

Prizmah Teen Mental Health Club Playbook

By Mrs. Olivia Friedman and Mr. Marc Fein



PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

The initiative in this playbook is intended
לעילוי נשמת בתשבע חיה בת נועם יגאל ורנה.

Foreword from Rabbi Marianne Novak and Dr. Noam Stadlan

Our daughter, Batsheva Chaya Stadlan, of blessed memory, was full of life and sparkle. She could take anything and infuse it with her distinct aesthetic. Wherever she went, she brought not only light but kindness and caring. However, her very essence was no match for her anxiety and depression, coupled with an eating order, that tragically caused her to take her own life. Although she was under the care of physicians, psychologists, and psychiatrists and had the support of her immediate family, Batsheva suffered basically alone.

She rarely shared with her friends her struggles or her pain. Even when she did share, her friends didn't have the resources or training to help her. While her illness was ultimately fatal, perhaps if she had had the support of her peers, her suffering might have been lessened. Our hope is that Mental Health clubs in schools can not only remove the stigma associated with mental illness but also, and more importantly, alleviate the intense loneliness many teens especially feel who are suffering.

These clubs also provide the crucial structure for other students to support those grappling with mental health conditions in a constructive and compassionate way where before, they might have wanted to help but been at a loss as to what to do. We hope, too, that these clubs will work not only to remove the stigma associated with mental illness but also to take the initiative to advocate for better research, diagnostic tools and treatments.

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WELCOME

Thank you for partnering with Prizmah to protect teen mental health. In this document, we will take you through the current youth mental health crisis, the proposed intervention of teen mental health clubs, and its impact on your school. We will detail how to go about starting your club, highlight models of success, and share useful resources. You will have access to a checklist that will clarify exact steps for implementation and whom to contact with additional questions. This playbook will enable you to successfully structure and launch your own club!

THE CRISIS

On Dec 7, 2021, the Surgeon General of America released [a 53-page report](#) on the youth mental health crisis in America. Its findings were troubling.

National surveys of youth have shown major increases in certain mental health symptoms, including **depressive** symptoms and **suicidal ideation**.

From 2009-2019

- The proportion of high school students reporting persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness **increased by 40%**.
- The share of high school students seriously considering attempted suicide **increased by 36%**.
- The share creating a suicide plan increased by **44%**.

From 2011-2015

- Youth psychiatric visits to emergency departments for depression, anxiety, and behavioral challenges **increased by 28%**.

From 2007-2018

- Suicide rates among youth ages 10-24 **increased by 57%**.

Current estimates from the National Center for Health Statistics **suggest there were tragically more than 6,600 deaths by suicide among the 10-24 age group in 2020.**

This crisis was exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic.

- Rates of psychological distress, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders, **increased**
- Research covering 80,000 youth globally found that depressive and anxiety symptoms **doubled** during the pandemic.
- In early 2021, **emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts were 51% higher for adolescent girls and 4% higher for adolescent boys** compared to the same time period in 2019.
- Students had fewer in-person interactions with friends, social supports, professionals, teachers, school counselors, pediatricians, and child welfare workers, which also made it harder to **recognize mental health concerns**.

THE INTERVENTION

Teens are struggling. One of the best ways to support them is to empower them to support one another. The ideal way to do that is through creating a teen mental health club at your Jewish day school. This peer-to-peer model meets teens exactly where they are by allowing them access to accurate, vetted information on mental health, destigmatizing these topics, connecting them to additional resources, and enabling them to receive support to help them maintain good mental health.

[A recent BBYO survey](#) focused on the mental health needs of teens, and identifies the people to whom they are most likely to turn for support.

When asked whom they seek support from when stressed, upset, anxious, or experiencing challenges, **79 percent of teens responded that they seek out their friends first, followed by 64 percent who turn to family members. But the drop-off after that is huge. Only 22 percent of teens turn to mental health or medical professionals, and a mere one percent seek out clergy. Most concerning, however, is that 11 percent said they had no one to turn to.**

This important finding indicates that **teens are overwhelmingly turning to their peers in challenging times, and that their peers, in turn, have a tremendous opportunity to help.** Of course, this places a great deal of responsibility on teens to be able to identify mental health red flags, appropriately engage in sensitive conversations, and know where to turn for assistance.

