

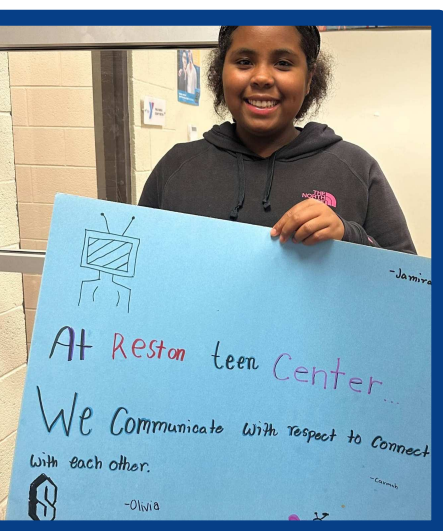
our minds  
matter



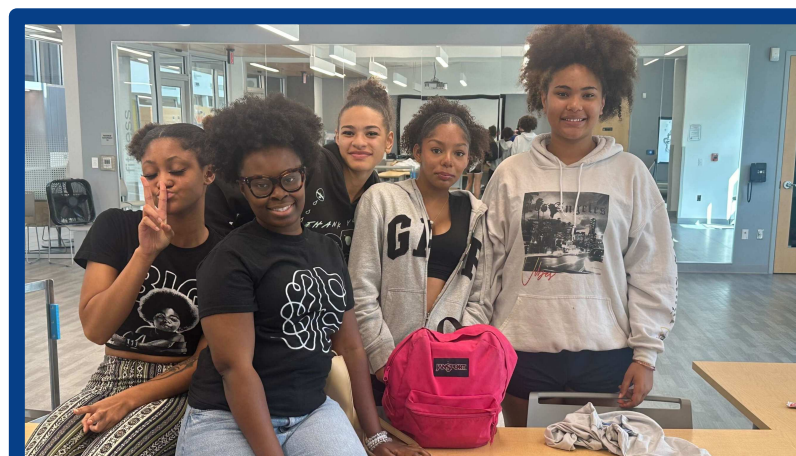
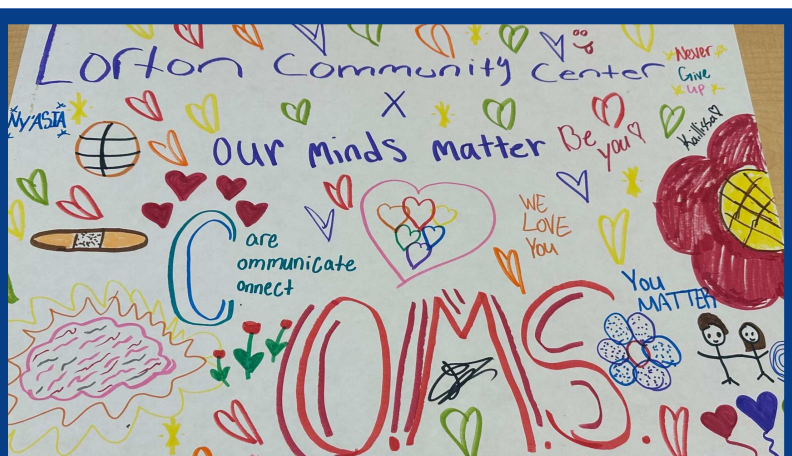
# a **teen-led** movement for mental health

2023-2024 School Year Impact Report





—High school club member





**“it saved my life.”**

—High school club member

## **our minds matter is working toward the day when no teen dies by suicide.**

In recent years, we have grown our club footprint while tripling our reach — delivering life-saving mental health peer support to 66,700+ teens last year alone. Our team and budget have grown in tandem, and we were especially thrilled by our recent awards from both the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Foundation for Advancing Minority Mental Health and Morgan Stanley for our innovative solution in advancing children’s mental health.

