

Welcome to the third edition of our Newsletter



CHS NEWSLETTER

COMMUNITY HELP SERVICE

VOLUME 1. ISSUE 03 - December 2022

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A Psycho-Educational Assessor

A message from our Chairman

We trust you will find it informative. For the first time in what seems like a very long time, we are finally moving beyond COVID. However, there has been no reduction in calls to the Helpline. Neither has there been an appreciable reduction in the number of people seeking an appointment with our team of therapists.

The pandemic may be behind us but the impact lingers on.

Awareness of the importance of mental health and well-being has never been higher, which is a positive development.

The CHS continues to be at the heart of this important matter. As always, we are deeply indebted to a team of volunteers as well as the members of the Clinical Team.

If you would like to join the CHS family as a volunteer in the Office or with the Helpline, we would love to hear from you!

Jeremy Jennings

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Autumn AmCham Meeting

It has always been a pleasure to attend events at St John's International School in Waterloo, and in mid-March 2022, just after the COVID restrictions and constraints were lifted, we again had the opportunity to visit the School, this time with the American Chamber of Commerce in Belgium (AmCham Belgium) on the occasion of their Annual General Meeting and the Spring Reception.

CHS was invited to set up a stand in the reception hall on this occasion. In the first part of the programme, members of AmCham congregated to attend the annual general meeting. Apart from the usual business, Marcel Claes, the outgoing Chief Executive, delivered his leaving speech after nearly 18 years in the post and presented his successor, Stéphanie Rutten, who officially took over the post in May 2022.

As participants to arrived, a networking session ensued as invitees moved to the 'Lion's Den' which gradually filled up with lively conversations. AmCham President, Philip Alliet, announced the commencement of proceedings. David Brooke, the new Head



of School, welcomed us all to St. John's for the evening.

There followed the announcement of the 2021 AmChampion Award winners and a speech by the President. Next spoke Sylke Hamerijck, who is an advisor on international taxation and tax procedure in the Minister's Cabinet.

The keynote speaker, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in the Federal Government, Vincent Van Peteghem, delivered a fascinating appraisal of the current world crisis, and a most interesting and varied sketch of the

development of taxation policies in a complex and ever-changing Belgian environment. His speech was much appreciated, particularly taking account of his pressing schedule.

To end the evening, participants were invited to rise and partake of a nibble and a glass.

CHS was delighted to have the opportunity to attend the AmCham function and renew precious contacts at the School, so we look forward to pursuing our partnership and continuing to offer assistance as required.

The Community Help Service is looking for volunteers!

Should you be interested in volunteering in the Helpline team or in the Offices of the Mental Health Services Centre, please email us at: office@chsbelgium.org.

You can find more information on these vacancies here:
<https://www.chsbelgium.org/en/how-you-can-help/volunteer>

CHS Charity Walk

October this year saw CHS launch its second annual fundraiser walk. After the success and wonderful weather of last year's event, it was a joy to again launch this mental health focused initiative.

The goal of this event is, in the weeks leading up to the grand finale, to walk, run, bike (or hop skip and jump!) and enrol sponsors for a donation for each KM you travel. There was much online chatter as enthusiasts shared their exercise goals to their friends, family, and social media contacts to sponsor their efforts. The donations raised from such events help finance the ongoing operation of the CHS Helpline.

The Helpline is staffed by hard working volunteers and is offered to the English-speaking community.

Officially it is offered to the community of Belgium; however, the Helpline often receives calls from neighbouring countries, and sometimes even more distant calls are received, speaking not only to the dearth of English-speaking mental help support in the European community, but also to the quality of support the CHS volunteers provide to those who do call. A worthy cause for anyone wishing to donate!

But I digress! This year's fundraising walk kicked off with a repeat performance of 2021 –

the sun warmed our faces as we completed a social loop of Bois de la Cambre, and warmed our backs as we returned to the CHS premises to enjoy an abundance of cake. As the socialising continued there, our souls were warmed with good company, and maybe just a little by the wine!

