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# Seattle U Student-Lead Programs Highlight Mental Health Awareness Month

Nicole Alejandra Hong, Staff Reporter

The Mental Health America organization has designated the month of May to mental health awareness since 1949, to break the negative stigma surrounding mental health. Education around mental health has made headway in recent years; however, mental health issues still largely go unspoken.

First-year English major, Angelica Camacho, spoke about the stigma around mental health and the dangers of that stigmatization.

“Having struggles with mental health is a lot more common than people think, but because it is so stigmatized, many don’t realize it, and that perpetuates the problem,” Camacho said.



Adeline Ong

At Seattle University, there are several on-campus organizations such as Health and Wellness Crew (HAWC) and the Office of Wellness & Health Promotion, that work to provide mental health resources and outlets to students.

HAWC is unique from many of the other mental health resources on-campus because it is composed of student peers who are certified in offering support. Third-year Biology major, Ivy Hawksford, who is also a member of HAWC, spoke to the benefits of receiving help and resources from a student-led organization, especially when it comes to a stigmatized issue like mental health.

“It can sometimes be intimidating to seek out support from older adults or authority figures. HAWC is an organization where students can work with someone closer to their age to address an issue they’re facing. We are always here if you just want to talk or rant,” Hawksford said.

Throughout Mental Health Awareness Month, the Office of Wellness & Health Promotion is posting daily on their Instagram with tips on how to better care for mental health. In addition, the office is hosting a variety of events.

Earlier this month, the office hosted the Mindfulness and Healing Through Art event, featuring Dr. Raja Gopal Bhattar, and Time to Break Some Sh\*t!! where students were able to write down all their bottled-up feelings on a plate and break it afterward.

You Can Help A Friend is another event that the office of Wellness & Health Promotion put on at the beginning of May. The event provided training on how to identify, recognize and talk to a friend when they are in distress. Throughout the fall and winter quarters of the 2020-2021 academic year, the office hosted the You Can Help A Friend event monthly and hopes to bring it back again in the future.

The Office of Wellness & Health Promotion and HAWC are teaming up to put on a Mindful Coloring event May 27 where students will receive a coloring book and learn about the benefits that mindful coloring can have on mental health.

Wellness & Health Promotion also provides several resources to students throughout the school year. During the fall and winter, the office rented out light therapy lamps to students experiencing seasonal depression, which proved to be very popular as the rentals quickly ran out.

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed how the Wellness & Promotion office can provide for Seattle U students. Before the pandemic, students were free to walk into the office and socialize. Now social distancing has severely limited student capacity in the office.

To ensure that students still have similar access to Wellness & Health Promotion, they have introduced Reserve a Rant, where students can reserve a 30-minute time session with a faculty member at Wellness & Health Promotion to vent their feelings to. Although the faculty are not certified psychologists, they are there to support students through listening.

Renata Elias, the Mental Health Program Coordinator at the Office of Wellness & Health Promotion spoke to the importance of mental health, not just during the pandemic, but always.

"We are holistic beings. Everything affects everything. Just like not eating affects your learning, failing to take care of your mental health affects other aspects of your life," Elias said. "People will automatically seek out help from a doctor or take medicine if they are having a headache, for example, but we don't always do this when it comes to mental health. Sometimes we just bottle it all up until the problem is very severe, and that's not healthy."

First-year Computer Science major, Diana Sambotin, shared her tips on how she has been taking care of her mental health.

"I always try to take study breaks and go on walks often. I especially enjoy taking walks in the Central District," Sambotin said.

Student-led organizations on campus are highlighting the importance of recognizing mental health as an integral part of human wellbeing. They are holding various events to emphasize mental health conversations and resources throughout May and will continue their regular services apart from this month of recognition.