

# BUILDING ON THE POWER OF PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT TO ENHANCE STUDENT WELL-BEING



**CALIFORNIA**  
**SCHOOL-BASED**  
**HEALTH ALLIANCE**

Putting Health Care Where Kids Are



**Amy Blackshaw, MSW**

**Behavioral Health Project Director,  
California School-Based Health Alliance**

**&**

**Youth Peer-to-Peer Leaders from  
California High Schools**

# **PRESENTER DISCLOSURE**

**2023 Annual Conference on Advancing School Mental Health**

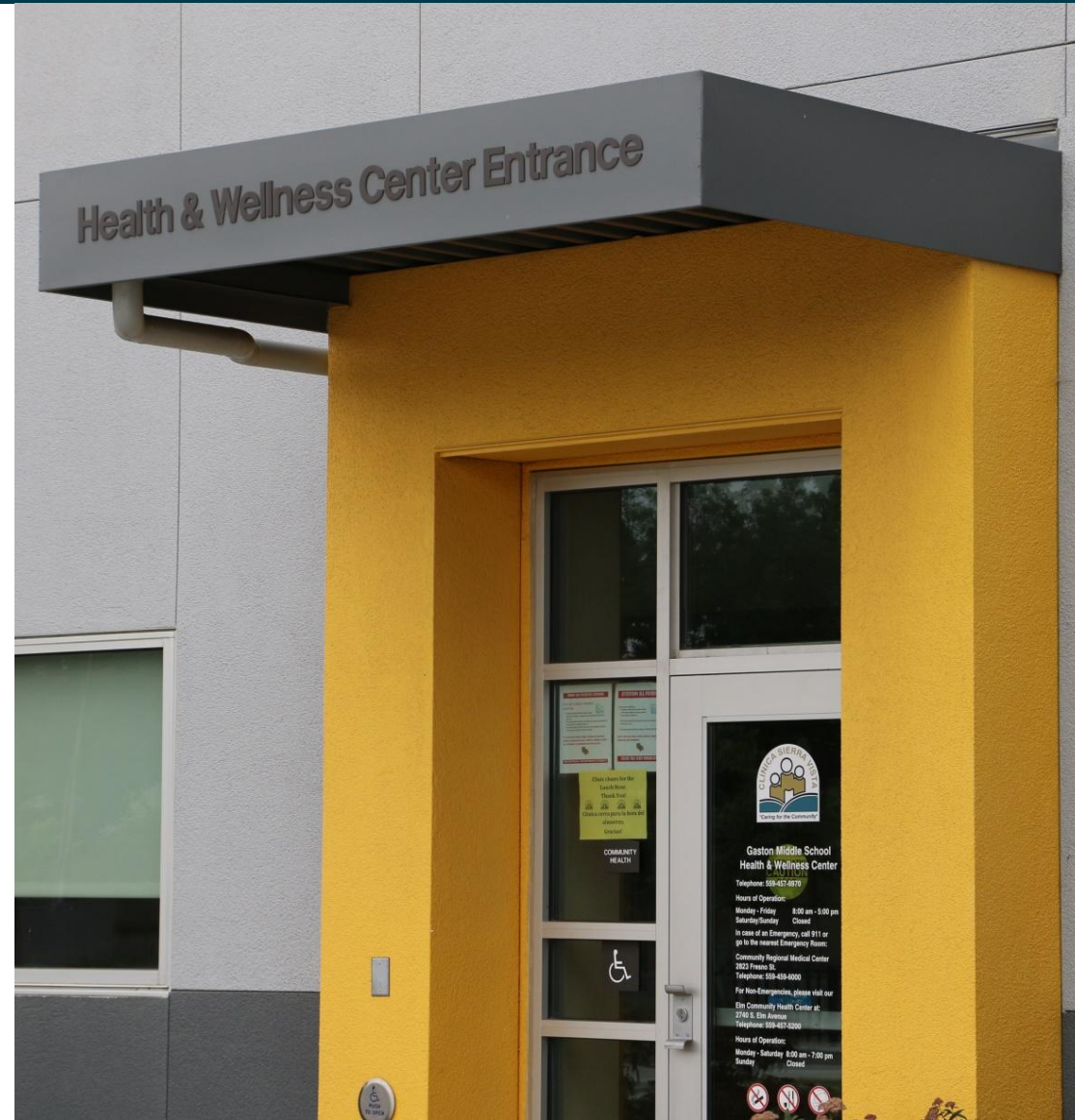
**There are no relationships to disclose.**