Similarly, [a peer-to-peer program](#) that was the recipient of the American Psychological Association's gold award in 2019 is built on the understanding that "many mental health disorders first present themselves during adolescence, and teens are more likely to listen to other teens than well-meaning adults."

THE IMPACT

Creating a teen mental health club in your school will transform the culture and climate of the school in multiple ways.

- Board members will feel empowered to make a meaningful difference in the lives of their peers.
- Students will have access to accurate information as opposed to learning about mental health conditions from the media or believing in myths about these conditions.
- The existence of the club will give fellow students permission to ask for help. In a culture where no one speaks about mental health or mental illness, students feel lonely and are afraid to reach out, even when they need support. But in a culture where fellow teens are regularly presenting on these topics, mental illness and mental health challenges become destigmatized, allowing struggling students to reach out to board members to seek help.

Gabe Greenfield '22 of Frisch (New Jersey) and Ilan Blumenthal '23 of Ida Crown (Illinois) share their experiences as board members of teen mental health clubs at their respective schools.

Hear from Gabe...

As a student leader and a member of the Executive Board of Student Council my junior year, I was approached by a peer concerned with the lack of mental health awareness at Frisch. I was intrigued and agreed to look into it. The more I researched and the deeper I dove, the more I realized how big and ubiquitous a topic mental health is, especially in the aftermath of COVID, whose effects are still being felt. The fact that I wasn't aware of the magnitude of the issue made me realize how little awareness there was about mental health.

I decided to take on the cause, and Ava, my co-executive board member, and I began researching and brainstorming. I became more and more passionate about the issue, and over months, Ava and I spent countless hours creating and developing a program to make an impact. From the beginning, I made it clear — I am no expert. I had no experience as a mental health advocate or creating programming, yet I was determined that change needed to be made and that I had the opportunity to make it. As Marc Fein, whom we brought in for our first program, said — one out of every four people faces mental health issues in adolescence. That's an entire grade's worth of people when you look at Frisch, well over 200 people. Furthermore, half of those people never ask for or receive the help they need and deserve.

All of us have mental health, just as we have physical health. And just as one must take care of their physical health, the same holds true for mental health. Yet mental health is surrounded by a negative stigma, and even if that weren't true, many people who experience mental health issues don't realize that what they are going through is not normal and that they can get help. Realizing this through the work and research we were doing, we sought to create a program to combat both these to destigmatize mental illness (and make people who are experiencing it realize that they are not alone and can get help), and to provide students who don't suffer from mental illnesses with the means and methods to help anyone in their life who does.

After our first program, many students shared that they felt heard.

Hear from Ilan...

*There is a need for this kind of club at Jewish day schools because I often feel that these topics overlooked in both public and private institutions. Schools and the Jewish community need to work to be more proactive rather than reactive. We are talking about potentially saving a life; mental health topics are the only thing we do not talk about that could actively save someone. **Most people are aware of the technique of CPR, but few people know how to comfort someone going through a depressive episode.***

*The main impact that a mental health club has on the student body is simply education and knowledge. As Nelson Mandela put it, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." I feel that is exactly the impact I, as a club leader, look to have on other people. If each student walks away with greater knowledge than they entered with, I feel successful. **The end goal would be to remove the stigma surrounding to remove the stigma surrounding mental illness and to ensure that people who are experiencing it know they are not alone.** That is our end goal for each and every individual who comes to our presentation.*

MODELS OF SUCCESS

Both Frisch (750 students) and Ida Crown (250 students) boast thriving mental health awareness clubs currently. Below are examples of the kinds of events and programs they have held.

Frisch

Both listed programs were school-wide events.

- **Mental Health Kickoff (Mental Health Awareness Month, May 2021):** The program began with a presenter, Marc Fein, sharing his lived experience with depression and anxiety. Once students were sensitized to the fact that people could be struggling behind the smile, students were broken up by class for workshops to get more into detail about mental health and mental illness, as well as about how to help themselves and others. These workshops were led by local mental health professionals. Feedback on the event indicated many students felt heard.
- **Healthy Habits & Social Media (Dec 2021):** The program featured Daniel Wright, an Emmy-nominated producer of the Netflix documentary 'The Social Dilemma' with whom Gabe had a Q&A about the contents and production of the film and the importance of balanced usage of social media for one's mental health. The second segment included students from the mental health awareness club going from class to class presenting on different healthy habits and how students could implement them; the topics included mindfulness, stress/time management, exercise, self-love, sleep, intuitive eating, and technology. Students appreciated seeing their peers taking the initiative on an issue they felt passionate about.

