

# MEIGHEN CENTRE & SUPPORTING STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS

YEAR IN REVIEW 2023-2024



MIRIAM DYSART ('23)

## MEET MIRIAM DYSART ('23)

### New grad supports students and combats food insecurity

Miriam Dysart, the 2023-24 Meighen Centre Post-Grad Intern, was happy to have the opportunity to work with a part of the University that had such positive impacts on friends, family, and classmates.

"I realize how much the resources of the Meighen Centre and Wellness Centre are needed on a campus," says Dysart. "They can really alter a student's path. I think that if a student knows they have resources they can fall back on or just someone to talk to and get some guidance about some things, well I think that can be pretty life changing. I know that sounds dramatic, but especially when it comes to wellness and mental health that's what it is — life changing."

The Meighen Centre provides supports and services to students with disabilities and medical conditions. Mount Allison's Wellness Centre provides a variety of health services to students.

As an intern, Dysart had many responsibilities, including meeting students who came to the Meighen Centre and connecting them with the necessary resources and people, working on the centre's peer tutoring program, and collaborating with departments throughout the University on new initiatives.

"I cannot say enough about how positive a workplace it was," says Dysart. "It's really nice interacting with students and having coworkers so committed to helping students and ready to involve me in the work of the Meighen Centre."

Dysart is most proud of launching Mountie Meals, an initiative she came up with where alumni and friends of the University donate funds to directly support meals for students. Donated funds are loaded onto students' Mountie Cards — the University ID that is used to purchase meals and snacks at Jennings Dining Hall and other on-campus locations.

"Even as an upper-year student living in an apartment in town, my friends and I would go to meals at Jennings because it was affordable and offered a variety of nutritious and dietary options. It also means you are not alone in your apartment trying to cook something but have the chance to engage with classmates and meet friends over a meal. I wanted to make sure all students have this option."

Dysart is happy to know Mountie Meals will continue after her time at Mount Allison.

"We know how important nutrition is to students reaching their full potential and academic success," says Dysart. "This is the reason there are breakfast and lunch programs in schools, and I think it's also important for us to make sure university students are getting the meals they need."

Dysart earned a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in psychology, from Mount Allison in 2023. This fall she begins a master's degree in communications at Mount Saint Vincent University.



**THE PANTRY**

## MOUNT ALLISON'S FOOD BANK

The Pantry provides items to those in need and in September 2023 opened in a new space in the University's Wallace McCain Student Centre. We are thankful to our partners on and off campus and the many groups and individuals in our community who have helped provide food, clothing, and personal care items.

Together, The Pantry and Mountie Meals help to combat food insecurity.



MATT MASTON

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Thank you for your interest in learning how Mount Allison supports students and health and wellness throughout our community. This past year, we've spent a great deal of time as administrators, working in close collaboration with student leaders, to refine processes and procedures to ensure students are directed to the specific resource or set of resources they need as quickly as possible. This has meant everything from improving our communication outreaches and increasing access to mental health first aid training to supporting the work of our Student Wellness Social Worker as a case manager. Our community continues to be one that works together to address issues, respond to students in crisis, identify new learning and program opportunities, and build a community that celebrates self-care and rallies in support of mental and physical health.

My appreciation goes to all the families, donors, alumni, and friends supporting health and wellness at Mount Allison.

Sincerely,

**Matt Maston**, Director, Accessibility and Student Wellness

## MOUNTIES 4 MENTAL HEALTH

Mounties 4 Mental Health is a new student group on campus that advocates for the mental health and well-being of student-athletes. The group, which will include a representative from each varsity team, plans to work with coaches on initiatives and develop resources and tools for student-athletes. The group builds on an initiative that was started two years ago by Matt Thomson ('11) and Jon Graves ('15) in memory of a football teammate.

