



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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New Campaign Encourages Young People to ‘Be Present’ for Others in Need of Mental, Emotional Support

COLUMBUS – Adolescence is a challenging time for any young person. It’s a period of dramatic changes, transitions from middle to high school to college and self-discovery that can sometimes contribute to isolation, depression and other mental health issues. That’s why the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) has launched *Be Present* – a statewide multimedia campaign that educates and empowers peers, friends, classmates and siblings of at-risk youth to “step-up” and provide needed support.

“Many young people experience stress or anxiety as they find their way, and some have experienced trauma or have an evolving emotional disorder,” said OhioMHAS Director Tracy Plouck. “Be Present will raise awareness about the struggles young people face and link them to local and state resources, information, crisis intervention and other forms of care, if needed.”

The campaign was developed by MEE Productions, Inc. a communications, market research and social-marketing firm that specializes in developing cutting-edge and culturally relevant messages focusing on public health. Using the tagline “Your Presence is a Present,” the campaign especially targets youth who are victims of bullying, those who are struggling to overcome mental or emotional problems or other stressors, and those who are most at risk of harming themselves – including LGBTQ youth.

The campaign includes a website (www.BePresentOhio.org), a multi-platform presence on social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat), print ads and digital PSAs on Pandora Radio. The website features an online toolkit to help young people demonstrate the power of presence by getting involved at one of three levels:

- **Friend:** registration not required; everyone who visits the main campaign website can become a friend and gain access to videos, email updates, activity calendars and other campaign materials.
- **Advocate:** registration and parental permission (if under age 18) required; includes access to demographic profiles, tutorials about coping with stressors for self and others; ability to order/download campaign materials, disseminate messages to peers and participate in regional trainings.
- **Leader:** username/password required for entry; ability to connect with other advocates throughout Ohio for leader training, sponsor support groups and other peer activities; participate in more intensive training and certification opportunities and become eligible for incentives.

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“To develop this campaign, we got on-the-ground research insights from young people in five counties. Through these firsthand accounts and stories of the challenges facing youth, you can see and hear why galvanizing support among peers is so important,” said Ivan Juzang, founder and president of MEE Productions, Inc.

The campaign will roll out in stages over the next five to seven months, with a series of regional kickoffs to be held in partnership with local schools and state partners, including Prevention Action Alliance and the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation.

What Ohio Teens Are Saying About the *Be Present* Campaign:

“A lot of people my age are having a hard time with a lot of stuff, and this could be a good way to help them get through it. I think this would make a huge difference in my school and community”
– Josh, 17

“It’s a powerful message and promotes youth to become active leaders in the community.”
– Aiden, 16

“In my community, numerous teens struggle with mental health issues, but often do not know how to cope in healthy ways...Adults often do not know how to relate to or comfort teens, so the peer-to-peer connection is invaluable and more effective.”
– Lauren, 18

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