



2020

# Young Professional Award

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## Donovan Taplin

In recognition of exemplary leadership and outstanding contributions to the development of a standard on psychological health and safety for post-secondary students



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In only a short time as a member with CSA Group, Donovan Taplin has exhibited compassionate leadership and dedication in their role as Vice Chair of a Technical Committee formed in 2018 to develop a standard on psychological health and safety for post-secondary students. Donovan also skillfully coordinated the activities of several working groups within the Technical Committee to develop additional guidance to support the new CSA Z2003:20, *Mental health and well-being for post-secondary students* standard.

Donovan consistently encouraged and raised creative solutions to address challenges associated with the technical content of the standard. They sought to foster an inclusive environment in which members were encouraged to work together and collaborate in order to reach consensus on many strategic as well as tactical issues associated with the standard.

The ability to successfully take up a leadership position within a large, new committee addressing the subject of mental health and the very complex social issues and demands associated with the topic is, in large part, the result of Donovan's unique history in public service. At the age of 19, Donovan was elected to municipal office in Newfoundland and Labrador. From 2013 to 2017, as a Councillor for the Town of Wabana, Bell Island, Donovan was an unwavering steward of the community's resources. While in office, they also introduced proclamations to establish the municipality's first recognition of Mental Illness Awareness Week, and Pride. Concurrently, Donovan served on Newfoundland and Labrador's Premier's Youth Advisory Committee, the Prime Minister's Youth Council, and represented young Canadians at official events for the United Nations and G7 in Brazil and Japan. It is evident that Donovan has long been committed to creating a better, safer and more sustainable world.

Donovan is guided by empathy. By sharing their personal history and experiences with mental illness and mental health, and deeply respecting the experiences of others, Donovan underlined the importance of lived expertise in committee deliberations. They made specific efforts to ensure that the voices of students, peers, families and careers were all strongly represented.

A strong advocate for the success of the Z2003 standard, Donovan has led several outreach efforts, including participating in the 2019 Faces of Mental Illness Campaign with the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health and Bell Let's Talk. They served as a keynote speaker at the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference for the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) in June 2019 in Calgary. Donovan further promoted the development and adoption of the standard at the Canadian Mental Health Association National Conference, at a special gathering of the Atlantic Association of Universities, and at consultations led by the Mental Health Commission of Canada from Whitehorse to Montreal. Believing in the potential of standards to support global student mental health, Donovan represented CSA Group and shared key insights from the technical committee at the 5th International Conference on Youth Mental Health in Brisbane, Australia in October 2019.

During the development of the standard, Donovan was a student in the Master of Professional Communication program at Ryerson University. Previously, Donovan earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communications Studies and Folklore at Memorial University, a course of study Donovan fondly refers to as a degree in storytelling. As was clearly demonstrated in their role as Vice-Chair, Donovan believes storytelling is the cornerstone of making a difference.

Currently, Donovan is a Health Communication and Knowledge Translation Specialist at Health & Wellness, University of Toronto. Donovan continues to care deeply about supporting future generations of students and has often been an advocate for the unique challenges of students from rural, remote, and Northern Canada, queer and trans students, and students who are the first in their families to attend post-secondary education.

One of Donovan's numerous nominators for this award referred to them as "an old soul with a fresh perspective," noting that their wisdom, compassion and humanity are a gift to mental health advocacy in this country. A trusted advisor to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, Donovan has supported countless young people to channel their lived experiences into contributions for systemic change. Without question, Donovan is an individual who will continue to contribute to, and will demand, that the future is held to a higher standard.