time you mention something it's going to have an impact on someone and help others to talk to someone else," he said.

He urges others to take part in Ride Don't Hide to help end stigma.

The CMHA Ride Don't Hide takes place Sunday, June 23 at Creekside Park in Coldstream.

Registration is $35 for youth and adults, and free for children 12 and under.

Participants also have the option of having the registration fee waived if they raise $100 in donations.

Individuals, families and teams can register for the ride, stride for walkers, or virtual Soul Studio Spin Ryde online at vernon.ridedonthide.ca or at the event from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

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