



**REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF HEALTH**  
**THE HONOURABLE KIM N. WILSON, JP, MP**  
**LAUNCH OF MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK 2018**

**8<sup>th</sup> October 2018**

**11am, Warwick Academy School Hall**

Good morning everyone,

It is truly a pleasure to be here today to open Mental Health Awareness week. This is special to me because mental illness – and mental wellbeing – are issues I’m very passionate about personally... And, truthfully, I think we all need to be passionate about this issue.

Mental health is often referred to as the “Cinderella issue” – the health issue that didn’t get invited to the ball. Compared to physical health, it is the issue that gets forgotten, overlooked, hidden under a carpet and, worse, buried deep inside suffers and their families for the shame and stigma that comes with it.

You don’t hear people whisper in hushed tones, “he broke a leg”. No. He’ll wear a cast like a badge of honour. We don’t feel embarrassed to tell our friends or colleagues, “I had the flu”, or even “I’m diabetic”. Physical health issues are considered “normal” and ok to have.

But not so for mental illness. A student who tells a teacher, “I suffer from anxiety sometimes” can feel a terrible burden in admitting this. Adults may regard this as a weakness or an excuse for laziness. An employee who suffers from depression cannot easily explain why they could not go to work that day.

Mental ill-health is not something we have come to accept as an ordinary part of life. And for that reason, events like this one, dedicated to raising awareness and bringing the issue out from the shadows are extremely important.

I’m proud and honoured to help spread that message and tell everyone that it’s ok to hurt sometimes. It’s not a sign of weakness.... And, on the contrary, seeking help, is a sign of strength.

Did you know that in our entire lifetime, one in four of us will suffer from a mental illness?

Furthermore, research indicates at least half of all mental health disorders appear by the age of 14, and about 75% by the age 24.

The skills we learn in life and our experiences growing up are often critical in helping us to either prevent, manage or recover from a mental illness. Also, getting help early is crucial. This is why the theme this year is

particularly appropriate – *Mental Health And Young People In A Changing World*.

Knowing that you are not alone, knowing that you can ask for and receive help, knowing that mental health difficulties are a part of life and that treatments work, may save you or your friends' lives.

Growing up in today's times requires us to learn new skills of resilience and care. Young people today have exposure to bullying online, and a constant stream of news, both here in Bermuda and globally, through our TVs, our phones and computers. These are new challenges that many teachers and parents did not grow up with.

But if we are proactive in education and we empower our children at an early age to be good digital citizens and make informed and responsible choices when they use online media, we can save lives...and, certainly, much emotional distress.

Recent research shows us that bullying behaviours hurt not just the victims – but the bullies themselves. Both are in poorer health, job prospects and relationships than the average person. These are real consequences.

However, just like getting treatment for an infection or broken limb, you can recover if you seek help.

Asking someone if they are thinking of suicide gives them the opportunity to say 'yes' and seek help. Please pay attention to friends who may self-harm – as this behaviour also puts them a risk for suicide. In 2017, there were 92 risk assessments conducted at MWI's Child & Adolescent Services. Risk assessments are undertaken for all children who have made statements of self-harm, or expressed thoughts of self-harm.

So listen to your friends. If they seem down, withdrawn, anxious or taking unusual risks, don't avoid the conversation.

In closing, I would like to thank Warwick Academy, for welcoming us here today to launch Mental Health Awareness Week with staff and service users from the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute. It is wonderful to see Warwick Academy's approach to educating about mental health issues.

With that, I would like to welcome McKenzie-Kohl Tuckett to come and bring the voice of our young people to this launch of mental health awareness 2018.

Thank you.