# Putting Health Care in Schools

The California School-Based Health Alliance is the statewide non-profit organization dedicated to **improving the health & academic success** of children & youth by **advancing health services in schools**.

Learn more:  
[schoolhealthcenters.org](https://schoolhealthcenters.org)




# WHO IS IN THE ROOM?

- Behavioral Health Providers
- School Administrators
- District/COE Representatives
- FQHC Partners
- CBO Partners
- Academia/Research

**Who has an existing peer to peer program at their school?**



# WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

- Describe at least three benefits of school-based peer-to-peer mental health support programs
  - Deepen knowledge about how peer-to-peer supports can strengthen and supplement existing school mental health programs
  - Identify action steps for planning and implementing student-driven, peer-to-peer mental health support programs
- 

# THE STATE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

**1 in 5**

teens in the United States will experience a mental health challenge by the time they are 18.

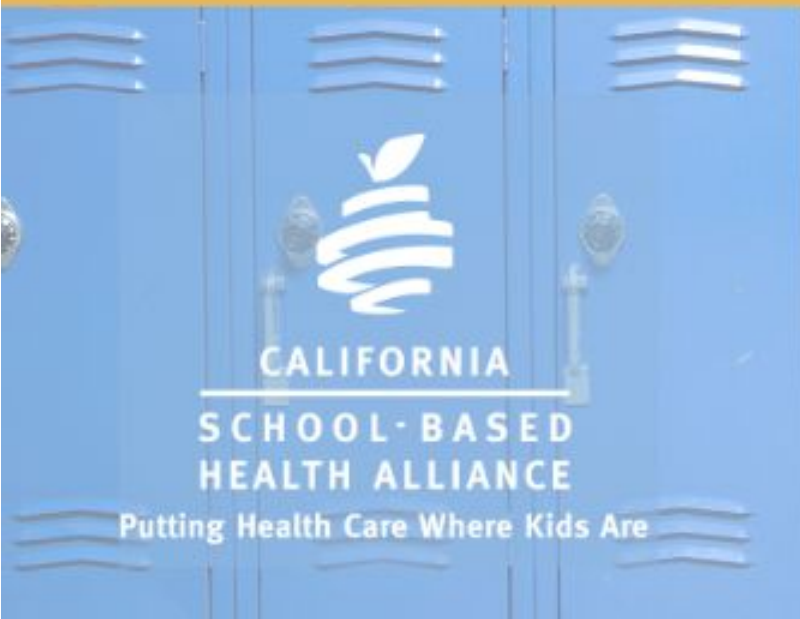
**64%**

of teens in the United States who experience mental health challenges don't seek help.





# peer-to-peer mental health supports





# SMALL GROUP CONVERSATION



Who were you as a middle school student?

Who was a adult or mentor or student you looked up to in school?

Who made you feel seen and how did they do that?

# Emily

Peer Mentor  
Oakland Technical  
High School  
12 grade



Emily, Peer Mentor

# WHY PEER TO PEER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS?

- ❖ Youth want to talk to other youth



# WHAT THE PEERS LEADERS SAY....

"We are not professionals, but it does help to have students come in here to talk about their problems in a judgment- free zone"

"Students are more likely to listen to someone else who is their age, rather than an adult. I find it easier to confide in someone who is my friend and my age rather than a grown up in my life"


"Peer programs are a great resource for young people, especially for those who feel scared to approach an adult for help. There is a barrier that can be felt between us and someone from a different generation"

# WHY PEER TO PEER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS?

- ❖ Youth want to talk to other youth
- ❖ **Peer relationships are highly valued by adolescents**



