

# Chippewa Valley coalitions host teen mental health challenges

- By Nicole Tuttle For MediaNews Group – The Macomb Daily
- Mar 3, 2021



Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families' Coalition Teen Councils are hosting Mental Health Challenges in March for students. Pictured are Chippewa Valley High School Coalition Teen Council members at a 2019 Be Aware 5K for Youth Suicide Prevention.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLENE MCGUNN



Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families' Coalition Teen Councils are hosting Mental Health Challenges for students during March. Although the 2020 Be Aware 5K for Youth Suicide Prevention was held virtually in October, allowing walkers to participate from anywhere, a small group gathered outside at Dakota for a release of doves to mark the start of the walk.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEPHANIE LANGE



Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families' Coalition Teen councils are hosting Mental Health Challenges for students at Dakota and Chippewa Valley high schools throughout March.

NICOLE TUTTLE FOR THE MACOMB DAILY

---

As the discovery of the first cases of COVID-19 in Michigan nears the one-year mark, a new mental health challenge allowing teens to support their peers has emerged in Chippewa Valley high schools.

The idea to participate in the March 30-Day Mental Health Challenge was developed through the Coalition Teen Councils of two district high schools. The councils are part of a larger Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families, formed almost 30 years ago to reduce and prevent youth substance use and suicide. The larger coalition combines the school district, local families and communities in a partnership.

Charlene McGunn, the Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families executive director, said that the teen councils and their moderators selected to offer the challenges that kicked off March 1 for their respective schools to create a greater awareness of the need for daily self-care.

"It includes things about exercising your brain, gratitude, happiness challenges, yoga, a variety of ideas that students themselves create for other students," McGunn said.

The mental health challenge offered to students at each high school involves joining a group on the Remind app by texting a specific address, then following the directions on the remind to get materials. Materials assist students in doing one act of self-care per day the entire month.

"There are a variety of different mindfulness supportive activities. It also helps students identify if they have struggles, and if they do have struggles, it shows how to deal with it," McGunn said.

Each school also offers a small incentive to participate. Those who complete a self-care assessment survey at the end of the month are entered for a chance to win a prize. Four student participants at each school will win a \$10 Amazon gift card.

The Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families serves the geographic area within the boundaries of Chippewa Valley Schools district, which is made up of portions of Clinton and Macomb townships and includes both Chippewa Valley and Dakota high schools.

McGunn said the coalition has been working on districtwide efforts to address student mental health, involving school social workers, counselors and psychologists. A primary focus has been on school-based approaches, particularly for middle and high school students. Counselors and student assistance specialists have regularly met with high school students via technology, McGunn said. Surveys also went out to high school students shortly before holiday break, asking what their teachers could do to make them feel more connected and to help them learn better.

Results were shared with teachers. Mental health information has been disseminated to parents and school staff as well. However, many teens have been able to find positives within the confines of COVID-19 as well, surprisingly, listing more family time as one of them.

“It is a reminder for us as adults in fact, that youth still need the involvement of parents. A lot of what we really do hear also is that the attitudes of adolescents, are very much shaped by their parents attitudes,” McGunn said. “That is actually true across age levels.”

One key area of mental health focus has been on supporting and assisting students with necessary school transitions, such as moving from elementary to middle school or middle school to high school, McGunn said. Transitions can create anxiety and uncertainty for students, particularly during COVID-19.

“We have to be flexible, we have to consider all the contingencies. But there are common features of transition regardless of the circumstances,” McGunn said.

To ease this anxiety, the coalition is considering virtual school tours and finding ways of having current high school students chat with transitioning middle school students.

“We have initiated a group at Wyandot (middle school) that is a chat group, between Wyandot students and members of our Chippewa Valley Coalition Teen Council, for when the eighth grade moves up to Chippewa Valley next year,” McGunn said.

Earlier in the school year, the coalition re-imagined its annual walk for youth suicide prevention, held in conjunction with KnowResolve Youth Suicide Awareness Prevention. The Be Aware 5K for Youth

Suicide Prevention was held virtually, allowing walkers to participate from anywhere between Oct. 17 and Oct. 24, 2020. It fundraised for the youth suicide awareness and prevention programs of KnowResolve and Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families.