## NAVIGATE MtA UPDATE

Navigate MtA is a student-led group that launched in 2020 to provide programs and resources meant to encourage self-care and heighten awareness of mental health and wellness throughout campus. Initiatives have included a Wellness Hub website of resources, yoga and mindfulness sessions, therapy dogs, workshops on managing stress and on mental health, special programming for first-year students, the creation of a green space of plants inside the student centre and other relaxing places on campus, special events and programming for Wellness Week, and outreach booths on campus throughout the year.

This past year, the group launched the Harms Reduction Wagon, where during Homecoming and St. Patrick's Day, members walked around the crowds, spoke with fellow students, and had such items as health and wellness pamphlet resources, water and snacks, naloxone kits, and condoms available. Navigate MtA team member Olivia Joudrey ('24) says the wagon was very well received by students and that they connected with more than 500 students during Homecoming and more than 300 during St. Patrick's Day.

The Navigate MtA team also collaborated with other mental health student groups and student support services to give out free hot chocolate and cider on campus during December and the lead up to exams. Meighen Centre staff participated to provide students with information and support and answer questions about centre-supported exam accommodations.

"I'm proud of what the Navigate MtA team has done," says Joudrey. "It's been a great experience, and I'm really excited to see that initiatives I created are living beyond my years at Mount A."

## MEIGHEN CENTRE NEWS

- In 2023-24, the centre supported more than 433 students.
- Students registered with the centre often identify as having ADHD or a learning disability. Many also identify as having a mental health disorder. Other students registered with the centre may have physical or chronic health disorders, hearing or visual impairments, concussion or neurological disabilities, or be on the autism spectrum.
- The centre provided individualized resources and supports, including important learning and exam accommodations, a special orientation for new students, meaningful workplace experience through internships with community organizations, and supported students participating in international field courses as part of their studies.
- 120 students worked as notetakers, supporting the academic success of 210 students in 194 courses. An amazing example of peer support.



OLIVER BATCHILDER

## MEET OLIVER BATCHILDER

### 2023-24 Health and Wellness Intern

Oliver Batchilder is a third-year student in the Frank McKenna School of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) with an interest in social and health public policy. After experiences working with the Public Health Association of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, and with the HIV Legal Network in Toronto, Batchilder was eager to apply for the position of Mount Allison Health and Wellness Intern. It was an opportunity to provide on-the-ground support and health advocacy within his own student community and to deepen his research and policy knowledge.

"I really enjoyed my internship this past year," says Batchilder. "There were a lot of different parts to it. Certainly, one of the main responsibilities was running the Wellness Centre's social media accounts, making sure that important health information was being shared with students, and communicating with students in a variety of other ways."

Through social media, Batchilder shared Wellness Centre news and events, news from other on-campus organizations such as Navigate MtA and Mounties 4 Mental Health, and information from the province's Horizon Health Network. Batchilder also made presentations at Orientation and campus Open House events, sharing with current and potential students information on the different health services and resources available.

"There are a lot of supports on campus and making sure those supports are articulated to students in a way that is clear and doesn't overwhelm them is important," says Batchilder, who also wrote a regular column on health and wellness issues in *The Argosy* student newspaper. "There are many ways to communicate health information to students and I think opportunities to do more and make sure health communication is a two-way conversation where students can respond."

Batchilder appreciates the opportunity the internship has provided to conduct primary research and statistical analysis and to gain a better understanding of the social determinants of health. He collected statistical information about various clinics (flu shot, STI testing, etc.) offered at the Wellness Centre and compiled reports about uptake, outreach success, and other variables.

"Being able to do this type of research through the University has been really impactful," says Batchilder. "The information that I found and recommendations that I have provided to Student Life and the Wellness Centre and other parts of the University are actually considered when improving programs and initiatives."

The Health and Wellness Intern sits on campus-wide health related committees. Batchilder was actively involved with the Student Alcohol/Substance Use Advisory Committee, composed of students, staff, and faculty. The committee supports a harm-reduction approach to alcohol and substance use and a safe, responsible, and respectful environment at Mount Allison.