# WHY PEER TO PEER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS?


- ❖ Youth want to talk to other youth
  - ❖ Peer relationships are highly valued by adolescents
  - ❖ **Critical need for more mental health supports in schools**
- 

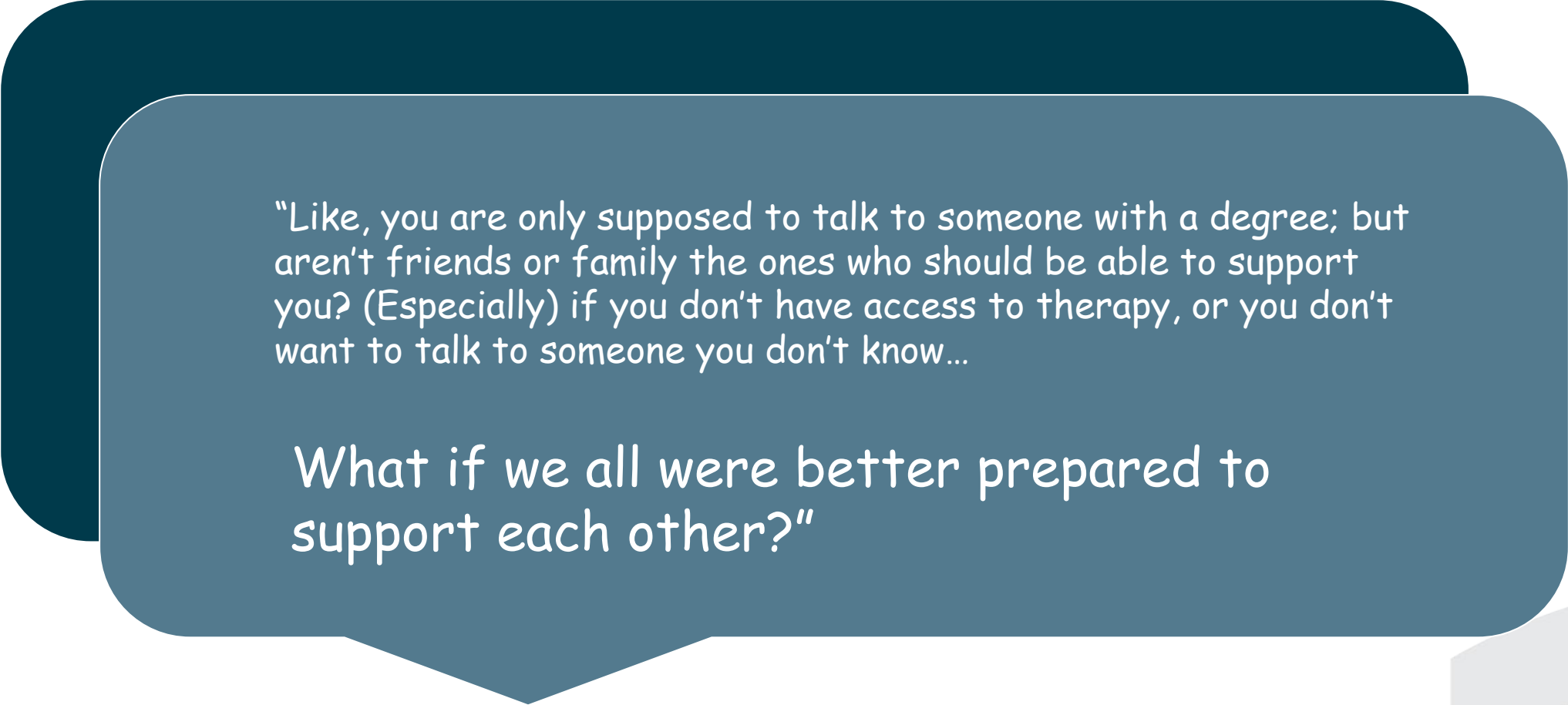


*“My experience as a Peer Counselor did in fact influence my career plans and until this day I am very grateful for that. In becoming a peer mentor I found my place and instantly knew that I wanted to study Psychology straight out of high school. Currently I am Working as a Behavioral Counselor at a Mental Health facility.”*