Students evaluated and shared their impressions about the events via a feedback form (created with Google Forms) [available at this link](#).

Ida Crown

The main model Ida Crown chose to employ was the Lunch-and-Learn. Lunch-and-Learns run twice, occurring during both school lunch periods. The process is as follows: Students decide on a topic they would like to present to their peers. They select an event date, clear it with the administration, and create a flyer that they hang up around the school and share out via email blasts. Sushi (sponsored by the club or by the school) is served to make the Lunch-and-Learn more enticing; interested students must sign up in advance via a Google Form to indicate they plan to attend the event so the correct amount can be ordered. The Google Form is linked via QR code on the flyer. Signing up also enables student participants to ask anonymous questions about the topic. See a sample Google Form sign up [available at this link](#).

While this is happening, teen mental health club board members research their topic in depth, creating a slideshow with accurate information, short video clips, interesting graphics, and strategies to assist an individual who might be struggling in that area. They have all their content vetted by the school social workers and make corrections if they have made any mistakes. When possible, the club strives to have a speaker (in person or on Zoom) who can share lived experience or professional insight on the topic.

See a sample flyer for an event below ("5th" or "6th" indicates the lunch periods during which the event will run). Flyers can be created easily on postermywall.com.

ERIKA'S LIGHTHOUSE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS CLUB PRESENTS

TALKING ABOUT ANXIETY

WHAT IT IS & HOW TO MANAGE IT



**SUSHI
WILL BE
SERVED!!**



OCT 27 5th or 6th

HEAR ILAN BLUMENTHAL SHARE HIS STORY!

SIGN UP WITH THE QR CODE

Questions? Email ofriedman@icja.org

Made with PosterMyWall.com

The programs listed below were open to any interested students.

- **Talking About Anxiety (October 2021):** In this presentation (please [click here](#) to see the student-created slideshow and filmed presentation), teen mental health club members provided a definition of anxiety and real-life examples of when it might occur, and explained the difference between clinical and functional anxiety. Board member Ilan Blumenthal '23 shared his experiences living with anxiety. The students concluded by offering strategies to manage anxiety and talking about how to support a friend living with anxiety. They also took questions. Several board members had students reach out to them with additional questions after the presentation.
- **Talking About Depression (December 2021):** In this presentation (please [click here](#) to see the student-created slideshow and filmed presentation), teen mental health club members provided a definition of depression and real-life examples of how it might occur, and went through some of the different forms it could take. Guest speaker Marc Fein shared his experience living with depression. The students discussed strategies to manage depression and how to support a friend living with depression. They also took questions.

The slideshows and filmed presentations were posted up on the club's page within Ida Crown's learning management system as well. In this way, they remain resources to all students, including the ones who did not attend the live event.

HOW DO WE DO IT?

So you want to build a teen mental health club at your Jewish day school. Excellent! How do you go about it?

The following checklist will walk you through each piece of the process.

