

Miss Shore Resort Raises Awareness of Mental Health

The news is rife with articles, essays and interviews related to the crisis in youth and teen mental health in America. Depression, anxiety and suicide among youth have been steadily increasing in recent years. CNN just reported that five states (including New Jersey) saw increases in suicide rates for youth ages 10 through 19 since the onset of the pandemic. One New Jersey activist who is all too aware of this situation from a personal and global perspective has partnered with MHANJ to take action and make a difference. Isabelle (Belle) Nicholas is a dynamic young mental health advocate who also happens to be the reigning Miss Shore Resort 2022. The title of Miss Shore Resort allows her to be a candidate for the title of Miss New Jersey within the Miss America organization at a competition which will take place in June.

Ms. Nicholas majored in Musical Theatre with a minor in Spanish at James Madison University. After dealing with her own mental health crisis and going into therapy, she decided to transition from a career in musical theatre to pursuing a master's and doctorate degree in Counseling Psychology. She is the founder and host of a podcast devoted to mental health and wellness called *Shout Our Struggle* (SOS). Her impact statement for SOS clearly emphasizes the need for open conversations, "The philosophy of my Social Impact Initiative, Shout Our Struggle, is that sharing our mental health stories and cultivating a culture in our youth of mental wellness through education will begin to improve the state of mental health in our country."

Ms. Nicholas is very open about her own mental health struggles and her diagnoses of major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and illness anxiety. She first connected with MHANJ through our ongoing collaboration with the New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC). In her current role as the Administrative Specialist of Student Life at Rowan College, she became aware of a suicide prevention training, QPR- Question, Persuade, Refer; that was being offered on campus by the Mental Health Association in New Jersey. After taking the training she went to the website and contacted the Association to learn more. "I wanted to see how I could become a part of the change that MHANJ is creating," she said.

To read more click here:

Ms. Nicholas has now completed the Mental Health First Aid training for adults and is excited to be trained in the youth version and be a part of MHANJ's teen initiative in the future. She has also enthusiastically offered to volunteer with us. "I was so excited when I heard about Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and all the levels of MHFA and that a framework already existed to help in that way."

"This sequence of events proves the validity of MHANJ's collaboration with NJCCC and the impact it is having in helping us reach young people," said Bob Kley, COO of the Mental Health Association. We are excited to be on 15 of the state's 18 community college campuses and we hope to train and support many more young people.

We are so grateful to have Belle Nicholas as part of our team and salute her many initiatives. Through her efforts, mental health education and literacy is expanding to a younger audience. We wish her well in her Scholarship Competition with Miss America. More importantly we will be watching this young dynamo lend her talents to the cause of mental health and wellness. "I know, with my hard work and passion, *Shout Our Struggle* and the Mental Health Association in New Jersey will be a dynamic partnership that will create so much change for our New Jersey Youth."

Follow Belle on her podcast and social media:

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