**Vanessa Avila, Peer Counselor and Pomona High School graduate**

# WHY PEER TO PEER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS?

- ❖ Youth want to talk to other youth
  - ❖ Peer relationships are highly valued by adolescents
  - ❖ Critical need for more mental health supports in schools
  - ❖ **Can increase equity, diversity and cultural relevance**
- 



"Like, you are only supposed to talk to someone with a degree; but aren't friends or family the ones who should be able to support you? (Especially) if you don't have access to therapy, or you don't want to talk to someone you don't know...


What if we all were better prepared to support each other?"

SOURCE: CYBHI: Youth at the Center report, California Health and Human Services Agency, 2022

# WHY PEER TO PEER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS?

- ❖ Youth want to talk to other youth
  - ❖ Peer relationships are highly valued by adolescents
  - ❖ Critical need for more mental health supports in schools
  - ❖ Increase equity and diversity
  - ❖ **Double impact - benefits for peer mentor and peer mentee**
- 

# WHY PEER TO PEER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS?

- ❖ Youth want to talk to other youth
  - ❖ Peer relationships are highly valued by adolescents
  - ❖ Critical need for more mental health supports in schools
  - ❖ Increase equity and diversity
  - ❖ Double impact - benefits for peer mentor and peer mentee
  - ❖ **Fits into the MTSS as Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions**
- 

# PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS - MODELS

*LESS*

Intensity of Peer Support

*MORE*

PEER-DESIGNED/LED  
SAFE SPACES

PEER AMBASSADORS

PEER EDUCATORS

WELLNESS PEERS

CULTURE KEEPERS  
R J PEER LEADERS

PEER MENTORS  
PEER COUNSELORS

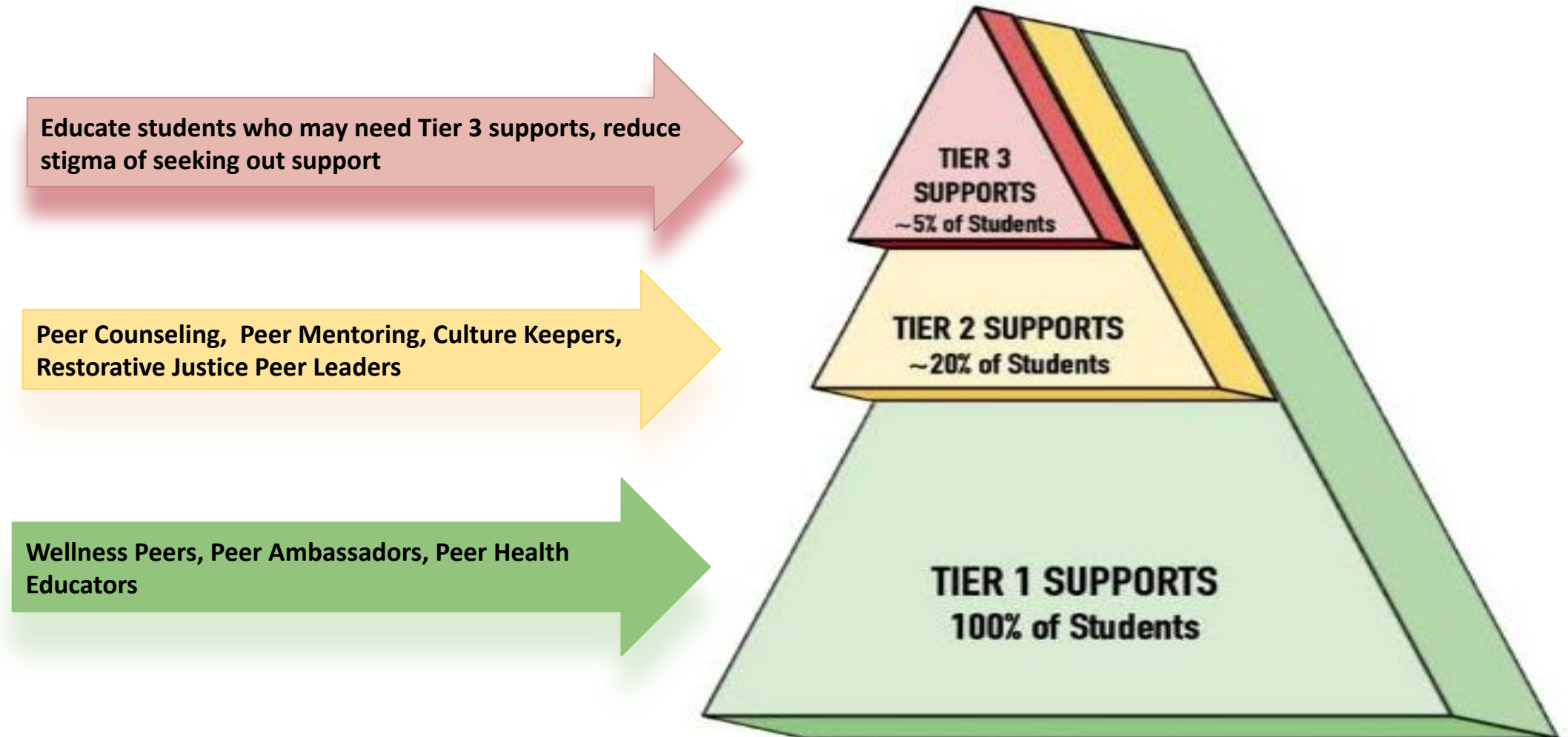
PEER SPECIALISTS  
WELLNESS COACHES  
(NEAR PEERS)

