

# Province to support award-winning youth mental health program

## Mindyourmind funding announcement

Sean Meyer/London Community News

*Maria Luisa Contursi (right), program director and co-founder of Mindyourmind, introduced Ontario Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care Deb Matthews (centre) to several of the organization's past and current volunteers on Friday (June 21) prior to an announcement of \$360,000 in annual funding for the program.*

London Community News

By [Sean Meyer](#)

Alicia Raimundo knows all too well how important it is for young people to get help with mental illness. She was just 13 when she tried to kill herself.

Raimundo would go on to not only get help for herself, but also offer assistance to others through her work with various mental health advocacy groups, including the London-based Mindyourmind.

Since its inception nearly a decade ago, [Mindyourmind](#) — an award winning website for youth, by youth, where they can get information, resources and the tools to help manage stress, crisis and mental health problems — has faced funding issues that constantly threatened to close its doors. On Friday (June 21), Raimundo served as emcee for an announcement that forever changed the future of Mindyourmind, as Ontario Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care Deb Matthews, also the MPP for London North Centre, announced \$360,000 in annual funding for the program.

“I am absolutely delighted to announce stable, annual funding for Mindyourmind. You have earned this. The evidence is very clear that Mindyourmind is the go-to place for young people. Young people turn to the Internet first when they try to understand what is going on in their minds and Mindyourmind is there for them.”

Matthews said stable funding means Mindyourmind, a program of Family Service Thames Valley, can now plan ahead, not “lurch from here-to-here not knowing what their budget was going to be.” With that funding, Matthews said, Mindyourmind’s dedicated staff and volunteers can “really focus on the job at hand.”

And that job is something Raimundo said will absolutely make a difference in the lives of young people. The funding, Raimundo said, means young people will be able to find happiness through a resource that can put them in touch with the help they need, whatever form it might take.

“It means there are going to be a lot of amazing young people who are going to find their voice and be empowered to their full potential,” Raimundo said. “People, who knew me when I was younger, then saw who I am now, would say, ‘When you were 13, we would go entire years without hearing you talk. You were awkward and angry. And now you are not only helping other people, saving lives, but also talking to thousands of



people. I never would have expected to turn on a TV and see you.' That is really thanks to this program."

Deana Ruston, another youth volunteer, said she agreed with Raimundo, but added the organization has helped her feel not only valued, but empowered. "It is gaining your confidence back," Ruston said, adding that involvement with Mindyourmind has helped her find many other opportunities for herself while assisting others.

Raimundo said the contributions of young people are essential to the success of Mindyourmind and they aren't brought in just to make "a token appearance" at the end of some initiative.

Maria Luisa Contursi, program director and co-founder of Mindyourmind, echoed those sentiments. And as someone who has fought to keep the program afloat during the seemingly most dire of circumstances, Contursi couldn't help but show her excitement with every beaming look she offered before, during and after Matthew's announcement.

"It is wonderful. What it means is we can really focus on listening to what youth need, listening to how they want to work with us to create these resources," Contursi said. "That is what this funding does, it allows us to focus and be present in those conversations without worrying about how we are going to pay the rent in two months. That is a huge deal."

Contursi said stable funding will allow Mindyourmind to focus on the future, to look at expanding its global reach. By working with partnerships with organizations such as Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, Maryland, and Plan International, based out of the United Kingdom, Contursi said Mindyourmind can work to influence policymakers in Canada, and around the world, to accept that young people have an important role to play.

The Mindyourmind offices in Citi Plaza (355 Wellington St.) were packed with staff members, volunteers past and present, and supporters of the initiatives the organization has fought so hard to maintain.

One of those supporters knows a great deal about the fight to champion mental health and the resources necessary to help provide it. Don Seymour, executive director at WOTCH Community Mental Health Services, said he was thrilled by the "incredible leadership on the part of the province" as they recognized a small, local program has a national impact on youth mental illness, and international.

"When you see these young people, who through Mindyourmind, have found their path to recovery; that is very powerful for all of us," Seymour said. "If you think about it, they are becoming adults that will not need service. Or if they do, they will be adults who will know the service they need and be able to direct it, tell us what they need to remain in recovery. That is powerful."