STUDENT SPOTLIGHT : Charlie Anania

SMASHING THE STIGMA IN MAINE



Charlie Anania

When Charlie Anania graduated from Greely High School in Cumberland, Maine earlier this month, it marked the end of a more than two-year mental health journey. A journey that began when he was a sophomore, unexpectedly hospitalized, and concluded in his senior year with him proudly co-leading one of the most successful high school Active Minds chapters in New England.

"For me, my lowest point was two years ago when I was unexpectedly hospitalized for a rare health condition with life-altering implications. I couldn't play the sports I loved, I was behind two months in my schoolwork, and worst of all, I felt alone," Charlie shared. However, he soon realized he was not alone. With the support of family, friends, and school personnel, he began to see how fortunate he was. This led him to think about other students who might be struggling with their own mental health challenges but lack a support system, leaving them to cope on their own.

After learning about KyleCares, Charlie and three of his male peers applied for a KyleCares grant to start an Active Minds chapter. The impact of that chapter on the GHS school culture has been tremendous, spreading mental health awareness and offering support without judgment. Over the past year, the chapter has grown to over 60 students. They've hosted numerous events, including awareness games for every sports team, two mental health speakers, a green bandana project, and an incredible 5k road race through the streets of Cumberland, ME that raised $50,000 for future mental health programming at the school.

The road race, part of Charlie's senior project in late April, included over 250 runners from the community and significantly contributed to "smashing the stigma" of mental health – a motto the chapter has embraced since its inception.

Perhaps the one characteristic that has made Charlie's efforts so influential across his entire school community is his willingness, as a male student, to share his own story.

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"Charlie has been incredibly vulnerable, sharing his story in front of the entire student body, staff, and faculty, letting everyone know it's OK not to be OK and to always strive to be the light for somebody else," said his School Counselor and Active Minds chapter advisor, Melissa Fowler. "As a result of this, and the monthly chapter programming, numerous students have reached out to Active Minds club members or school counselors who otherwise might not have had the courage to do so. Thanks to Charlie and the other club officers' efforts in promoting suicide and mental health awareness, these students received the mental health care they needed and have since joined the club. I'm so proud of the club members' passion, dedication, and inclusivity as role models and leaders in smashing the stigma and conveying that mental health matters."

As Charlie prepares to leave for Christopher Newport University in Virginia, he'll pass the leadership torch to his younger brother, Sam, who will take over as President and continue the Anania family tradition as mental health advocates.