

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THEIR FRIENDS

UC San Diego's 2006 NDS Event *The Power of Peer Education*

Do you want to test your moods today?

Last fall, the National Depression Screening Day® (NDS) event at the University of California San Diego was all about testing moods. Using a peer to peer approach and incentives like Krispy-Kreme donuts, the event reached more than 300 people eager to "test their moods" using anonymous screening tools.

The event was run through the University's Psychological & Counseling Services (PCS) and sponsored by the Wellness Peer Education program. This group of devoted students works to educate the UCSD community about mental health issues.

During the event, students not only held signs to invite others to attend, but also administered, prepared and scored screening forms. They also ensured that those who completed screenings had a brief consultation with a mental health professional.

"The psychology staff can be intimidating. The peer educators helped to normalize the survey for other students," said Dr. Tiffany O'Meara, coordinator of the Wellness Peer Education program at UCSD and a strong supporter of peer-education.

Having the peer-to-peer approach worked great, but additionally, "one of the best changes we made from previous years was adding more staff to conduct one-on-one consultations," said Dr. O'Meara. The additional staff made it possible for all of the students who took a screening to receive a consultation with a professional, and not only those who got high-scores.

"In the past, we only spoke with students who scored above the cut off scores, and noticed that these students felt singled out. By having all of the students speak with a PCS staff member we were able to normalize the experience of talking to a professional and also provide information about our services to everyone," said Dr. O'Meara.

INCENTIVES, INCENTIVES, INCENTIVES...

To invite more students to "test their moods", Dr. O'Meara and members of the Wellness Peer Education program held the event on the university's "Library Walk", a high traffic location. Students passing by were drawn in, thanks, in part, to the great giveaways that were offered. Every student who participated received a Krispy-Kreme donut, a PCS hi-lighter, a Wellness Peer Educator "stress gloop" or "stress ball," and a brochure from the PCS Stress Management Clinic. Some also received specific information and handouts on depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and PTSD.

Clearly, the 25 dozen boxes of donuts displayed on the table caught the eyes of many students. However, some students chose to participate

specifically to test their moods. “NDS is an effective way to reach students who may not have otherwise sought out our services. It’s also a great way for us to educate our Peer Educators about important mental health topics such as depression, anxiety, and suicide prevention,” said Dr. O’Meara. Not surprising then, that according to Dr. O’Meara, these students consistently rate NDS as their favorite event of the year, and one of their more meaningful college experiences.

“NDS training and screening assists in the development of future mental health professionals. The Wellness Peer educators then take this information and not only educate other students, but apply it to their own lives,” she said.

National Depression Screening Day[®] is part of CollegeResponse[®], a program of Screening for Mental Health, Inc. The program uses a multi-faceted approach in combating the stigma around mental illness and alcohol problems in the college community. For more information or to register call (781) 239-0071 or visit www.mentalhealthscreening.org/college.

Some helpful hints for hosting a successful NDS event:

- Hold a brief training for both the students and staff participating on how to score the forms
- Have an area away from the hustle and bustle of the screening, where staff can sit down and talk to students one-on-one
- Be prepared with LOTS of pens and clip-boards
- Have referral resources grouped by category (Depression, Anxiety, Bipolar, PTSD, etc) so that staff can easily grab the specific brochures that match with that student’s results
- Set a goal for how many students you want to screen, number the screening forms in advance, and have them continually restocked on the clipboards with pens so they’re ready to hand out
- The more prepared the coordinators of NDS can be in advance, the smoother it will run