STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Kylie Bodzinski



Mental health has been amongst the most important things to me for many years now and will continue to be as I grow older. Ever since I was young, I have dealt with anxiety, and at times it has altered my day-to-day life. A month or so prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, I fell into a dark place. This resulted in my admission to a psychiatric hospital when I was 14. During this time, I built the confidence I needed to keep going, and through this experience, I came to the realization that it truly is "okay to be not okay." I found that with depression, one of the most important things you can realize is that you are not alone if you are willing to ask for, and accept, help.

Over the past several years I have noticed a general lack of widespread awareness for mental health throughout society. Often, discussions about mental health are even frowned upon by both students and adults in their lives. Those struggling with mental illness, who some days may have difficulty even getting out of bed or attending school, are sometimes misunderstood or feel disregarded by those around them. For example, a person dealing with depression might be accused of simply demonstrating "attention seeking" behavior instead of a legit illness.

As a result, students who want help sometimes are afraid to ask for it out of public embarrassment. Students who need support should easily be able to seek help and resources, but they find it's difficult to do so, even if they may hint to others that they need help.

"Kylie has left her mark on the Nipmuc community immensely and works tirelessly to make sure everyone is welcome and in a safe environment. She is the heart and soul of the Active Minds chapter."

–Jamie Caprarella
Teacher
Nipmuc Regional High School

Starting an Active Minds Chapter at Nipmuc has certainly decreased the stigma around mental health not only in my school, but throughout the community. For the past few months, I have led Nipmuc's Active Minds as we aim to diminish the stigma by talking openly about mental health in several ways. We recently dedicated one fall sport game on every team's home schedule to mental health awareness and hope to do the same throughout the winter sports season as well.

In addition to the awareness games, another chapter member and I created over 700 green ribbons that have been distributed all around the school as a symbol of hope and support for those who are struggling. Students and staff have their ribbons located on their sports uniforms, and/or their school backpacks. We've created a "positivity board" in classroom 138, where students from all over the school can now display positive messages to their peers, and during a recent Wellness Week, our chapter presented an informational session around ways to seek support and how to cope with stress.

Changing the conversation around mental health takes time and effort, but I have received many encouraging messages from friends, family, and teachers who say that what I am doing is impacting the school culture around mental health in a positive way. We are opening up the dialogue all around us, and we will continue to do so throughout the year

Big things are coming, and Nipmuc Active Minds is gonna knock your socks off!