#standtogether
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Stand Together initiative trains, inspires and equips middle and high school youth to take action against stigma toward youth with mental and/or substance use disorders to reduce negative attitudes, beliefs, and social distance between youth with these disorders and their peers.

Stand Together is based upon a peer-to-peer, service learning model in which students are educated about an issue and then act to address the issue. Stand Together's three goals are to increase education/awareness, increase social inclusion, and encourage adolescents to reach out to an adult they trust when they are concerned about their own or another student's behavioral health.

Each participating school will identify at least one adult advisor, typically a teacher, to champion Stand Together; schools are encouraged to identify advisors who have a personal interest in this issue and choose to function as the project advisor. They select 20 student leaders who will be listened to by their peers as well as students who have or have been affected by mental and/or substance use disorders to form the core planning group. These students will undergo two days of training (between September and the middle of November). Each school will choose from one of three levels of participation (described below) and will then implement their anti-stigma project for the students in their school.

In Day One of the training, students learn about various mental and substance use disorders as well as the impact of stigma on youth with these disorders through interactive lessons using videos, music, and exercises that actively engage youth in the learning process. The students also engage in team-building activities.

The content of Day Two of training will be determined by the level of participation selected by the advisor and students. For schools selecting levels one or two, students will be given a list of pre-defined projects supplied by the Stand Together staff and will be given a set budget to implement the project along with a description of the steps involved in developing each project. Level one schools will develop one major project. Level two schools will create two major projects. Schools will select their projects and then plan the implementation of the project with guidance from the trainer, in conjunction with the advisor, during the workshop.

Schools selecting the third level of participation will define their own projects and will brainstorm strategies for reducing stigma in their school or community. The goal, by the end of the second day, is to have an outline of the activities that will constitute the project. A third half day of training can take place to assist students to learn about writing a grant proposal and developing a project budget. They will be eligible for up to $1000 to implement those projects. The project proposal will be submitted within four weeks after the final day of training.

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services will provide ongoing support and technical assistance to the schools as they move forward in developing and implementing their projects, emphasizing each of the three goals. Schools will contribute Facebook and Twitter postings as well as photos, videos, and blog postings for the Stand Together website throughout the planning and implementation process. As part of their projects, schools will encourage students to sign the Stop the Stigma petition on the Stand Together website. Schools must complete their projects by the beginning of April and submit reports using a format developed by OBH staff.

After the projects are completed all participating schools will attend a recognition event later in the school year and will make a three- to five-minute presentation to other participating schools about their projects. Expenses for this event, as well as all aspects of the Stand Together project, are covered by the Stand Together initiative.

For further information on the Stand Together project:

http://standtogether.againststigma.org

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