Almost €3000 was raised on the day, with more trickling in as people collected their generous pledges. This money is received with much gratitude and helps the CHS continue to serve the community.

So we look forward to next year, to walk for fundraising, and for a good time with great company.

Maybe we'll see you there!

Happy but weary feet and their voluntary bodies



CHS activities: “Mental Health Matters” Well-Being Workshop for Adolescents

By Lisa Classen and Linnea Hoek

On Friday, the 13th of May, Linnea Hoek and I, Lisa Classen (both from the CHS Children & Adolescents’ team) gave a workshop on Mental Health, what it is and how to improve mental health at the European School IV (Laeken).

This workshop was a part of their “well-being project” for the whole school. Psychologists, counsellors and teachers of the ES had experienced - highlighted through the Covid crisis - a dramatic increase in anxiety, depression and disruptive behaviour in recent years among their students, with 40% of their students feeling down, anxious or depressed much of the time. They plunged into this well-being project to increase visibility of mental health and think of preventive measures for their students to reduce the number of interventions in the long term. We, after sitting together with the main gameplayers of the ES Laeken, came up with the idea to prepare a tool, a power-point workshop and psychologists, counsellors, interested teachers, and also the student representatives of the last 4 years of the secondary cycle. Subsequently, they would bring this tool into each class of S4-S7, presenting it with one adult from the well-being project and one student representative.

At the workshop, Linnea and I talked about Mental Health, why it matters, how it is defined, and how it is influenced. Particularly the young student representatives were extremely engaged when we talked about the influencers of today’s world on their mental health: the omnipresent presence of social media and smart phone use, the constant information overload and how it stresses body and mind, the equally constant news feeds on war,



Speakers and Participants

“Mental Health Matters” - CONTINUED

climate, etc which leads to extreme worry and pessimistic outlook on life by many young people.

The student reps felt very understood and participated and shared vividly their personal concerns and the impact on how they and their generation felt.

The second half of our workshop concentrated on how mental health can be improved: Focusing on possible actions they can take and thinking patterns they can challenge.

For the action side we based our ideas on extensive research on evidence based strategies to improve mental health and explained the 5 most important actions: connect with people,

be active, take notice (mindfulness), keep learning and give/offer help.

We gave them many examples and again the young people were extremely engaged in sharing what helped them when feeling down.

When we talked about helpful and unhelpful thinking patterns, we went deeper into the unhelpful thinking habit of “social comparison” so relevant to the generation Z, as they are constantly exposed to social comparison not only in real life but also virtually.

Again, the students shared very personal experiences showing how meaningful these thoughts are for them.

The workshop which was scheduled for 90 min lasted an hour longer, because of the animated participation of students and staff!

Their feedback was unanimously positive and the next step is now for staff and student reps to take our workshop into all the classrooms.

In a feedback session afterwards with the SEN/Mental Health staff of the school the idea was raised to take the workshop to the other European Schools as well.

Why I volunteer at CHS

In late 2020, amidst the global pandemic, I found myself with a considerable amount of free time which led me to search for an organization in Brussels where I could volunteer. I had not previously volunteered at a single organization on a recurring, committed basis; most often it was ad hoc for individual events or fundraisers.

During my search, a colleague informed me of Community Help Service, stressing that it relies on volunteers to both operate the CHS Helpline and run the administrative office for the CHS Mental Health Services Centre. The CHS website has an informative section which explains how one can volunteer and it helped me determine that the best fit for me would be to work in the office.

There are many different types of positions available for all skill sets.

Since joining the team, I have felt a delightful satisfaction from my contribution to a worthwhile organization. The appreciation expressed from fellow volunteers and the CHS Clinical Team professionals make it enjoyable to volunteer in a positive atmosphere. On days when volunteering, there can be profound moments, while taking a request for an appointment or when simply listening to someone in need, which have a positive impact on their day and perhaps on their journey to obtain mental health treatment.

