

New Campaign Brings Mental Health Awareness to University

As the end of another semester is nearing more students become stressed about finals. Students are sleep deprived, don't eat as well as they should and it seems there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish their goals.

Starting around spring the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) campus is decorated with campaign signs for all the different college elections, but there was one bright orange sign that has stood out from all the rest. Five university students who wanted to bring more awareness to mental health on campus created the campaign Vote for Compassion. 1 in 10 students have admitted to thinking about suicide at least once in the past year.

Jordy Addeo is one of the students that started to bring compassion to UNR to create awareness for the 18% of Americans that are living with a mental illness. "This is an initiative to have people check in on each other and look out for each other and pay more attention to what we are all going through", Addeo said. "The person sitting next to you, you have no idea if their dog just died or what is bothering them that day."

The campaign ran from February 15th through March 15th as part of the PRSSA Bateman competition. UNR students developed a movement for this year's client, the Campaign to Change Direction. Their goal is to educate people on the five signs of emotional suffering. Being isolated from others, personality changes such as getting angry, or moody, and neglecting self-care are just some of the signs that someone might be suffering from a mental illness.

According to the programs social media page their goal for bringing more compassion to campus is to create a force that helps bring people together and make them feel safe, comfortable and accepted.

"Compassion is the encompassing element and it's the umbrella of the five signs, so that's why we chose compassion because it's an action and you can do things with it and help people," Addeo said.

More and more students are now becoming aware that 1 in 5 students at the university do have a diagnosable mental illness that may go untreated due to the stigmas that are attached.

The University is trying to do a check in program in classrooms. They ask minutes before each class to check in with each other and ask the simple question of "How are you doing?" The campaign has gained numerous testimonials from both students and teachers regarding their stances on mental health. This allows for a more comfortable way for people of all ages to start the conversation and be more compassionate towards one another.

“You are comfortable saying oh sorry I can’t come into work I have a cold, but nobody’s comfortable saying sorry I can’t come to work I’m having a mental breakdown or an anxiety attack,” said Addeo. “I think this is a good conversation starter.”

The Campaign to Change Direction started out with just fifty partners and now has risen to three hundred and thirty. Due to the increase in awareness more than 26 million people have been visible to the five signs of suffering that will help change the way Americans view the culture of mental illness. The discussion was inspired back in 2013 during the White House National Conference on Mental Health and has thrived ever since.

According to the Bateman team, being tough isn’t as important as being compassionate. “I think that it’s important to continue the conversation. I would love to see it continue, because we have worked hard and it has been positively accepted and I think we could all use more compassion,” Addeo stated.

Even though the PRSSA competition has ended and all the Vote for Compassion signs have been removed, the students created a new community to uplift each other in a more emotional way. Future plans will allow the compassion to continue to thrive through a similar club on campus.

To join the movement view the [Campaign to Change Direction](#) website and by knowing the five signs use the hashtag #ChangeMentalHealth to spread the word.