Our growth has happened while growing awareness of the teen mental health crisis and, crucially, of **the central role social connectedness plays as a cornerstone of mental well-being.** As the Surgeon General warned in 2023, loneliness is as harmful as smoking. From media reports to philanthropic investments, an emergent movement is working to ensure that every teen can

build the authentic social bonds and sense of belonging we all need for our mental health.

We are proud that our flagship Our Minds Matter model, launched in 2016, has proven to be a leader in this movement. Firmly grounded in the benefits of social connectedness, our model offers insights and pathways for others seeking to build sustainable mental well-being across the culture of a school and community.

**To all of our donors, partners, volunteers, and teens in the OMM program: Thank you for being a mental health champion!**



*Lauren Anderson*  
Executive Director  
& Founder



# our big wins

**1,281**

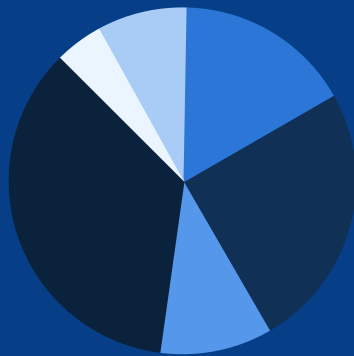
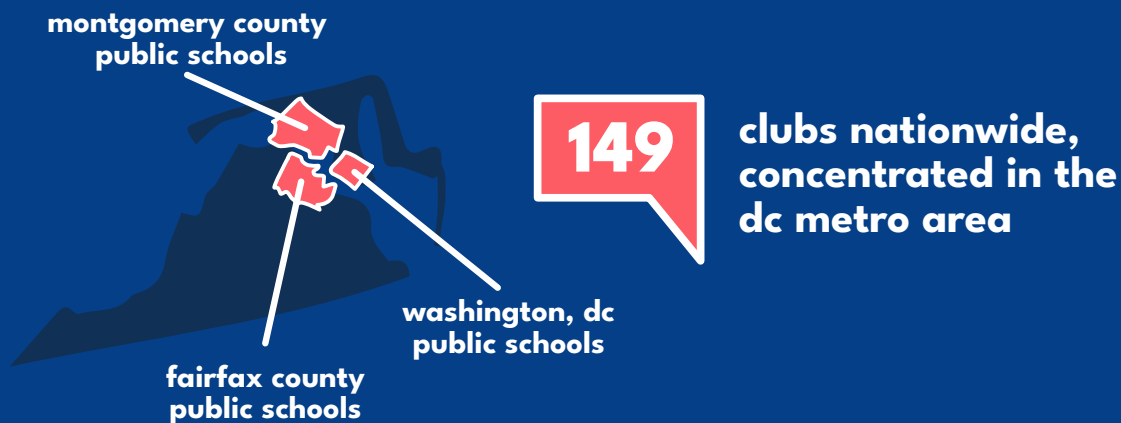
**teen-led  
events**

**2,871**

**club  
members**

**66,700**

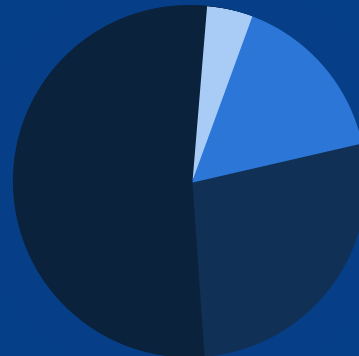
**total teens  
engaged**



## race/ethnicity

- Black/African American — 31.7%
- White or European American — 23.5%
- Hispanic/Latine — 20%
- Asian/Asian American — 13.6%
- Not categorized — 8%
- Multiracial — 3.1%

Source: District partner data and NCS (N:1475)



## sexual orientation

- Heterosexual: 53.23%
- Prefer Not to Answer: 25.81%
- LGBTQ+: 18.06%
- Not Sure: 2.90%

Source: High school exit poll (N:310)

*\*Data for sexual orientation is only available for high school students*

**“we have become a closer community and have involved the entire student population in events to get rid of the stigma surrounding mental health.”**

—High school club member



Our work is concentrated in the DC metro area, where we have strong partnerships with the public school districts in Fairfax County, VA; Montgomery County, MD; and Washington, DC.