An important motivator of why I volunteer at CHS is that some of my friends and relatives have been, or currently are, struggling with mental health issues. The stressful impacts from the past three years have increased my motivation to help my local community. Knowing that some of my family and friends live as expats in other countries, I am drawn even more towards CHS given its focus on assisting the English speaking community in Belgium. I find it particularly fulfilling to help people in my community who have limited options due to their language abilities. For me, it is meaningful to help an organization with a mission focused on helping people. The CHS Helpline and the CHS Mental Health Services Centre offer an invaluable resource for thousands of people each year.

For all the reasons above, this is why I volunteer.

- CHS Office volunteer



CHS 2023 Calendar

The Calendar is available free of charge. Donations are welcome!

3,000 copies of the 2023 calendar are currently being distributed to the wider international community in Belgium. Much more than a calendar—it is full of useful, practical, and sometimes ‘out-of-the-way’ information for both newcomers to Belgium and long-term residents. Information regarding schools, hospitals, places of religion, community services, and leisure activities is presented in an easily-accessible format.

It is distributed free of charge thanks to ING’s continued coverage of the printing costs. If you would like a copy, you can collect one at the CHS Mental Health Services Centre, Email office@chsbelgium.org or call our Offices on 02 647 67 80 if you need a copy to be posted to you.

Feel free to request some for neighbours or friends who you think would be interested.

Calendar Stockists:

Directly from the CHS office.

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Interview With Our Dad, A Psycho-Educational Assessor

By G. & L. Shin

So, what do you do at CHS, dad?

As you know, I'm a neuropsychologist and clinical psychologist. At CHS, I primarily assess children, teenagers, and adults for potential neurodevelopmental conditions. This means I do a range of psycho-educational assessments and neuropsychological assessments.

What are neurodevelopmental conditions?

We all differ across multiple aspects of our life: physical traits like height, hair colour, personality and preferences, but also in mental abilities to learn, memorise facts, self-control, or interpret other people's emotions. These traits tend to last through a person's lifetime. Sometimes, our mental abilities differ so much from those of others that certain aspects of our life do not function as adequately as society would expect.

For example, we can have more specific difficulties reading (dyslexia), spelling (dysorthography), calculating (dyscalculia) – or much more trouble focusing during a long meeting (ADHD).

Others write or process more slowly, or struggle to tie their shoelaces... This can create difficulties or misunderstanding at school, at work, or with friends... Scientists call these neurodevelopmental disorders, but I prefer the term neurodevelopmental conditions.

Are all neurodevelopmental conditions bad?

“Two hundred years ago, a very energetic young person who promptly reacted to external sounds could potentially make a fine officer . . . Nowadays, that same young person might be perceived as restless or too easily distracted.”

How do you assess for conditions like dyslexia, or ADHD?

I primarily use standardised tests to measure how a person performs on certain tasks, as compared to others

in their age group. Those tasks have been associated with specific conditions through research and experience. For example, someone with dyslexia might find it more challenging to convert certain letter combinations into sounds; someone with an attention deficit might struggle to react to targets on a computer screen when the task is longer.

When a person performs significantly below their peers, this may be a sign of neurodevelopmental condition.

However, this is not a sufficient condition. One has to be sure that difficulties were not primarily caused by environmental conditions, such as language difficulties (for example, due to recently learning the language), anxiety, or lack of sleep...

Who do you work with? How come you sometimes test adults too? I thought only children would need to be tested?

Actually, I assess people of all ages. A few decades ago, learning difficulties at school were often misunderstood for laziness, lack of motivation, or sometimes ignored.

When a child kept forgetting her multiplication tables, drawing badly, or misreading words, some teachers would attribute difficulties to the child's personality, rather than to a condition. So, some adults have never actually been diagnosed with their underlying condition. Some decide to get assessed, so as to better understand their difficulties, and hopefully learn how to better deal with them.

Then, I sometimes need to assess more elderly people. As we get older, certain functions like memory or attention can suddenly start to deteriorate.

