

Active Minds, Inc.

Bringing Theory to Practice Project

Student Civic Engagement Track of the Civic Engagement Imperative Conference

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What is Active Minds?

A student-run mental health awareness, education, and advocacy organization on the college campus

Mental Illness and College Students

- NIMH estimates that 22.1% of all Americans 18+ suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year
 - Young adults aged 18-24 have the highest prevalence of diagnosable forms of mental illness at 27% (Herrman, 2001)
- Half of all adults with depression report onset before age 20
- 75% of people with schizophrenia experience onset between the ages of 15-25
- 22% of college students were sometimes so depressed they could not function, and almost 10% have seriously contemplated suicide (ACHA)



Mental Illness and College Students (cont.)

- More children and young adults die from suicide each year than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, and chronic lung disease combined
- Over 4,000 children and young adults take their lives each year, making suicide the 3rd leading cause of death among 18-24 year olds
 - 2nd leading cause of death for college students
- From 1952 to 1995, the rate of suicide in children and young adults has tripled
- 95% of students who commit suicide have a diagnosable mental illness (AFSP)

Active Minds' Mission

- To utilize peer outreach to increase students' awareness of mental health issues, symptoms of mental illness, and available resources for seeking help
- To serve as liaison between students and the mental health community, and become a point of reference about mental illness and promotion of good mental health

The History

Active Minds, Inc.

- Active Minds on Campus: a student-run mental health awareness, education, and advocacy program on the college campus
- Active Minds, Inc.: National headquarters in Washington, D.C.
 - dedicated to developing and supporting chapters of the student group on college campuses nationwide, and creating a network of young adult advocates

Active Minds on Campus: What We Do

- **Discuss**
 - Encourage discussion about mental health issues
- **Educate**
 - Educate students about signs, symptoms and prevalence of mental illness; and available resources
- **Expose**
 - Expose students to other persons (esp. young adults) who have experienced mental illness
- **Plan campus-friendly events**
 - ...that reach as many members of the campus community as possible!

Active Minds Chapters: Sample Events

- Mental Health Awareness Week
 - Speakers, brown bag lunch sessions, movie screenings
- Charity Coffeehouse, Vigils
- Stress Relief Activities
- Journal Publications
- "Stomp out Stigma" Run

1st Annual Taking Steps Towards Open Minds Run - 3/24/2002



Active Minds: Role within the University and Mental Health Community

- Student-run organization...
 - 7-10 member (student) Executive Board
 - Part of Student Activities Council
 - Some funding
 - Staff/Faculty Advisor
- ...With support from, and affiliated with:
 - Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
 - Vice Provost of University Life, other Student Affairs Administrators
 - Office of the President

Who is in Active Minds?

Generally...

- Students with diagnosed mental health disorders
- Students with family members or friends who live with mental illness
- Suicide Survivors
- Psychology majors, Nursing students, Social Work students
- Students simply interested in learning more

Why Peer Advocacy?

- Non-threatening
- Empowers students into being proactive against the stigma that they have encountered
- Educates those who may not have much experience with, but are interested in, mental health issues
- Capitalizes on the energy of young adults
- Administrators respond well to students and "the student voice"
- Students are the best ones to know how to reach other students!

"Students are the main line of defense, but often the last to be heard"

- University of Pennsylvania President Judith Rodin

The Expansion Process

- Why?
 - There are few groups out there! National mental health organizations and University communities are starting to appreciate the need for such outreach...
 - But we can count the number of existing collegiate groups on one hand!
- Where We Are:
 - American University, Brandeis University, Brown University, Bryant University, Columbia University, Dartmouth College, Duke University, Emory University, Frostburg State University, Georgetown University, George Washington University, Ithaca College, Lehman College, Mars Hill College, Mercyhurst College, Middle Tennessee State University, Niagara University, Northland College, University of Illinois at Springfield, University of Mary Washington, University of Maryland, University of Pennsylvania, University of Sioux Falls, University of Wisconsin, Washburn University, West Chester University

Active Minds, Inc.:

Expressing the Voice, and Fostering a Movement, of Young Adult Mental Health Advocates

- Comprehensive website
 - www.activeminds.org
- Annual 'Mental Health on Campus' Conference
 - 3rd Annual held at Duke University, on October 14-15th, 2005
 - Next one: October 2006 at American University, Washington DC

What Can You Do?

- Start your own chapter of Active Minds or similar organization to raise awareness of mental health issues on your campus
- Talk with your school's Counseling Services to see if you can work with them and help with their outreach
- Contact your local Mental Health Association (MHA) or Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) to see if they will sponsor an event on your campus
- Talk with the Psychology department at your school and see what they can help you, or you can help them, do!

Advocating for Mental Health on Campus: Other Resources

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's "The Truth About Suicide: Real Stories of Depression" video
- National Mental Health Association mpower: musicians for mental health concert series
- Screening for Mental Health, Inc. College Response Program
- Online initiatives (ULifeline, AFSP Screening Tool)

Good Starter Events

- Basic educational campaign
 - Flyering, handing out brochures from NIMH, NAMI, NMHA
- Silver Ribbon or Silver Wristband for the Brain Campaign
- Bring a speaker to campus
 - ex. Ross Szabo - National Mental Health Awareness Campaign; Lizzie Simon - Author Detour: My Bipolar Road Trip Through 4-D; Kay Redfield Jamison, Tipper Gore, Senator Pete Domenici, or similar "big name"
- Stress-relief activities during Finals
- Make a short presentation to the Psychology classes

What Does it Take to Start a Group?

- Recognition by your school's Activity Council (or similarly-named entity)
 - Each University is unique and has unique policies!
 - Common requirements include a Constitution, Advisor, at least 3 interested members
- Registration with Active Minds, Inc.
- Dedication, perseverance, and a passion for the cause!*

Interested in Advocating on your Campus?

Contact Jessica, the Chapters Coordinator, at:
jessica@activemindsoncampus.org

Visit our website:
www.activeminds.org

Join our electronic listserve:
<http://www.activemindsoncampus.org/news/listserv.php>

"Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but stigma and bias shame us all. Together, we will replace stigma with acceptance, ignorance with understanding, fear with new hope for the future."

-President Bill Clinton, June 5, 1999