"Through that committee, I've started one of the things I'm most proud of from my role," says Batchilder. "We've started putting together an alcohol use survey going out to students, looking to collect information about the habits of alcohol use at Mount Allison, the sources of where students get their alcohol from, the frequency of consumption, and information about students' awareness of the supports on campus related to alcohol use that can allow us to identify where the gaps exist and make sure we can fill them. I'm really proud to have worked on this and think it will get us some really interesting information that will then help inform policy development on campus."

Batchilder says the team hopes to send the survey out to students this fall. He will return as the 2024-25 Health and Wellness Intern, launching the survey and continuing much of his work from this past year. He also plans to conduct a new research project on the best ways to communicate public health information to university students.

The importance of looking at issues from a variety of perspectives, making decisions based on solid research and evidence, and communicating effectively are lessons Batchilder says he has very much come to understand through his work as Health and Wellness Intern and his studies in the PPE program. As a result, he is considering pursuing a Master of Public Health after graduation.

## WELLNESS CENTRE

Mount Allison's Wellness Centre is located in the Wallace McCain Student Centre. The Wellness Centre team includes counsellors, a mental health and harm reduction educator, registered nurse, and social worker.





## Rene Ross — Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Coordinator

Rene Ross joined Mount Allison University in March and has worked in sexual violence prevention education for the past 20 years. Ross will provide one-on-one and group education around sexual violence prevention, including a range of topics and concerns such as public health, safety, how to be a good bystander, the impact of gender-based discrimination, online dating, and personal safety.

"I feel very passionate and strongly about education and awareness," says Ross. "I've always been really involved with education campaigns to prevent sexual violence and for me that is why I became a sexual health educator."



## Scott Peters — Indigenous Student Advisor

Scott Peters joined Mount Allison in March and provides support to Indigenous students throughout their academic journey. Peters is a bilingual Mi'kmaq/English speaker originally from We'koqma'q located on Cape Breton Island.

"Growing up in a Mi'kmaq community firsthand and coming from a Mi'kmaq speaking family and Mi'kmaq speaking community, I understand how hard it can be and what it's like to leave your community to pursue post-secondary," says Peters. "It's really difficult for members of Mi'kma'ki or other Indigenous communities to leave their community. It can be a big culture shock."

He looks forward to working collaboratively with the community to support Indigenous students and bridge the gap during their transition into life on campus. Whether students are looking for financial support, accessibility information, or simply need someone to talk to and share a sense of community, Peters is committed to being there to assist every step of the way.

## MULTI-SPORT COMPLEX

Mount Allison announced it will build a new Multi-Sport Complex to house facilities for a variety of activities including intramural and club sports.

Construction on the building will start soon and it will first serve as an Interim Library while the University's R.P. Bell Library building undergoes major renovations. After the library construction project is completed, the building's interior will be converted into the Multi-Sport Complex.

Regular activity is essential for maintaining good physical health. It can also reduce stress, improve mental health, enhance academic performance, and build social bonds. By investing in the Multi-Sport Complex, the University will encourage students and everyone in its community to lead active lifestyles. Mount Allison will further promote a culture of wellness and self-care on campus. We look forward to keeping you updated on this long-term, consequential project.

## THANK YOU CLASS OF '67

In 2007, members of the Mount Allison alumni Class of 1967 got together to create the Class of '67 Accessibility Award. This bursary has been awarded 17 times to students with disabilities registered with the Meighen Centre, providing \$76,953 in direct support. The Class of '67 is currently fundraising among its classmates to increase the funds available for its bursary, creating an endowment that will support the award in perpetuity. The goal is to create a \$300,000 endowment on or before their 60th Reunion.

"The University is really grateful to the Class of '67," says Marcie Meekins, Mount Allison's director of development. "The class has some amazing and passionate leaders working to steward this fundraising effort and see the fund grow. The class has already had a great impact and their aspirations for helping future generations of Allisonians is inspiring and just awesome."