In some cases, it is necessary to get assessed to figure out if the difficulties are part of normal ageing, or if other conditions are present.

Who else do you meet?

Besides my colleagues at CHS, I regularly collaborate with institutions (schools, hospitals etc.) and therefore

Interview With Our Dad - CONTINUED



Photo by Michał Parzuchowski on Unsplash

interact with many people: school psychologists, support teachers, therapists, medical specialists . . .

Working with others is really essential to get a good picture of the exact difficulties experienced by clients. Fortunately, I work with international schools, which are often very experienced in supporting children and teenagers with neurodevelopmental conditions.

My assessments will often be used by psychiatrists or neuropsychiatrists to formally diagnose a learning condition, by speech / occupational therapists to provide appropriate learning support, or by schools and

exam boards to provide the needed accommodations and arrangements.

I'm also lucky enough to keep activities and connections with larger hospitals and also academia. I still continue to lecture occasionally at the university (ULB Faculty of Psychology), which is conveniently located just round the corner of CHS.

Are assessments a bit like therapy?

Not really. Assessments are really about finding out what people find particularly easy, and what they find more challenging, compared to others – so that they can be better supported. But occasionally, after the assessment results indicate the probable absence of any neurodevelopmental condition, we realise that difficulties have more to do with life events and challenging situations experienced by the child, adult, or family as a whole. It may sometimes be beneficial in such cases to refer the family to psychotherapists to accompany them through harder times.

What do you like most about your job?

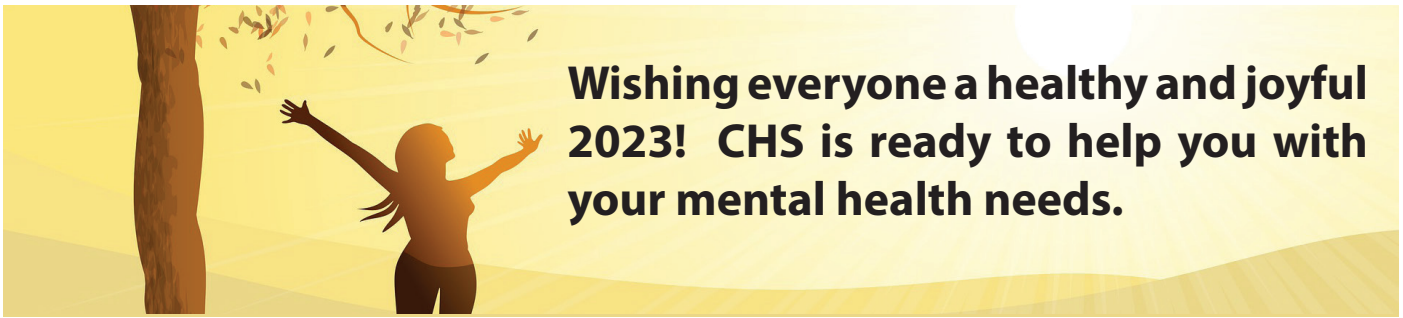
Many things! Firstly, the scientific process behind each assessment, and the specific assessment tools being used. I do find it all so fascinating, in a nerdy kind of way . . .

Secondly, you get to meet and help so many different people, from different backgrounds – that's the advantage of working in Brussels. As you know, your dad has been an expat all his life, before we moved to Belgium – so that's my way to stay close to the international community.

And what do you like the least?

Report writing is probably my least favourite part of an assessment. But writing up is really necessary to capture all the work done during the evaluation, so that the person benefits fully from the results.

After an assessment is completed during the day, I will spend many, many hours or days analysing and writing up the results into a detailed document. This means I can only do a relatively small number of assessments each year – however, I do get the flexibility to write up at home, at my own pace. Work-life balance is really important to me, so that I can also spend quality time with my own family!



Wishing everyone a healthy and joyful 2023! CHS is ready to help you with your mental health needs.



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Therapy with our diverse clinical team



Psycho-educational Assessments for children



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