*PREVENTION  
PEER EDUCATION  
NON-CLINICAL SUPPORT*





# Multi-Tiered Systems of Support ( MTSS)



Branding

Invest in youth as leaders, providing real training on transferable skills

Clinical support for high intensity peer-to-peer programs

Youth input and involvement in program design, builds on youth development principles ladder

Dosage of training matches peer work model, higher intensity = substantive training

## PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PEER-TO-PEER PROGRAMS

Strong curriculum that is developmentally appropriate, continuously updated

Strong partnerships and buy-in from school administration and staff

Social justice and racial equity lens

# GETTING STARTED

- ❖ No one size fits all! Consider your school community's needs
- ❖ Design your “WHY”
  - ◆ Why are you starting a peer-to-peer program?
  - ◆ What need are you addressing?
  - ◆ What data can help you determine what model is the best fit?
  - ◆ Who can partner with you?
  - ◆ How will you know it's working? What does success look like?
- ❖ From Design to Implementation!
  - ◆ Who will direct the program?
  - ◆ Do leads have adequate time and support?

# Elements of a Peer Program Development

---

## #1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A SUCCESSFUL PEER RESOURCE PROGRAM

1. Needs Assessment
2. Purpose and Mission Statement
3. Goals & Objectives
4. Staffing
5. Administrative and Faculty Support
6. Service Options
7. Policies and Procedures
8. Community and Advisory Committee
9. Involvement
10. Evaluation
11. Funding



# WELLNESS AMBASSADORS

NAMI On Campus





# PEER-LED WELLNESS EDUCATION

National Suicide  
Prevention Helpline -

1-800-273-8255





# WELLNESS PEERS

- ❖ Design their school's Wellness Center prior to opening
- ❖ Work in the school's Wellness Center
- ❖ Promote the Wellness Center through events and communication
- ❖ Provide mental health education to students
- ❖ Suggest ways to utilize Wellness Center tools to self regulate
- ❖ Share information about school and community resources



VENTURA COUNTY  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION  
Dr. César Morales  
County Superintendent of Schools



