



QUEEN MARGARET'S SCHOOL

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QMS EARNS STIGMA-FREE DESIGNATION

Showcasing the Power of Community and Understanding

April 14, 2021 - Duncan, BC, Canada – stig·ma | \ 'stig-mə | *noun: a strong feeling of disapproval that most people in a society have about something, especially when this is unfair. (Cambridge Dictionary)*

Stigma, such a simple word that can have devastating consequences. Most commonly, stigma involves negative attitudes and discrimination against people based on characteristics such as mental illness, health conditions, diversability, gender, sexuality, religion, culture or race. Changing societal attitudes to create a safe zone for students, staff and parents at QMS became the goal for the Stigma-Free Club (SFC) thereby earning the Stigma-Free Society of BC's official "Stigma-Free School" designation.

"When we started on this journey our club's mission was to educate and have the wider community reflect on their words and attitudes as it relates to stigma," shares Liz Tarkowski, Learning Support Teacher at QMS. "I believe that we have achieved that, but we cannot become complacent. The club will continue its works to ensure that this legacy will live on." With such a passionate groups of advocates, the QMS Stigma-Free Club launched an entire month of theme weeks. For the month of February, each week was dedicated to erasing stigma around mental health, sexual orientation and gender identification, diversabilities, and culture and race. Students educated their peers through spoken and written poetry, chapel presentations, art, fundraising activities, a School Stigma-Free Day and multiple celebrations of our differences. "I'm very proud of these students," Tarkowski continues. "Their inspirational work raised \$1,500 for three local charities (Cowichan Youth Services, the Hiiye'yu Lelum House of Friendship and the Stigma-Free Society) and helped create a more inclusive school for everyone to enjoy."

David Robertson, Head of School, agrees that the future looks bright. "These students have essentially left a legacy of positivity for future generations. The SFC will continue with its mission to be agents of social change within the school and the wider community."

The School's efforts caught the attention of Andrea Paquette, President of the [Stigma Free Society of BC](#). "No school in the province has accomplished what QMS did in such a short period of time," she said. "Earning the Stigma-Free Designation is very hard as the requirements are detailed; taking time to plan and execute. So what QMS did is very inspiring. QMS' SFC club has embraced the journey to a Stigma-Free Designation, which meant a commitment to understanding, awareness and acceptance."

For Grade 12 student, and Stigma-Free Club member, Sophia Kazakoff, receiving the award was a poignant moment. "I'm so proud of everyone for putting in the effort to change. My classmates didn't want to remain oblivious to stigma. They took a genuine interest in the movement, asked questions and supported us. It has made my final year at the School an incredibly meaningful one."

Queen Margaret's School

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Yet, the journey is not over for Queen Margaret's School. Throughout the month of April, the Stigma-Free Club is tackling anti-Asian sentiment and as part of QMS' designation, every student is expected to embrace the ethos of acceptance by taking the [Stigma Free Pledge](#). The pledge provides tips on ways people can educate themselves on social stigma, change negative language usage, and live the values of respect and inclusion for all people.

About Queen Margaret's School

Established in 1921, Queen Margaret's School (QMS) is a trailblazing all gender ECE to Grade 12 university prep school that transforms how students learn and develop through a unique educational model combining experiential and inquiry-based learning, and entrepreneurial thinking, and equine facilitated leadership development.

Set on a beautiful 27-acre campus in Duncan, BC, Canada, our vision is to create new generations of confident leaders empowered to create a more just and connected world.

New world. New challenges. New learning.

For more details about Queen Margaret's School, please visit the school's website at www.qms.bc.ca.



For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:

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Photo: Grade 12 students, Sophia Kazakoff and Catherine Yuan accept QMS' Stigma Free Designation award from Stigma-Free Society President, Andrea Paquette.

Photo: Valentine's Day Candy Grams, pronoun buttons and ice cream sales were popular fundraising activities for the QMS Stigma-Free Club throughout February.