Our new middle school program has rapidly expanded into **39 schools**.



We’re working with students in **schools that serve majority low-income students**; about 38% of club members qualify for free and reduced meals.



We are providing tailored, **culturally-responsive resources for teens of diverse backgrounds**, including (but not limited to) LGBTQ+ and BIPOC students.



With an **average club retention rate of 88%**, we are deepening our impact year-over-year as clubs become an integral part of school culture.

# awards & celebrations

## **morgan stanley children's mental health innovation award**

OMM was thrilled to win this prestigious award, given to just six non-profits each year. The award recognizes the innovation and impact of our new teen center program, piloted in the 2023-24 school year in all 13 teen and community centers in Fairfax County. We want to share our thanks with our partners at Neighborhood and Community Services of Fairfax County, the government agency that oversees these centers.



*Read more about our Teen Center Pilot on page 10.*

## **award for advancing minority mental health**

We were thrilled to be recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Foundation with one of 11 awards “for helping to advance mental health equity for our neighbors in need and their families,” according to the APA.



## we continued the tradition to “move with music”

For the second year in a row, we partnered with MTV Entertainment Studios to encourage schools to “Move with Music” for Mental Health Action Day 2024. Teens at 36 schools and community center sites led the celebration for over 38,600 of their peers.\*

*\*Note: Because of the widespread nature of Move with Music, these participants are not counted as part of the total reach reported above; the 66,700+ teens we reached represent action through other teen-led campaigns.*



**“each year [our club] garners more recognition and students are more excited to participate in the program. the success of our annual self-care fun fairs has spread throughout the school district. additionally, students have the opportunity to learn how they can be more supportive of their peers struggling with mental illness and addiction.”**

—High school sponsor

#### STORY HIGHLIGHT FROM OUR PROGRAM STAFF

### small moments of kindness

During a self-care activity at an OMM club meeting at a middle school, students were asked to write down a reason they are proud of themselves. One teen sat for a long time, unable to think of anything. Then another club member leaned over and started listing out the positive traits she saw, recommending what the teen could write. This small moment, just between the two of them, spoke to how our program is building peer-to-peer support skills every day.

**“for a seventh grader to be able to recognize that a peer was struggling, to step in without being asked, and to provide genuine and kind support is a powerful testament to our impact.”**

—OMM program staff

## omm clubs are:



### led by teens themselves

Based on prevention research that shows the power of peer-to-peer influence.



### easy and seamless

For students and school sponsors to set up, run, and sustain.



### evidence-informed

Using an “upstream” suicide prevention model that connects teens with resources *before* mental health struggles become crises.



**“i’ve learned different ways to cope with stress when things get overwhelming. being in an omm club has made me more comfortable discussing and confronting my mental health by being connected with others as well as supported.”**

—High school club member

**in omm clubs, teens build skills and habits in four key factors empirically proven to enhance mental health and reduce suicide risk:**



**social  
connectedness**

77.1% feel socially connected to other club members.



**help-seeking  
behavior**

73.2% are willing to seek help if struggling with mental health.



**prosocial  
skills**

84.5% feel confident in supporting a peer who is struggling.



**healthy  
habits**

75.4% practice self care and healthy habits to improve wellbeing.

**these protective factors are at the heart of how we evaluate our impact.**

**85%**

**of teens feel omm has had a positive impact on their mental health.**

# 66,700+ teens served

A typical OMM club is led by 3-5 engaged student leaders, who host weekly or bi-weekly meetings for a consistent membership of 5-40+ teens, overseen by at least one school staff sponsor.



## high school clubs

In our flagship high school model, teens take action to improve their own mental well-being and support a positive culture across their school community. All activities and school-wide events are reflective of teens' own lived experiences and specific communities.