- **Talk to your school social workers or psychologists.** Even though a person who does not have any mental health background may choose to be the club facilitator, the input of the school social workers and psychologists will be vital when it comes to staffing or vetting proposed club events. Make sure they are on board and willing to act as a resource to your club.
- **Talk to your school administration.** Most school clubs require approval from administrators prior to launch; make sure your administrators understand the value add of the club and are committed to its success.
- **Recruit club leaders.** Send out an email blast or post flyers in the hallways asking students interested in creating a mental health awareness club to contact you. (If you know that you will be inundated with requests, you may want to set up an application process. This is what Gabe at Frisch did; [click here](#) to see his application form.) Note: Where possible, try to recruit students from across multiple grade levels — you want the club to thrive even when seniors graduate.
- **Set up communications.** You want a clear and easy way to communicate with your club leaders. At Ida Crown, the board members are in a WhatsApp group with their club facilitator, and they set up meetings and share ideas that way. Microsoft Teams can also work. Ask the students which communication method will work best so that planning will be streamlined.
- **Create a mission and vision.** A teen mental health club can take many different forms. Some clubs may be most interested in increasing access to accurate information and education on the topic of mental illness. Others may focus on building a culture of wellness and positive mental health habits. Work with your students to determine what their goals are for the club and what the vision they wish to implement.
- **Consider joining an already established program.** As we will discuss in more detail below, there are several national organizations under which your club can be established. Choosing this option will enable your students to be part of a larger movement, will provide them with some funding, and often comes with suggested activities or pre-made curricula you can use when crafting your first event. Have your club leaders compare the different programs and decide whether they would like to set up their club under an umbrella organization, weighing the pros and cons of doing so.
- **Discuss funding.** How will your club be funded? The kinds of events you will be able to run depend on this (in addition to the size of your school). Some schools provide funding for student clubs while some do not. Will your club fundraise by selling baked goods or sweatshirts? Or will the activities be low-cost or budget friendly so little to no money needs to be spent?
- **Get the word out.** Make sure students are aware of the existence of your club — and what its goals are. Send out email blasts, give out candy with an informational flyer, or present at a club fair. Students will only attend your events if they know that you exist.

- **Plan your first event.** This is the kickoff event, so you want to make it impactful. There are many possibilities for accomplishing this, including, but not limited to:
 - Creating a wall of positivity/gratitude (this is especially appropriate around Thanksgiving time) where each student writes something they are grateful for on a sticky note and posts it up in a high-visibility location. This can be combined with a short speech from board members or an informational video on the power of gratitude and how it promotes positive mental health.
 - Joining with a different organization such as NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) to do a walk to support mental health.
 - Having a school-wide event on a particular topic (such as anxiety or depression) that can include anything from having a speaker with lived experience to screening and discussion of a film like "Angst."

When planning the event, also make sure to consider what your goals are for the event and how you will know whether you met them.

(Make sure to clear the date of your event with your administration so that it does not conflict with any other major activity!)

- **Advertise your event.** Make sure to let people know your event is happening! You can create beautiful flyers for free using PosterMyWall.com or Canva. Your flyers can include a link to a QR code to sign up with a Google Form, if that would be helpful. Make sure to send out information on your event to the students' school emails, WhatsApp or Microsoft Teams groups if applicable and to have flyers posted up around the school.
- **Run your event.** You may want to invite school social workers/ psychologists and administrators to attend. They will be wowed or be a good source of helpful feedback on what could have been improved.
- **Debrief afterwards.** How did the first event go? Was the turnout disappointing, or did people participate? Did you meet your goals? How do you know that you met them? If appropriate, send out a survey to event participants to seek their feedback.
- **Reflect.** After receiving feedback about your first event, reflect on whether there is anything you can do to make future events more successful, impactful, meaningful, or robust. Incorporate that feedback, and plan your next event!

BONUS

Create a club webpage. If possible, creating a club page on your school's learning management system will enable all of your events and content to live there forever. At Ida Crown, the students have a dedicated page that includes a welcome video, a list of board members and their contact information, links to presentations and recordings of past events, and links to additional mental health resources (local and national).

PARTNERING WITH ESTABLISHED CLUB PROGRAMS

As mentioned above, sometimes it is easiest to partner with an already established program. Below is a list of some of the programs that already exist with which you may want to partner.

