STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Abby Jean



For Abby Jean, mental health has been a focus in her and her family's life for as long as she can remember. Over the years at times her own mental health became a struggle, and as she has matured and gained a better understanding of mental health overall, two things have become abundantly clear.

One, unlike 8-12 years ago when her older siblings were in school, Abby's generation is more open to discussing topics such as anxiety and depression – it is not considered a dangerous topic to talk openly about.

Two, she is lucky to have devoted parents who have always done their best to find the best care possible to address Abby's mental well-being. Realizing how alone students from her siblings' generation must have felt is one of the biggest sparks that lit the flame inside of Abby to become a vocal advocate for mental health.

"After Covid I noticed a widespread decline in morale and motivation in students and teachers, including myself", said Abby. Students who openly spoke about their mental health struggles during the pandemic often felt guilty for speaking negatively about themselves, while the rest of the world was dealing with illness, joblessness, and death. To some extent, school felt optional, isolation was normal, and all the days simply blended.

One of Abby's biggest objectives is to ensure every student feels like part of the MHS school community. "I do not want teens to feel alone. High school and middle school years are hard years and feeling alone makes the whole experience even worse", she shared. "Imagining how alone some people might feel makes my heart ache. My sister made sure I never felt that way, and I want to do that for others" by creating an environment where students know people are always there to listen and be of support; to help school be a safe place.

A big priority of Abby's and the Active Minds chapter has been to give students and teachers the skills to recognize a student who is struggling, and how to intervene with (and for) the student in a productive way; noticing when a friend or peer isn't acting how they normally might, and what to say to them in a non-judgmental way that won't make the situation worse.

Abby and the chapter are making a difference at MHS.
Last spring, they organized a Wellness Week which included spirit days, "Chalk it Out", the Green Banana Project and V.A.R training. There was a lot of participation in Wellness Week from both students and staff.

"The Green Bandana event last year was huge. People are still wearing their bandanas, even teachers have them in their rooms. I really like the bandanas as a subtle yet effective way to show allyship and support", noted Abby. "The halls were full of green bandanas, and it was so uplifting to see that kind of support."

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Last year the chapter worked very hard to get off the ground, and this year they have a strong agenda to help them continue the open conversations around mental health they started last year. Students often reach out to Abby over social media to express their support and thanks for what Active Minds has been doing. One student expressed that Active Minds provides "a place where she knows people understand how she feels and are there to be supportive", while another student shared how Active Minds "allowed her to calmly express herself and makes her more comfortable to talk about mental health and having people open up to her".

"We are reaching many students who want and need to be reached", concluded Abby.