



# #standtogether PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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

Based on evidence from successful anti-stigma programs, Stand Together utilizes a peer-to-peer, service-learning model in which students are educated about a problem and then act to address the issue. Stand Together's three goals are to increase education and awareness, promote social inclusion, and encourage adolescents to reach out to a trusted adult when they are concerned about their own or another student's behavioral health.

Each participating school identifies at least two advisors to champion the Stand Together team. Schools identify advisors who have a personal interest in this issue and choose to function as the project advisor. The advisors work with other staff to identify 20-25 students to lead the program in their school. This core planning group includes student leaders, as well as individuals who have been personally affected by mental and/or substance use disorders and represent the diversity in the student body. These students and their advisors undergo two full days of training in the fall (between September and December) at their respective schools.

The two days of training provide a foundation for the students' projects. The first day, students learn about various mental and substance use disorders, as well as the impact of stigma on youth with these disorders, through interactive lessons that use videos, music, and exercises to engage youth in the learning process. The students also engage in team-building activities to encourage solidarity and strength within their group.

The second day of training uses the information and experiences the students obtained during the first day to design and plan projects for their peers. The students select and then plan the implementation of their projects with guidance from the trainer and advisor during the workshop. Teams must complete at least three projects during the school year to promote retention of information and engagement from the student body. After the training workshops, schools submit project proposals to Stand Together staff and then are given funding to implement their projects.

Students have the option of using pre-designed toolkits supplied by Stand Together staff to implement the project or they can design their own project. The toolkits walk students through the steps involved in developing the projects. Schools designing their own projects 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 constitute the project.

Stand Together staff provides 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 contribute photos and videos that are shared on our @stand2getherpgh Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram channels; each school is encouraged to utilize this medium for their own projects to reach peers. Planning and projects are chronicled on the Stand Together website with blogs for each school. In addition, students are encouraged to sign the Stop the Stigma pledge.

After the projects are completed, all participating schools participate in the annual Recognition Event in the community. Students share their work with other schools, friends and family, and community supporters through presentations and interactive exhibits of their projects. The final step is for each school to submit a final report assessing the impact of their activities in their schools. Expenses for the Recognition Event, as well as all aspects of the project are covered by Stand Together.

**For further information on the Stand Together project:**



[standtogether.againststigma.org](http://standtogether.againststigma.org)



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