- **[Bring Change 2 Mind](#)** is an organization whose mission is to “end the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental illness.” You can apply to start your own high school club [at this link](#). BC2M will provide a \$500 grant for group activities, access to the club portal with event and activity breakdowns, educational presentations and a club guidebook, an invitation to its annual high school student summit (a national conference), a free annual Headspace meditation app subscription, and more.
- **[Erika’s Lighthouse](#)** is an organization whose mission is to “give students a chance to make a difference in their school and normalize mental illness, promote positive mental health, and build a culture of inclusiveness throughout the year.” You can apply to start your own teen empowerment club [at this link](#). Erika’s Lighthouse will provide a \$250 grant for group activities, access to its resource portal with curricula, event and activity breakdowns, club t-shirts for members and sponsors, and more.
- **[University of Michigan’s Peer2Peer Program](#)** is an evidence-based program whose mission is to “educate teen students about depression and support them in finding creative ways to convey this knowledge to their peers in order to reduce stigma, raise awareness, encourage help-seeking when needed, and, ultimately, help to promote the early detection of depression, bipolar disorder, and related illnesses.” It was awarded the American Psychiatric Association’s Gold Award in 2019. You can apply to bring the program to your school by contacting Stephanie Salazar at sawaters@umich.edu.
- **[Hope Squad](#)** is a program whose mission is to “reduce youth suicide through education, training, and peer intervention.” A hope squad is a “school-based peer support team that partners with local mental health agencies. Peers select students who are trustworthy and caring individuals to join the Hope Squad. Squad members are trained to watch for at-risk students, provide friendship, identify suicide warning signs, and seek help from adults.” To find out more and implement the program in your school, [click here](#).

TEEN-SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH TRAININGS/ INITIATIVES

In addition to the club models/ programs listed above, there are a variety of teen-specific curricula, initiatives, trainings, or programs that you might want to consider using as part of your teen mental health club.

General

Teen Mental Health First Aid teaches teens in grades 10-12, or ages 15-18, how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use challenges among their friends and peers. Contact a member of the Teen Mental Health First Aid team to learn more and bring a training to your school.

MindWise Innovations Signs of Suicide is an affordable, evidence-based youth suicide prevention education program that has demonstrated a 64% reduction in self-reported suicide attempts. (Important note: Sometimes local organizations will offer to subsidize this program for you; for example, in the Chicago area, the organization **Elyssa's Mission** does this.)

To Write Love On Her Arms (TWLOHA) is a nonprofit movement “dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide.” Their **Between the Bells** program is a “one-week interactive program designed for high school students to spark authentic conversations about mental health and to remind those struggling that they are not alone.” Schools must register **at this link** and will receive the program kit, which includes swag.

Jewish

- **No Shame on U** is a national organization “dedicated to eliminating the stigma associated with mental health conditions and raising awareness.” Specifically, they offer a unique **teen ambassador program**. This immersive leadership program educates 10th, 11th and 12th graders in North America on mental health issues and helps them create an impact project on mental health. Students must submit an application and be accepted to the program.
- **Gelt Charitable Foundation** is a “not-for-profit organization that raises awareness and provides support for those who feel alone.” The foundation offers both **mental health awareness and suicide prevention workshops** for a reasonable fee.
- **Jewish CCSA (Communities Confronting Substance Abuse and Addiction)** offers evidence-based substance use prevention programs for middle and high school students. To learn more, **click here**.
- **JQY (Jewish Queer Youth)** is “a nonprofit organization that supports and empowers LGBTQ Jewish youth with a special focus on teens and young adults from Orthodox, Chassidic, and Sephardi/Mizrahi communities.” JQY offers LGBTQ sensitivity training for Orthodox schools (where youth are often more at risk for mental health struggles); to learn more, **click here**.
- **Shalom Task Force** is an organization whose mission is “to combat and prevent domestic violence and to foster healthy and safe relationships and families.” They offer the **Shalom Task Force Purple Fellowship** for juniors and seniors, which provides training on healthy relationships and intimate partner violence to teens and culminates in a “Go Purple” day at school.
- **The Bayar Group** offers trainings on consent, sexual harassment, sexual abuse prevention, online sexual solicitation, sexting, and sextortion.

