



Showcasing the Talents of *Teens in Control* during COVID-19

The *Teens in Control* program provides education and support for youth ages 12 to 18 who have a family member with mental illness. When a family member has a mental illness, it's normal to have a lot of confusing feelings about it. By learning and talking about their family member's mental illness, youth can find support and better understand their situation.

Recently, BCSS began a monthly *Teens in Control* drop-in group for youth to access ongoing support. This drop-in group continues the conversation about mental illness and mental health from the 2-session *Teens in Control* workshops.

When the COVID-19 restrictions came into effect, myself and the other group facilitator moved the group online. We now meet monthly through video conference. The group still offers the same education and support that youth look forward to, but online instead. This is especially important during this difficult time when youth need support and connection more than ever.

"Online Teens in Control meetings were something I could look forward to each month, especially when there was not much else to do at home besides online schoolwork." – Teens in Control participant



In a typical *Teens in Control* group, there would be crafts, games, art, and (of course) delicious snacks. At first, I thought we couldn't do this with a virtual group, but I decided to embark on a showcase of the group's talents. I encouraged the youth to share some of their many talents with the rest of the group virtually and several youth volunteered to teach art nights like *Origami Night* and *Virtual Paint Night*. Giving them the opportunity to take on a leadership role, helped them recognize their strengths and resilience. I could see them glow with appreciation and recognition.

"I led the paint night and I was nervous at first, but absolutely everyone was so supportive, and it was very nice to know I was contributing in some way to the group because it has helped me so much!" – Teens in Control participant

I also put together self-care boxes for each of the participants. These boxes included paint materials for the *Virtual Paint Night*, as well as snacks and additional information on mental illness and mental health. I happily delivered each box to the participants, and it was so great to connect with these wonderful youth that I had gotten to know well over the past year.

"I loved the Self-Care Paint Night boxes! They were so thoughtful and my sister and I used or read everything in them."

– Teens in Control participant



One 16-year-old participant, who has been regularly attending the group, shared how the group has helped her. Her 12-year-old sister attends the group as well and agreed with her comments.

“This group has been helpful for me because it gives me an additional place to talk about my feelings and questions about living with someone with mental illness, with both adults and my peers. It has helpful information about mental illnesses that’s easy to understand, and it helps me be more social, especially during quarantine.” – Teens in Control participant

By adapting to an online format, this group has continued to provide much needed connection and support for these youth, helping them cope with the added challenges they are facing and feel less alone. They are reminded that when it comes to mental illness in their families – they didn’t cause it, they can’t change it, but they can learn to care for themselves.

“Even though I am a co-facilitator, these groups have done so much for me. Even with my schooling in mental health I never learned what I learned facilitating Teens in Control. Understanding now my past trauma, I feel like I can actually understand why and how it happened in my family. If I had these groups when I was 12 -18, my life today would have been so different.” – Lisa Mann (co-facilitator)

BC Schizophrenia Society will be offering more online *Teens in Control* workshops and drop-in groups for youth across BC this summer and fall. Family members or professionals can refer youth to the groups, or youth 14+ can register themselves. For more information or to register, please call or text: 778-903-2752 or email: kidsincontrol@bcss.org.

- Shelley Jensen, Kids & Teens in Control Coordinator