## middle school clubs

With suicide rates rising among youth ages 10-14, we adapted our club model for younger students to strengthen coping skills and build healthy habits that can last a lifetime. Piloted in 2021-22, our middle school is now widespread through our partner districts in the DC metro area. These younger teens develop their leadership skills while working with the more-hands-on support of staff sponsors.



**“i liked meeting with others who were dealing with the same things as me. it made me feel like i wasn’t alone.”**

—Middle school club member



## school-wide campaigns

OMM clubs also extend their impact through student-led campaigns, which reach an exponential number of their peers in their schools and communities. Teen leaders organize therapy dog visits, sponsor craft projects to promote kindness, run LGBTQ+ acceptance campaigns, create designated “wellness rooms” (as pictured left), and more. All grounded in what teens know their schools need, campaigns encourage social connectedness while promoting life-saving mental health awareness, resources, and coping skills.

**“i loved the community and working together to host fun events that everyone could enjoy.”**

—Middle school club member

## teen center pilot

In Fall 2023, we launched a pilot program to expand our successful school-based program model into new spaces — reaching a population of teens who face higher mental health risks and lower access to mental health resources, and meeting them in the teen and community centers where they already are. Many of the participants in the program face barriers to participating in school clubs (such as needing to care for a sibling, or work a job). About 93% of participants in the program are BIPOC, about 71% are cisgender boys/men, and about 77% are in grades 7, 8, or 9, which are all important groups to reach for mental health equity. More than 260 unique teens participated during the first pilot year, and we are training community center staff to run the program sustainably for the long-term.





# club features

stories of teens cultivating their own well-being and supporting their peers:

## SCHOOL-WIDE CAMPAIGNS

### under my umbrella

In spring 2024, we launched a new campaign celebrating the joy that the LGBTQ+ community brings to the world: “Umbrellas protect us from storms and community does the same.” Inviting teens to write down how the LGBTQ+ community has uplifted or embraced them, the campaign creates a collage of rainbow-colored umbrellas for a highly visible and meaningful statement. By mailing campaign supply kits to 35 Virginia clubs to run the campaign at the same time, we also fostered peer connectedness across our network. *Special thanks to our partners at the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.*



## DC PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### envisioning your future

As an antidote to spring semester exhaustion, the Knights Minds Matter club at Ballou High School gathered for an OMM-designed Vision Board Activity. Students spent a relaxing afternoon chatting and creating collages using magazine pictures, motivational stickers, and affirmations, in an activity encouraging self-care, creativity, and social connectedness, as well as goal-setting. Teens’ vision boards included dreams of travel, fulfilling jobs, families, financial goals, and living lives that center well-being.



#### FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### what's in your hope box?

At Thomas Edison High School, the teen leaders of Edison Minds Matter were awarded the 2024 Fairfax County Peace Award for their inspired work uniting their school community and reducing mental health stigma. Just one example of their activities: This spring, the club gathered to create “hope boxes,” writing down goals and aspirations as a way of sharing their hopes, visualizing their futures, and cultivating a positive outlook. The club saved all of the teens’ notes as a time capsule, which they opened in the spring to reflect and share.



#### MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### kindness rocks!

At Robert Frost Middle School, teens in the Eagle Minds Matter club decided to mark World Kindness Day in November by blanketing their school with affirmations. Students gathered to decorate rocks, as well as the sidewalks of their school, with chalk drawings and positive messages like “You matter” and “Love yourself and be kind.” The activity let club members relax and create together. And, because they spread their artwork across the front of the school, the club also shared kindness with the entire student body.



# our model of support

while there are many “o. -the-shelf” models for teen programming, omm offers a uniquely hands-on approach for the clubs in our network. we create tangible impact on teen participants’ mental health thanks to:

## our collaborative district partnerships

We have robust relationships with public school districts, collaborating and integrating our work to support district mental health initiatives and connect clubs to more resources.