PARTNERING WITH ADDITIONAL JEWISH MENTAL HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS

- National Jewish mental health organizations are likely to be excited to support you and your club's efforts to spread awareness and eliminate stigma. Below is a list of some organizations that may be of particular interest; it is always worthwhile to also ask your local Jewish Federation for their recommendations.
- **[No Shame on U](#)** is a national organization “dedicated to eliminating the stigma associated with mental health conditions and raising awareness.” No Shame on U offers events, speakers on Zoom, support groups on Zoom (based on age and/or issue addressed), yoga and therapy groups, and more.
- **[The Blue Dove Foundation](#)** is dedicated to advancing discussions in the Jewish community on mental illness and substance use. They provide a number of resources including but not limited to mental wellness workshops, written publications on the connection between Judaism and mental health and substance use, and more.
- **[Refuat Hanefesh](#)** is an organization aiming to “create a Jewish community that is more aware, respectful, and empathetic to people living with mental illness.” Their blog offers reflections from professionals and individuals living with mental health struggles. They also offer contests and hosts the gap year conference — a guide to managing mental health during the gap year in Israel for students and parents.
- **[Active Minds at Yeshiva University](#)** is a chapter of a national nonprofit promoting mental health for young adults. Students affiliated with the club may be willing to share their experiences living with a mental health struggle by speaking with your students over Zoom.
- **[Elijah's Journey](#)** is a nonprofit organization focused on a Jewish response to the issues of suicide awareness and suicide prevention.
- **[Maaglei Nefesh: The Institute for Mental Health and Halacha](#)** is an organization founded by Rav Yoni Rosensweig, who is based in Israel. Rav Rosensweig is particularly adept at reaching Orthodox populations and helping them navigate the challenges of living with a mental illness while navigating observance (specifically, halacha, Jewish law). A gifted speaker, Rav Rosensweig may be available to speak to your school club, or to help provide guidance to faculty or staff.

Do not forget to consider your local mental health organizations, as well!

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Please note the following important text lines and hotlines that should be shared with all teen club leaders and members. A suggestion from Phil Zbaraz, director of Student Social Services at Ida Crown Jewish Academy, is to have the number for the suicide hotline — which as of July 16, 2022, will be 988 — printed on the back of every student’s ID card. (This means it will be easily accessible if needed.)

Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis counselor.

Suicide Hotline: 800-273-8255 (note that as of July 16, 2022, the number will be shortened to 988)

Teen Lifeline: 800-248-8336

FAQS

Do I need to be a mental health professional to run a mental health teen club?

No. Club facilitators can be members of faculty who are passionate about promoting good mental health in students. However, we do recommend partnering and liaising with your school social workers, psychologists, or other mental health professionals in order to ensure that your programming is appropriate and effective for your audience.

How many members should serve on the board of our mental health teen club?

This depends on the size of your school. You want to have enough board members to ensure the club's growth as students matriculate, but not so many that decision-making becomes unwieldy. In a small school (250 students), we have found that two students from each grade level was sufficient.

How often should our club meet?

A better way to think about this is: How often do you want to run events? We have found that running one event per month is ideal. (Note that the events do not need to be the same — there could be a NAMI walk one month, a Lunch-and-Learn another month, and a book club meeting the next month). Determining the goals of your club and the kind of impact you wish to have will enable you to set a schedule of events; then, meet in person or via Zoom as many times as necessary to schedule and hold those events.

How do I find funding for my mental health teen club?

If you choose to create your club under Bring Change 2 Mind or Erika's Lighthouse, you will receive some funding (up to \$500 for Bring Change 2 Mind and up to \$250 for Erika's Lighthouse). Talk to your school administration to see whether they might be willing to offer funding. They may also know of potential donors who would be eager to support this kind of programming. Reach out to national Jewish mental health organizations and your local Jewish Federation. Remember that low-budget activities such as book club discussions and film screenings on mental health topics are low-cost and very impactful.

Is there any advice you can offer regarding what we can expect during the first year of launching our mental health teen club?

Remember that it takes time to build something great. It may be hard to drum up interest during the first year, especially if you offer opt-in programming as opposed to a mandated school-wide or grade-wide event. This is expected and is okay! As students learn more about what you offer (especially as you market yourselves by creating a club Instagram account or a webpage within your learning management system), they will become more interested. When possible, offer free food at events; this will draw a crowd.

What's the most important takeaway from this playbook?

Never forget that by facilitating and serving as members of your mental health teen club, you are empowering adolescents to make a difference in their own lives and the lives of their peers. This is important, essential, and holy work. Teens listen to other teens — and having this club in school means more members of your school population will feel heard, valued, and seen. What you are doing matters, and you are saving lives.

Good luck! To receive support on any step of the process, please email Marc Fein, mental health advocate, at marc.fein@gmail.com, and Olivia Friedman, Ida Crown mental health teen club facilitator, at Oliviafried@gmail.com.