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## Fox Chapel Area students observe Stands Together Week to better manage mental health, substance abuse struggles

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COURTESY OF THE FOX CHAPEL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Fox Chapel Area High School Stands Together team members Ava McCaffrey (third from right) and Eileen Healy (right) assist peers in adding their handprints to a FC Stands Together banner on April 25, 2022 in the high school cafeteria. Color-coded handprints represent a mental health or substance abuse disorder that has affected students and staff members either directly or indirectly, or the handprints signal support for overcoming the stigmas associated with the disorders.

Fox Chapel Area High School observed FC Stands Together Week April 25-29 to help students better manage mental health and substance abuse struggles and the stigmas association with them.

Stand Together is a program of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services. Participating students begin a yearlong commitment by taking part in two five-hour workshops that focus on mental health and substance abuse disorders, the stigmas associated with them and service learning. The students then planned and implemented projects for the school.

Stands Together Week activities at FCAHS, all took place during lunch periods.

Take the Pledge Day on April 25 had students making a large color-coded banner to show how many of them had been affected by mental health issues, substance abuse or both. Students willing to fight stigmas associated with those disorders added handprints.

On Self Advocacy Day on April 26 students and staff made bead bracelets, the colors in them representing the types of mental health and/or substance abuse issues that have affected them. The effort also recognized how hobbies, such as jewelry making, can improve mental health.

An Opportunities Fair on Wednesday on April 27 gave all students a chance to earn raffle tickets to win a self-care gift basket.

Anti-Stigma Day on April 28 used chocolate chip cookies to convey the message of: "Chip Away the Stigma." Students and staff learned how particular words can cause people with mental health and substance abuse disorders to feel ashamed and embarrassed, potentially causing them to withdraw and isolate.

An ice cream social on Get the Scoop Day on April 29 provided information about the support services available to them at FCAHS.

The Fox Chapel Area stand together team is primarily led by students, with gifted support facilitator Lisa Gibson and school counselor Rachel Machen serving as co-sponsors.

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