## our trainings, club funding, and tailored support

We provide clubs with a wide range of tangible help, including stipends to run events and campaigns, swag to raise awareness, and a library of activities and curricula.

## our hands-on club coaching

Our program team keeps in regular touch with clubs, including site visits to lead special activities. Teens and staff are busy, so we make clubs easy to set up, run, and sustain.





## our programming is teen-centric, and our organization is, too.

As part of our commitment to teen leadership, our Teen Advisory Council offers a paid opportunity for eight student leaders from the OMM network to grow professionally while making their mark on the future of teen mental health. Students selected for the Council through an application process provide input on OMM's goals, program, and communication strategies.



## our partners



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Fairfax County  
Neighborhood and  
Community Services

Maryland's Largest School District

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

*Expanding Opportunity and Unleashing Potential*



Fairfax County  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
ENGAGE • INSPIRE • THRIVE



**BORN THIS WAY/  
FOUNDATION**

CRISIS TEXT LINE |

jssa



**MY LIFE IS WORTH LIVING**

**TAC**



**THE BLACK SWAN  
ACADEMY**



University of Missouri



**Service  
Never Sleeps**  
Tireless Action Toward Social Justice

# gathering evidence of impact

**our work is firmly grounded in the latest youth mental health and suicide prevention research and refined through our own data and evidence.**

In recent years, our data has consistently shown that increased involvement with OMM (as measured by the number of club meetings attended and by club tenure) is associated with better mental wellbeing. Teens who attend meetings more regularly tend to report higher scores on other program outcomes than their low-attendance peers, including feeling more socially connected to others, better self-care habits, improved help-seeking, and greater confidence in supporting others who are struggling.

**when comparing scores from those at the beginning of the year to those at the end of the year for a matched sample of omm participants, we see that...**



Students saw **meaningful improvements in their mental wellbeing** and that the increase was statistically significant.



Students also reported **gains in their feelings of connectedness** to peers, self-care habits and coping skills, overall help-seeking attitude and awareness, and prosocial skills though these increases were not significant (due to small sample size).



There was a decrease in perceived mental health stigma at school.

## researching our “ripple effects”

Since 2021, we have partnered with University of Missouri teen development specialist Dr. Jordan Booker to research the use of peer-to-peer models in youth suicide prevention programming.

With this ongoing research, we are focusing on achieving more rigorous research design by establishing control groups. For example, can we compare the mental health outcomes of OMM club members with non-participants at the same school? Can we compare the mental well-being of teens at schools with OMM clubs with that of teens at non-OMM schools in the same district? Through this more rigorous design, we will be able to assess the benefits of OMM club participation for individual club members; most importantly, we will also be able to unearth the mechanisms through which the OMM program could have a cascading effect across the school community, creating a cultural shift. The findings from this study will enable us to strengthen our models as we bring our work to scale.



### LOOKING AHEAD

## end-of-the-year celebration kits

At the end of each school year, OMM celebrates our high school seniors, many of whom have been recurring club members, including by sending around an activity box celebrating their growth and accomplishments.

This year’s activity box, “Back to the Future,” asked teens to meditate on their past, present, and future versions of themselves, then create a visual graphic or narrative of their reflections. At the end of the club meeting, teens were given the space to share their impressions with their peers. This activity collectively helped students process their past struggles, acknowledge their mental health progress, and look toward a promising future.





# thank you to the mental health champions who donate to our work!

Our Minds Matter is a nonprofit organization; we wouldn't be able to do what we do without the support of foundations, corporations, government funders, and individual mental health champions.

