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Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts High School and William T. Dwyer High School in Florida Selected to Participate in teen Mental Health First Aid Pilot Program

The schools were 2 of 35 selected by the National Council for Behavioral Health with support from Lady Gaga’s Born This Way Foundation

Tallahassee, FL – Florida was selected as one of the first expanded pilot sites for teen Mental Health First Aid. The program will be hosted at Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts High School and William T. Dwyer High School in Palm Beach County. The training is the first of its kind developed for high school students in the U.S.

“This first-of-a-kind program will truly make a difference in our communities, and we are excited that our state was chosen to introduce teen Mental Health First Aid to local communities,” said Melanie Brown-Woofter, President of the Florida Behavioral Health Association, a member of the National Council for Behavioral Health – which represents 3100 member organizations across the United States. “It is our hope that this training program will encourage students to take action when they spot early signs of a problem and empower them to support a friend who may be in distress or struggling with a mental health or substance use issue, so they can get the help and treatment they need.”

tMHFA is an in-person training designed for high school students to learn about mental illnesses and addictions, particularly how to identify and respond to a developing mental health or substance use problem among their peers. Similar to CPR, students learn a 5-step action plan to help their friends who may be facing a mental health problem or crisis, such as suicide.

The course specifically highlights the important step of involving a responsible and trusted adult. To ensure additional support for students taking the training, Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts has trained over 100 school staff and William T. Dwyer is scheduled to have 60 staff trained in November in Mental Health First Aid for Adults Working with Young People.

“We’re thrilled that Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts High School and William T. Dwyer High School are two of the first U.S. high schools to participate in teen Mental Health First Aid,” said Chuck Ingoglia, president and CEO of the National Council for Behavioral Health. “Teens trust their friends, so they need to be trained to recognize signs of mental health or substance use problems in their peers. The number one thing a teen can do to support a friend dealing with anxiety or depression is to help the friend seek support from a trusted adult.”

“With teen Mental Health First Aid, we like to say, it’s okay to not be okay,” said Lady Gaga, co-founder of Born This Way Foundation, as she spoke with 16 students who completed the first tMHFA pilot in eight schools across the country.

“Together, Born This Way and the National Council have put this program in eight schools. I know for certain that I’m not stopping here,” Lady Gaga continued. “I want the teen Mental Health First Aid program in every school in this country.”

“Through this pilot program, both high schools are taking an important step towards ensuring their students are able to recognize when a friend or peer might be struggling and to feel confident that they know what to do to help,” said Cynthia Germanotta, president and co-founder of Born This Way Foundation. “Knowing how to spot the signs that someone in our lives is experiencing a mental health challenge and understanding how we can support that person is a basic life skill we all need to have – especially teenagers.”

tMHFA is an evidence-based training program from Australia. The National Council adapted the training with support from Born This Way Foundation and Well Being Trust. The pilot program is being evaluated by researchers from Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health to assess its effectiveness. The training will be made available to the public following analysis of the pilot study. The training for Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts High School and William T. Dwyer High School is being implemented in partnership with the School District of Palm Beach County.

“We are pleased to introduce teen Mental Health First Aid to our community,” said Debbie O’Meilia and Wendy Venoff, Behavior Resource teachers in the Department of Behavioral and Mental Health. Both participated in the instructor training and are now certified instructors who will deliver the curriculum on both schools. “The program will teach high school students to recognize and respond when their friends are experiencing the early stages of a mental health or addiction problem.”

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About the Florida Behavioral Health Association

The Florida Behavioral Health Association is a non-profit organization that provides statewide leadership on behavioral health policy and practice. FBHA supports member agencies offering services to those in need of mental health and substance use disorder assistance and support. The Association’s members include a broad range of provider types, ranging from small specialty organizations to comprehensive treatment organizations with multiple locations within a geographic region. FBHA is the result of a recent merger between the Florida Council for Community Mental Health and the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association. For more information please visit www.floridabha.org.

About the National Council for Behavioral Health

The National Council for Behavioral Health is the unifying voice of America’s health care organizations that deliver mental health and addictions treatment and services. Together with 3,100 member organizations serving over 10 million adults, children and families living with mental illnesses and addictions, the National Council is committed to all Americans having access to comprehensive, high-quality care that affords every opportunity for recovery. The National Council introduced [Mental Health First Aid USA](http://www.MentalHealthFirstAid.org) and nearly 2 million Americans have been trained. To learn more visit www.TheNationalCouncil.org and www.MentalHealthFirstAid.org.

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