

PROVIDER CORNER: THE NAN PROJECT



The NAN Project, based in Lexington, Massachusetts is an organization dedicated to the memory and legacy of Nancy Cavanaugh or "Nan." Nan was an inspiring, caring young woman who took her own life on

April 11, 2012 because she could not find the services, support, or hope needed to defeat the pain. Since then her family and friends have been trying to understand and learn more about suicide and how to reduce its prevalence. The result of much thought and discussion is The NAN Project – an initiative to increase understanding, support, and the treatment of depression in young people.

The NAN Project holds educational events in schools and in the community seeking to improve the conversation around mental health concerns and ultimately reduce suicidal thoughts among young people. If you know a school who could use this program, [Fill out the form](#) on their website.

PEER MENTORS

Peer Mentors (PMs) are the core of The NAN Project. These young adults live, go to school, and work all over Massachusetts and many are graduates of the DMH funded Gathering and Inspiring Future Talent (GIFT) Peer Mentor Training. To hear the PMs describe themselves in their own words check out the [Peer Mentor Spotlight](#).

For the safety of everyone involved, Peer Mentors complete the rigorous four day training before starting work in the classroom. Around 150 PMs have completed this training which covers appropriate conduct, safe messaging, presentation skills, and Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Suicide Prevention certification. Senior Peer Mentors have the opportunity to receive additional trainings throughout the year in Botvin LifeSkills, Mental Health First Aid, SafeTalk, and art therapy. The NAN Project's full time Peer Coordinators and the Project Coordinator work with the Peer Mentors and ensuring presentation days run smoothly.

COMEBACK STORIES

All of The NAN Project's Peer Mentors have crafted a story of their lived experience with mental health challenges, and are coached on how to present those stories in a way that inspires hope and uplifts their audience. These "Comeback Stories" contain three main sections: 1) a peer mentor's background and experiences, 2) the strengths and supports that helped them overcome hardship, and 3) what gives them hope today.

As a resource tool, The NAN Project also produced an educational film [13 Reasons Why We Need to Talk about Suicide](#) to inform viewers about the true risk factors that increase the chances someone may consider suicide, inform on the supports available, and empower the audience with the tools to reach out to a loved one in crisis.

The NAN Project emphasizes the messages of HOPE and HELP by:

- Acknowledging that mental illness is a serious problem among young people;
- Accepting mental health challenges as illnesses of the brain that are treatable; and
- Providing access to treatment for all families and their children.

OPERATIONS

The NAN Project operates under [Eliot Community Human Services](#), and is supported by its infrastructure and clinical services. Eliot is a private, non-profit human services organization providing services for people of all ages throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. A board and an advisory group work closely with The NAN Project to develop the structure and mode, and ensure its ongoing success. Since The NAN Project was founded in late 2015, the organization has reached over 6,000 students and 2,000 educators and community members in nearly 3 dozen cities and towns across Massachusetts.