We want to express our deepest thanks to all of our supporters, who give at any size. In addition, we want to acknowledge the following major donors\* who committed \$500 or more to our mission in FY24:

## institutional funders

\$100,000+	
The County of Fairfax, VA • Devon C. Rubenstein Foundation • Hopewell Fund / Hollister Confidence Fund • Imagine Learning Foundation • Morgan Stanley Alliance for Children's Mental Health	
\$20,000 - \$49,999	\$10,000 - 19,999
Commonwealth of Virginia • Fairfax County Public Schools • Government of the District of Columbia • Healthcare Initiative Foundation • Jewish Social Service Agency • Kettering Family Foundation • Zephyr Impact Fund	Community Foundation for Northern Virginia / The Sydalco Charitable Fund • Garchik Family Foundation • Harman Family Foundation • if: A Foundation for Radical Possibility • Joseph E. and Marjorie B. Jones Foundation • Risa Fund
\$5,000 - \$9,999	\$2,500 - \$4,999
Adventist Healthcare Community Partnerships Fund • The Ally Coalition • American Psychiatric Association Foundation • Clark-Winchcole Foundation • Dominion Guild • Foley Hoag Foundation • MTV Entertainment • PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation • Rosendin Foundation	Arlington-DC Behavior Therapy Institute • Van Metre Companies Foundation • Yorktown High School
\$1,000 - \$2,499	\$500 - \$999
Immanuel Presbyterian Church • Rogers Behavioral Health • Spur Local	Community Foundation for Northern Virginia / Kara Foster-Bey Suicide Prevention Memorial Fund • PennyLoafer, LLC • School First Education Consulting • The Will To Live Foundation

# individual donors

\$10,000+		\$5,000 - 9,999	
Anonymous • David Parker and Althea Lee		Tim & Sue Anderson • Jonathan Faubell • Rhodes Family Foundation / Diane C Rhodes	
\$2,000 - \$4,999			
Todd R Kingsley • Rachel and Todd Kros • Whitney Parnell			
\$1,000 - \$1,999			
Mike and Michele Bradshaw • Andrew Davis • Aras Jizan • Sharon J. Kemmerer & Elizabeth L. Halsey Fund • Deborah Kimmel • Jen Leyton-Armakan • Len Levitt • Beaman/McCain Charitable Fund • David McAnulty		Kurt and Marilyn Muller • Michael and Michelle Roberts • Paul Roellig • Linda Ryan-Nicklas • Simone Sawyer • Amanda Shipe • Dudley Ward • Beth Werfel	
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Kevin Anderson • Martha Armour • Gail Belt • Jim Bullion • Kristin J Carothers Ph.D. • Jay and Lisa Donegan • Michael Dunn • Gregory Difelice • Sophie Hruza • Dwight Iverson • Sharon Kemmerer • Anthony LaBarbera • Kathleen LaBarbera		Lance Matthiesen • Susan Nordeen • Robert Olcott III • Matt Owens • Jess Owens • Roger Nastou • Sonia Surakov • Nahid Sabti • Melissa Sporn • Steve Stuban • TJ Walsh • Jean Yoon	

*\* Our 2024 fiscal year 2024 runs July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024. We have done our best to report all \$500+ donors during this time, but if you notice an error in this list, please email [info@ourmindsmatter.org](mailto:info@ourmindsmatter.org)*

**“the destigmatization of conversations surrounding mental health is life-saving and incredibly valuable, and contributing to positive change in conjunction with that notion is so deeply personal to me.”**

—2023-2024 Teen Advisory Council member



**our minds  
matter**

**[www.ourmindsmatter.org](http://www.ourmindsmatter.org)**

**would you recommend omm to other schools?**

**“yes, we love omm and all of the resources we have access to. the resources help me in my daily work as well as spark ideas for the group and school community.”**

**“yes, i would recommend this to everyone. this is a direct school connection and aids students who are experiencing trauma.”**

**“yes. omm is a club that allows everyone to feel included and stress-free.”**

**“absolutely - wonderful experience for the students that normalizes the topic of mental health, reduces stigma, and creates an atmosphere of well-being for individuals — leaders and attendees — and the school as a whole.”**

\*Survey responses from high school club sponsors, spring 2024