

Active Minds: De-stigmatizing Mental Health

Program Directors:

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College of Education and Social Services

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Overview of The Program:

Active Minds: De-stigmatizing Mental Health is a program dedicated to educating ourselves and others about the stigma of mental health. Our program will work toward this goal by hosting events such as movie nights, discussions, guest speakers, student presentations and volunteer events. The program is open to anyone with the desire to educate themselves and others about mental health. The program aims to attract a diverse group of students across different academic and personal backgrounds: supporters and allies alike. The program is meant to be supportive to those involved, but will not be a therapy group. The program directors feel this program is a good outlet to acknowledge mental health, which is something everybody has but is not necessarily aware of. In the past this program has been found to be extremely beneficial when it comes to personal growth and developing interpersonal relationships. Through breaking down the stigma, students can develop deeper bonds with fellow students and within themselves.

Learning Objectives & Action Steps:

LEARNING OBJECTIVE #1

Create awareness around mental health and the prevalence of mental illness; the risks, signs, and symptoms of particular mental illnesses; and available resources for seeking help.

Action Steps:

- Everyone will participate in bi-weekly movie nights accompanied with discussions. The films will be chosen based on content relating to mental health

issues. When possible, we would like to bring a member of the counseling staff to come and facilitate a discussion related to that specific movie.

- Each student will research a mental illness, or find a current event related to mental health and make an informal presentation on their topic.
- Each student will make an effort to maintain and update their knowledge regarding mental health and related events. The suite will have a white board where students can write a link to an online mental health article, or write other relevant facts related to mental health.
- Each student may choose to attend an Active Minds Club Event, or other events that promote mental health awareness on campus.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE #2

Interaction with people struggling with mental health issues/disorders. Through these interactions (volunteering, guest speakers, etc.) each member of the suite will increase their knowledge and awareness, and help reduce stigma.

Action Steps:

- Each member will volunteer and/or participate in the Out of the Darkness Walk in October 2011.
- Each member will attend an organized discussion of their choice about different mental health issues facilitated by a member of the UVM Counseling Staff.
- Each student will attend a presentation put on by a Mental Health Professional in the community. We plan on having on or two speakers outside of the UVM Counseling Center that work for a mental health agency.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE #3

Work to reduce the stigma that surrounds mental health through events open to the entire L/L community. We will achieve this goal through organized discussion, events, and postering campaigns.

Action Steps:

- Everyone will contribute to creating and distributing posters and flyers aimed at decreasing the stigma surrounding mental health.
- Our suite will organize dinners open to the entire L/L community that will consist of a discussion related to a mental health issue.
- Each member of the suite may choose to table at a campus wide Active Minds event to promote and raise awareness of mental health issues to the UVM community.

Community Service:

As mentioned in the action steps above, members of the Active Minds suite will Volunteer at the Out of the Darkness Walk. Out of the Darkness is an extremely powerful, 5k walk sponsored by the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention. The walk honors survivors and supporters of people who've lost loved ones to suicide. We as a suite will raise money toward suicide prevention research. This event will not only enable us to interact with people who have been deeply affected by mental health issues, it will also be a great team building activity. In the spring, our suite plans to participate in Relay for Life, a 24-hour walk to raise money for cancer research. Losing a family member or friend to cancer can be heart wrenching and play a huge role on our mental health. This will be a way to honor our own friends we have lost to cancer.

Program Advisor:

Annie Cressey from the Center of Health and Wellbeing has agreed to resume her position as advisor for the Active Minds suite. She is also the advisor of Active Minds @ UVM, so she will be a wonderful asset to our program. She has a lot to offer in terms of organizing campus-wide events as she works in the Center of Health and Wellbeing. We hope to meet with Annie as a suite on a regular basis and have her as involved as possible.

Program Suites:

This past year, the Active Minds program had two neighboring suites. We think it's essential to have the suites on the same level again to encourage communication and team building. We don't see our program needing more than 2 suites, and we would like to make our program co-ed if possible. Additionally, because of the nature of our program, we would like to welcome students of all abilities. Because of this, we hope to consider being on the ground floor to accommodate students of all abilities.

Plans for interactions with other L/L Programs:

We would be interested in hosting a "Pet Therapy" event with the "Animalia suite." Pets have a natural way of calming and relieving stress, so our hope is that our event will have that effect on UVM students. We hope to host it during a stressful time, such as midterms, or finals, in a very public place, such as the Davis Center so the entire UVM community could be involved. Through this event, we could also partner with a community organization, such as "Therapy Dogs of Vermont." Creative Expressions would also be fun to work with to channel different ways people cope with stress and difficult feelings. We could have a night in the fireplace lounge where paper and paints

could be available for writing, painting, or other forms of creation. In the busyness of college, it's easy to go through the motions without pausing to do something healing for our selves. We hope this event would encourage people to have some moments of peace. Finally, we would like to partner with SPECTRUM to have a conversation on the struggles related to mental health and sexual orientation. The five suicides in September 2010, really opened the campuses' eyes to how bullying affects an individual's state of mind. Our hope is that we would be able to comfortably talk about a very sensitive topic. We could make dinner together and discuss this topic over dinner to make it a little more comfortable and informal. There are so many possibilities when it comes to collaborating with other suites. Our program will fit beautifully into the Health Professions and Wellness community, as our suite will promote mental health awareness and wellness.

Program Member Recruitment:

Once we find out if our program has been accepted for next year, we will put up fliers in the ACCESS office, the Counseling Center, the Allan House, and L/L. Continuing to discuss our program at Active Minds meetings is another strategy we will use. During admitted students days, we will try to have information available about our program for incoming students. If possible, we would like to be at the Fireplace Lounge when students come in for tours to promote our program. We would also like to try to be at orientation to talk our program up to incoming freshman. Students will be beginning to apply for housing and this might be a good way to make students who haven't heard of the program interested. Finally, I think it might be good to make announcements about our program to our classes because we never know who might be interested in applying.

