

Bridging the gap

A partnership program takes aim at the stigma of workplace mental health

IT SEEMS THAT it's okay to talk about being stressed out these days—we all have those moments. But despite a growing awareness of mental health challenges, it still isn't as acceptable to talk about them, says Sarah Hilton.

"There is still resistance and such a stigma around mental health," she says. "It's easier to talk about feeling stressed, even though the symptoms are often the same. The only difference is in the severity and how long they last."

As a mental health specialist, Hilton has offered workplace programming, presentations and workshops since she first launched her company, Mental Health Solutions, in 2005. After rebranding as Stressed Out Solutions in 2014 (with the appropriate acronym, SOS), Hilton says it has been interesting to observe how differently companies and employees have responded. "It's easier to get in the door to have a conversation about workplace stress," she says.

"Challenges and concerns about productivity, absenteeism, conflict and morale are often connected to mental health," says Hilton. Citing statistics from various sources, she says 65% percent of managers and supervisors say they could do their job more effectively if they found ways to more easily manage distressed workers, and 70% of Canadian employees report some degree of concern with psychological health and safety in their workplace. The economic cost of mental health problems in Canada is estimated at \$51 billion annually.

"One in five Canadians that we know of is affected by mental health challenges, and everyone around them is affected in one way or another."

Stressed Out Solutions has recently partnered with Employee Wellness Solutions Network, a London-based firm focused



Garth Jansen, president and co-founder of Employee Wellness Solutions Network and Sarah Hilton, founder and CEO of Stressed Out Solutions

on building healthy work environments. The company's employee wellness programs promote healthy lifestyle habits, and president and co-founder Garth Jansen notes, "If employees are struggling emotionally, they won't be paying as much attention to becoming healthier, mentally or physically."

Hilton's primary goal for the partnership is a Canada-wide roll out of SOS programming. Since April, the initiative has attracted attention from consultants across the country. Ten

Shiftwork

RANKED On the 2015 Profit 500 list of fastest-growing companies:

HRDownloads (102), **Big Blue Bubble** (116), **Voices.com** (125) and **Info-Tech Research Group** (456).

ELECTED **Steve Bolton** (president and CEO, Libro Credit Union), to the board of directors, Canadian Credit Union Association.

AWARDED **TrojanUV**, Water Reuse Equipment Supplier/Manufacturer of the Year, 2015 WaterReuse Awards of Excellence.

APPOINTED **Marlys Koschinsky**, scientific and executive director, Roberts Research Institute.

UNVEILED By **Sifton Properties Limited**, London's first net zero home, 1896 Sumac Way.

ANNOUNCED By **Jones Packaging Inc.**, selling of its shrink sleeve business (equipment and customer portfolio) to Guelph-based Safety Seal Plastics Inc.

CELEBRATED By **Oakridge Ford**, grand re-opening of renovated facility, 601 Oxford Street West.

MOVED **tbk Creative**, to 562 Wellington Street.



KOSCHINSKY



BOLTON

AWARDED **Sandra Polson** (senior sales manager, London Convention Centre), Business Member Service Excellence Award from the Canadian Society of Association Executives-Trillium Chapter.

ANNOUNCED By **Fanshawe College**, launch of partnership with Zipcar car-sharing network.



encourage everyone to talk more openly, she began hosting a weekly television show, *Stressed Out Solutions*, on Rogers television last month. "It can get to the point where we can't shut off and focus on the here and now," Hilton says of the debilitating impact mental illness can have on people. "Our bodies and minds are telling us enough is enough." ❧ KYM WOLFE

STRESSED OUT SOLUTIONS

Workplace mental health programming
 Established 2005
 (as Mental Health Solutions)
 1 employee plus contracted consultants
 National market
www.stressedoutsolutions.com

are currently being trained to deliver SOS programs in their own communities, spanning the country from British Columbia to Nova Scotia.

Whether an organization has five employees or 500, mental health impacts the bottom line, says Hilton. "A successful and sustainable shift in culture requires more than one-off training. We have to pay attention to how workers are doing every day, because the workplace is where we spend most of our time. Companies don't want their managers to be counselors, but they want them to understand and be able to communicate comfortably with employees, and to let people know it is okay to talk about mental health."

Hilton customizes SOS programming to each organization's unique needs, even going as far as throwing on jeans and taking coffee out to talk to construction workers on the jobsite. "They work outside in the elements every day," she reasons. "They don't want to come and sit in a boardroom."

Hilton's concerns with mental health extend beyond the workplace, and to



Custom office suites because your business is unique

It might be seen as square-feet, but the true measure of an office is how well it works for you, not how you have to adapt to it. Sifton will collaborate with you to create an environment that will not only showcase your business, but enhance the way you work.

Sifton Commercial Properties.
Think outside the square-foot.™

519.434.1000 | lease@sifton.com

Sifton



Sifton.com



Experience. The Difference.™