

Western prepares educators with new mental health program

November 25, 2011

Thanks to the generosity of a former graduate student and elementary school teacher, Walter M. Lobb, The University of Western Ontario's Faculty of Education has developed a new mental health program and scholarship fund to address the needs of teachers who deal with students' mental health issues every day. The Walter M. Lobb Program for Mental Health for Educators and the Walter M. Lobb Ontario Graduate Scholarship award was officially launched today at the Faculty of Education's Community Room in the George Althouse Building. Mr. Lobb, an elementary school teacher for nearly 40 years in the Chatham area, left a generous bequest of \$430,000 to the Faculty. Funds will be used to develop research, materials and resources to help educators identify and meet the needs of students who have a mental health disorder. Funds will also assist educators with the personal challenges and stress of dealing with the numerous demands of the modern classroom. "Teachers are on the front lines," says Western professor Alan Leschied, one of the Western faculty members coordinating the Lobb program. "They are very often the most trusted if not the only person in whom a child in need might confide. As there is an enormous gap in resources and expertise, our teachers need our help to deal with this growing and troubling issue." This gift will also provide support to teachers in dealing with their own mental well-being. Recent surveys indicate as many as 20 per cent of children aged four to 17 years old have clinically important disorders at any given time. This translates to more than 800,000 Canadian children who experience mental health disorders that cause significant distress and impairment at home, school, and in the community. The gift has also created the Walter M. Lobb Ontario Graduate Scholarship, which will be awarded to a graduate student conducting research in the Faculty of Education, focused on children's mental health. "We firmly believe that our schools will be central to providing support for our country's children in an increasingly complex societal context," says Vicki Schwean, Western's Dean of Education. The funding will enable educators, front line workers and experts in mental health conduct workshops and seminars at the Faculty of Education. Following the official announcement, Western's 700 teacher candidates will participate in the first full-day seminar featuring keynote speaker Dr. Ian Manion, Executive Director of the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health.