

We are all here on this fine Sunday morning because we care deeply about the well being of each other. There is a real stigma around the topics of mental health, depression, and suicide, hence the title of this event- "E-race the Stigma." We all have to realize that these pressing issues are only going to be solved through the abolition of the stigma around them. Each one of us is either personally affected by such things, or has experienced first-hand someone who is suffering. It's mind boggling to me that there still is such a taboo around mentioning and having conversations about suicide or being depressed, anxious, or just mentally unwell. Our goal here today, and what the members of YAC have been working for all year, is to make bring these types of difficult conversations into the forefront of all our minds. We all have been striving to reach out and make a positive difference in the lives of every person in each community in Geauga County.

Your participation here today and your continued efforts going forward will help foster the kinds of proactive and important

conversations about mental health that can sweep across the entire county, state, and country. I personally want to see phrases like “It's okay not to be okay” and “I need help too” to be thrust into the spotlight of communities everywhere. Each one of us has the baggage and extra weight that we carry with us on a daily basis, and that affects your mental state no matter how happy, outgoing, or fun-loving of a person you are. Why then, do teenagers have such a hard time going to their parents about what they're going through? Why do adults hold in and hide their pain and angst instead of reaching out and talking to someone? Why then did 47,173 commit suicide in 2017 and why does that number get exponentially bigger every year? We have to end the stigma around these things. It's time to be a voice, a helping hand, or just someone that someone else can talk to. It doesn't take much to help someone out, nor should it be something that is pushed away. There are so many ways to help a person in need.

I have been a shoulder for my friends to cry on before, and I have been the friend crying into another friend's arms. I deal with issues that affect my mental health, but because I am a part of this loving community that looks out for one another I have so many ways to deal with my struggles. Our goal here is to extend that community out to anyone and everyone in need. Seeing so many incredible faces ranging through all ages gives me so much hope and encouragement that this movement and our efforts are going in the right direction and that we will be changing the lives of so many people in need for a long time to come. Thank you all for coming and have a great time today.