



VICTORS FOR MICHIGAN

MEDICINE NEEDS VICTORS

Peer-to-Peer Depression Awareness Campaign

A partnership between the University of Michigan Depression Center and area schools



MICHIGAN MEDICINE
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The first signs of many mental health issues often emerge during the middle and high school years. To foster positive development and help students reach their full potential, it is vital that everyone, from peers to teachers, learn to recognize symptoms and encourage those in need to seek help.

The University of Michigan Depression Center's approach to helping youth with depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders relies on two critical components: 1) meeting with youth in their school, and 2) utilizing the help of those they trust most — their peers. This work has grown significantly since 2007 when the Depression Center first partnered with the Ann Arbor Public Schools to raise staff awareness of depression and suicide prevention. Two years later, the Peer-to-Peer Depression Awareness Campaign (P2P) was created, developing innovative mental health awareness and stigma reduction messages to help students connect with one another.

Since its launch in 2009 the program has continued to grow, with hundreds of students from schools across Washtenaw County and beyond creating depression awareness campaigns that have reached thousands of their peers. During the last school year, the teams reached more of their peers than ever before.

"I loved making a positive impact regarding mental health. I liked seeing my fellow students reach out and seek help." –P2P Participant

REACHING OUT

Each year, the Depression Center team lays the groundwork for the program with a one-day conference for student team members. Working to improve their understanding of mental

illnesses, the students participate in seminars on mental health, factors that impact mood (sleep, substance abuse, and technology), and positive coping skills.

Following the conference, students design unique outreach initiatives that may include presentations, workshops, classroom lesson plans, bulletin boards, videos and handouts. Many of the groups also distribute awareness-building novelties, create mental health messages to be shared with the entire school via morning public address announcements, and staff information tables. Social media tools are also an important part of some teams' approaches.

The Depression Center works to connect students with local mental health resources and guest speakers to educate and share personal experiences of struggle and help-seeking. In order to expand their reach, P2P students have participated in parent nights, where they engage in discussions about how parents can support their child's mental health. Many schools now hold awareness days and months annually.

Each year, the student teams include at least five students; however, some have had more than 20 members. Together, these teams show incredible creativity, using innovative and effective messages to reach out to thousands of classmates. These students successfully show area youth how to recognize the warning signs of anxiety and depression, and how to find help in critical situations.

"I think P2P outreach truly helps educate kids about basic mental health and where to turn for help. I believe that this program enhances a supportive mental health environment at school."
–P2P Faculty Mentor

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Program evaluation consistently shows positive gains in participating schools:

- Students are more confident in their ability to identify someone who is showing common signs of depression and to help them to access mental health support services
- They are more likely to seek help if they were experiencing symptoms of depression themselves
- Students are less likely to keep it a secret if a friend is thinking about suicide
- They are more comfortable discussing mental health issues with their peers
- Students reported lower stigma in their school environment related to students with mental health challenges

SUPPORT

Through a coalition of private and public support, the Peer-to-Peer Depression Awareness Campaign has gained an important foothold in area schools. This support, including funds raised by the Depression Center Community Volunteer Committee, has proven critical as record numbers of students are now involved and learning about the signs of depression and anxiety and how to find help. The Depression Center hopes to continue the campaign in the coming years, maintaining its partnership with schools across Washtenaw County and beyond, and engaging additional schools as funding allows.

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