## **BECOME A WELLNESS CENTER PEER**

- PROVIDE SUPPORT TO WELLNESS CENTER PARTICIPANTS
- SUGGEST WAYS OF MANAGING SYMPTOMS
- DE-ESCALATE EMOTIONAL SITUATIONS
- REFER STUDENTS TO THE CENTER
- PROMOTE THE CENTER THROUGH EVENTS AND COMMUNICATION PLAN ACTIVITIES
- PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION TO STUDENTS
- ANNOUNCE AND PARTICIPATE IN WELLNESS CENTER WORKSHOPS
- DISTRIBUTE INFORMATION ABOUT ON-SITE RESOURCES

**CONTACT THE WELLNESS CENTER  
COORDINATOR FOR MORE  
INFORMATION**

W

# PEER MENTORING / PEER COUNSELING



MPA MENTORING





# TRAINING

---

## 1. PROGRAM GOALS AND ROLES OF THE PEER HELPER

- Review of program's operation
- Set norms and expectations, review ethical guidelines
- Review important peer helper qualities: acceptance, caring, etc.
- Confidentiality and Duties to Inform

## 2. TEAM BUILDING

## 3. SELF-AWARENESS TRAINING

- Prejudice Awareness and Reduction
- Frame of Reference
- Values Clarification
- Noticing

## 4. COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING

- Non-Verbal Communication
- Question-Asking: Open & Closed Questions
- Paraphrasing for Content and Feeling
- Helping Someone Without Giving Advice

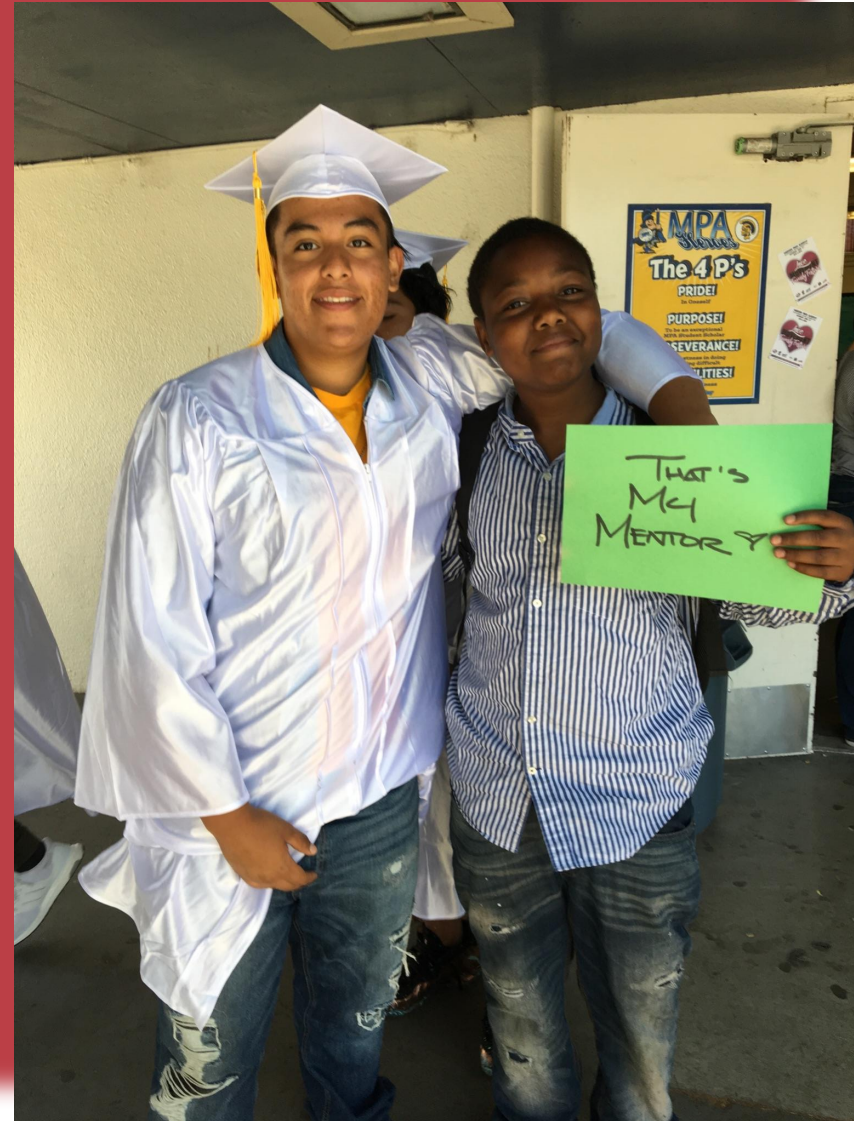
- "I" messages
- Communication stoppers
- Problem Solving and Decision Making
- Assertiveness versus aggressiveness
- Am I in over my head?



