

# Brad Siroski shares his journey with students

**By Kevin Gilby**

**DAVIDSON** — Brad Siroski was busy last week in Davidson and Watrous, providing about a dozen mental health and addictions presentations. On Monday, he presented to Davidson students in Grades 7 and 8. Tuesday and Wednesday he did presentations for the high school in Watrous.

Siroski shares his personal battles with substance abuse to promote perseverance and mental health wellness. He travels extensively throughout the province to let students and adults know they are not alone.

"I've seen the Grade 9s, 10s, 11s, and 12s at different times in January and February of this year," Siroski said of his visits to Davidson. "One of the teachers saw one of my presentations and thought it would be good to have the 7s and 8s as well."

Siroski never dismisses a request to share mental wellness with students, and quickly designed a presentation tailored to the younger audience. Keeping some of the more mature themes absent, Siroski opted to keep it more interactive with the students and added a Jeopardy-style game

to cement what students learned that day.

"I think that mental health and addictions is such that there's no age group, and there's no discrimination; it affects everyone. When we take a community approach and talk to both the adults and the youth, it's a sure-fire way to build support and awareness in your community."

Travel expenses, materials, and other expenses Siroski encounters while presenting are often covered by community groups or sponsorships. When he was asked to return to familiar ground, Siroski knows he had tremendous support from friends in the area.

"Because I'm originally from Davidson, I reached out to a few friends that I knew," he said. "I reached out to Clayton Schneider at Panther Industries, who agreed to sponsor the program to get me out there. And I also reached out to my friend Todd Lockwood, who runs Hansen's Funeral Home, who is a very big supporter of mental health as well. And he agreed to donate as well."

Watrous School was able to raise money through their student high school council. In previous visits to Davidson, he received



(Photo Supplied)

support from many Davidson groups and businesses like the Kinsmen, Home Hardware, and Shaw's Agency.

He works fulltime in Saskatoon, but credits a gracious employer, who grants him days off for him to put on outreach programs. Additionally, he also works for the Saskatchewan Health Authority as a mental health and addictions counsellor.

He says the main topics of discussion are the same regardless of the age group he's present to. Trauma, stress, anxiety, depression, and substance use isn't confined to a given age or demographic.

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# Health:

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"If I'm doing it for a Grade 7-8 age group, I try to keep it a little bit simpler and I try to have more fun with the group," he said. "If I'm doing it for the adults, I kind of take a no BS approach. I just go right at saying what needs to be said, provide that awareness and let them know there's support."

The most important lessons he hopes students get from a presentation is putting a voice to one's mental health, as well as knowing one's connections and support. The ability to communicate the pain and struggles to people that can listen and provide support is what he emphasizes.

"Knowing those are the things that are going to help you heal."

From personal experience, he told students that he started substance abuse as a means of coping before he was even aware he had underlying mental health issues. He said it wasn't until later in life, when he was receiving counselling and working through his addictions issues that he learned he had underlying issues like stress/anxiety and depression.

"What I told the kids today is that the further I looked into it, the more I realized that some of the mental health issues can cause the substance abuse and the substance issues can, in turn, cause the mental health issues. If you have anxiety and stress, and you drink to cope with that anxiety and stress, often that drinking causes more anxiety and stress, and it becomes a vicious circle.

"I've had a couple of kids just in the past few days, kids of 12 or 13 years old, tell me they realize how important it is to talk to some of their supports to deal with what they're struggling with, so they don't turn to substances like I did."

Another important lesson he taught the students was "who to connect with." He was impressed when the students were able to



**Davidson School Grade 7s - Bottom photo - Davidson School Grade 8s**  
(Photos Supplied)



identify about 90 per cent of the community resources that are available to residents of Davidson.

Siroski notes that the students were able to list off "pastors, teachers, guidance counsellors, addictions and mental health counsellors, parents, coaches, and best friends."

He stresses the importance of knowing who one can talk with because "often, all people want to do when they're struggling with mental health is to be heard."

"When I started to be vulnerable and actually talk about what I went through with mental health was the first time I felt like I was healing," he said. "It was like a huge weight off my shoulders. I finally felt like I could breathe again."

He recommended being there for their peers as well. If a friend withdraws from typical interactions or

isolates, maybe the student should reach out to the friend, to offer an ear and direction for help.

"I just want to get out there and I want people to understand, is that if you are struggling with mental health and addictions that you're not alone."

He said Davidson is an extra place to give presentations.

"To me, Davidson is home. It has been a community that has supported me through all my mental health and all my addictions.

"The amazing thing about the Town of Davidson is that they are ground breaking in the mental health field.

"I don't know of a lot of other communities that are bringing people out to talk to the youth, the adults, and the businesses. They are really paving the way in the promotion of mental health."