# MPA MENTORING



Love your self. You know.  
Never be afraid to be your self.







**Madison Park Academy Mentors - Oakland, California**



# WHAT THE PEER MENTORS SAY....

"I enjoy building a bond with the mentees I have, and supporting them. I sometimes see myself in them and it's like talking to my younger self."

"I make sure to listen to them and ask questions to make them feel that I care because I do. I always have a positive attitude to uplift them."

"The most challenging part was building the connection with my mentee. It took some time to gain their trust and for them to know that I will be there for them."

# PEER COUNSELING






**Carmen**  
Peer Counselor  
Pomona High School  
12 grade

**Noemy**  
Former Peer Counselor  
Pomona High School



# “BUT THEY ARE JUST KIDS!”

Strong peer mentoring/counseling programs have:

- Very clear guidance around scope of the peer’s role
  - Thorough training on red flags that need to be reported to advisor
  - Expectations around documentation of all peer sessions
  - Expectations around boundaries
  - **Lots** of practice - role plays, scenarios, opportunities to grow
  - Adequate staff time to oversee the program for quality and safety
  - School staff training and buy-in
- 

# Emily

Peer Mentor  
Oakland Technical  
High School  
12 grade

# CULTURE KEEPERs - El Cerrito High School





# WHAT SKILLS DID YOU LEARN?

"I learned patience, humility, empathy, and the importance of looking at a situation from all points of view."

"I learned how to relate to my peers in a way that also kept them safe and made them feel heard."


"Communication skills, ability to listen, reading body language/ tone of voice, summarizing to the speaker, case managing, confidentiality are all skills I learned as a peer counselor"

*"Validating feelings, conflict resolution, non verbal communication, body language, open vs closed ended questions, active listening, etc."*


**Ishmael  
Emily  
Mars  
Morgan**

**Peer Mentors  
Oakland Technical  
High School**

# SKILLS OF PEER LEADERS

- ❖ Empathetic listening
  - ❖ Identifying emotions
  - ❖ Recognizing and reflecting strengths
  - ❖ Stress management tools
  - ❖ Communication
  - ❖ Relationship-building
  - ❖ Organizational skills
  - ❖ Social awareness
  - ❖ Respect for others
  - ❖ Social Engagement
  - ❖ Goal setting
  - ❖ Paraphrasing
  - ❖ Self-confidence
  - ❖ Self-efficacy
- 

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT LEADERS

- ❖ Invest in training for schools and CBOs to bring P2P programs to schools
  - ❖ Implement P2P support as part of all schools' Tier 1 intervention
  - ❖ Fund programs and partnerships to scale P2P programs
  - ❖ Support research and evaluation efforts on Youth P2P programs
  - ❖ Consider P2P a critical strategy for improving/diversifying our mental health workforce
  - ❖ Commit to co-creating programs with youth, and centering youth voice and experience
- 

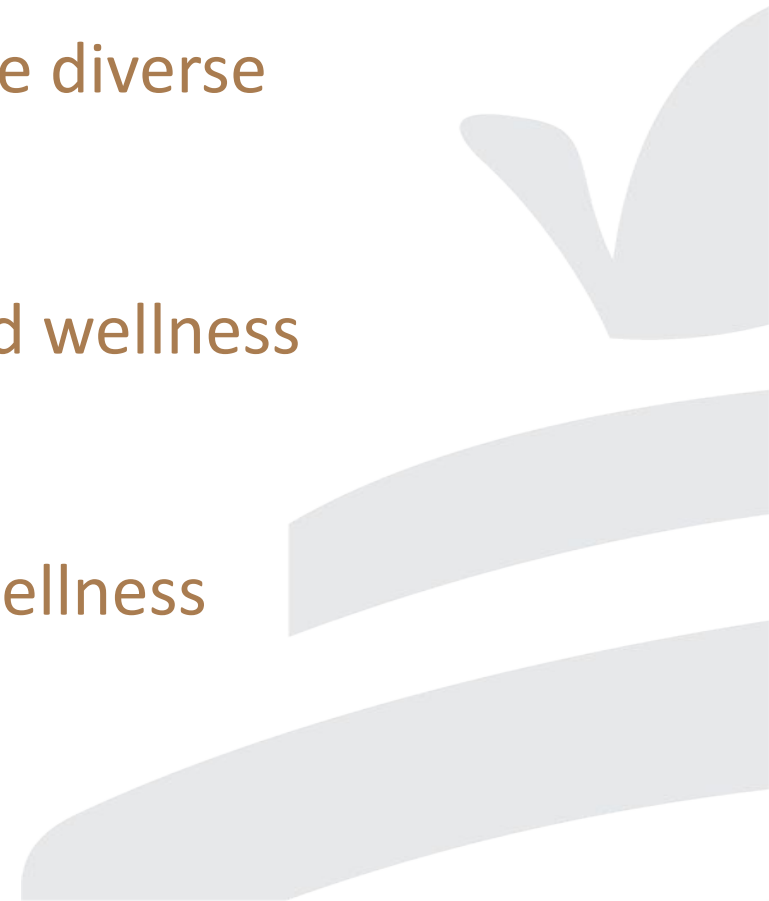
# CALIFORNIA's INVESTMENT CHILDREN & YOUTH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE (CYBHI)

- 5-year, \$4.4 billion dollars
- to enhance, expand and redesign the systems that support behavioral health for children and youth 0 -25.
- invitation to think differently about what supports student mental health and well-being, and by whom it is delivered.



# WELLNESS COACH WORKFORCE

- ❖ New provider type in California, creating a career ladder for mental health careers
- ❖ Increase the state's capacity and grow a larger, more diverse behavioral health workforce with lived experience
- ❖ Expansion of non-clinical mental health support and wellness strategies, such as peer programs
- ❖ LEAs and community partners will be able to hire wellness coaches and get reimbursed through Medicaid





# NEXT STEPS

- ❖ Youth-Led Peer-to-Peer Mental Health Supports Webinar Series
  - ❖ Peer-to Peer Mental Health Supports Learning Collaborative
  - ❖ Resources, Toolkits and Online Community
- 

# BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

What is an idea/inspiration that you heard today that you want to take away with you?

- ❖ Takeaways
- ❖ Wonderings, Questions, Curiosities
- ❖ Ah ha moment!



**peer support programs**



**Appreciation to the  
youth who shared  
their words and voices  
in this presentation!**

*Carmen, Vanessa, Jocelyn, Hope, Aaron, Sincere,  
Daniel, Lena, Myrron, Na'Taisha, Charlie,  
Laneiyah, Nohemy, Emily, Ishmael, Morgan,  
Mars and many more!*

***Presentation Slides***



# STAY CONNECTED



[schoolhealthcenters.org](https://schoolhealthcenters.org)



[info@schoolhealthcenters.org](mailto:info@schoolhealthcenters.org)



[sbh4ca](https://twitter.com/sbh4ca)



[sbh4ca](https://www.instagram.com/sbh4ca)

Gracias

謝謝

Thank you

Cảm ơn

Salamat

Amy Blackshaw, MSW

[ablackshaw@schoolhealthcenters.org](mailto:ablackshaw@schoolhealthcenters.org)





# Conference Evaluation



Throughout the conference, when you see a QR code, simply open your phone camera and point it at the code.

Your camera automatically recognizes the QR code and will prompt you to visit the link!

**Scan the QR to complete the evaluation for this session.**