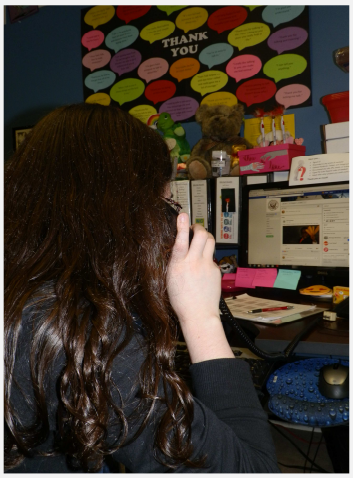
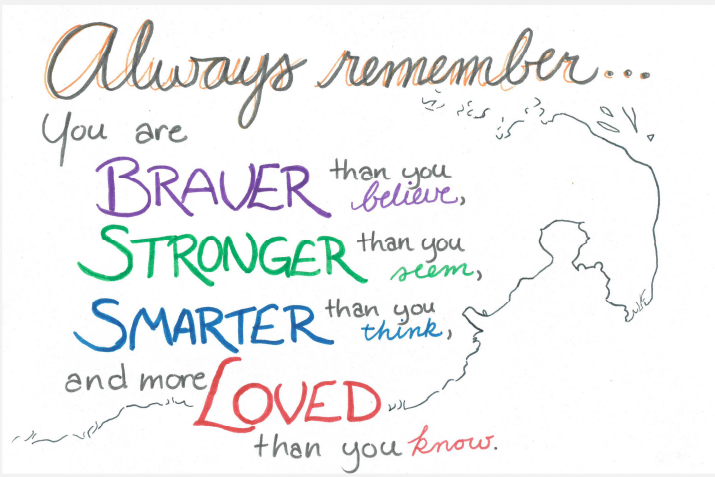
Clark County TeenTalk

A nonjudgmental teen-to-teen support line

2017 Report



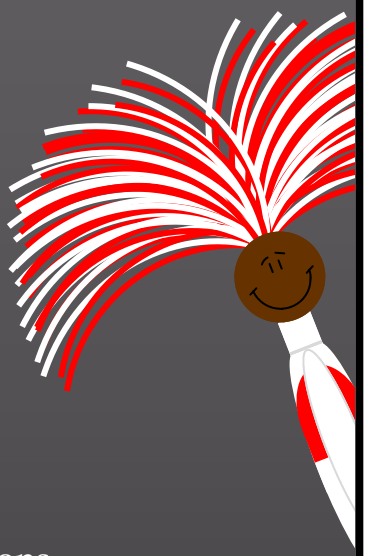


"I find it very calming to talk to someone who doesn't know who I am."
– Facebook Messenger

"Thank you for letting me talk to you about this. I really needed it."
– caller

Table of Contents

1 What is TeenTalk?
3 History
4 Volunteering
6 Peppy Penerson
7 2017 Statistics
9 Outreach
11 Challenge Day
13 School Presentations
13 I Work With Teens
14 Youth Mental Health First Aid
14 Thank You



We are thrilled to tell you about the TeenTalk program and other efforts by our staff in the community. With a focus on improving young people's mental health, self-esteem and connection to resources, these efforts are ones all of Clark County can be proud of. Thank you for letting us share our story with you.

What is TeenTalk?

TeenTalk offers anonymous, confidential and nonjudgmental support ***for teens by teens***. At TeenTalk, you will talk to people your age who may have gone through similar struggles to yourself and can help you find options and give you support. We talk to teens who are going through good times and not-so-good times, or just needing to get things off their chest.

We are ready to talk about

* bullying
* breakups
* school
* LGBTQ topics
* emotions
* self-injury
* mental health
* depression
* family
* work
* drugs and alcohol
* friends
* suicide
* relationships

You can even call if you are feeling bored!

Everyone deserves to be heard.

All conversations are kept anonymous and confidential unless you are being hurt, someone else is being hurt, or you are at risk of hurting yourself. If any of these situations are happening, we take all actions needed to get those young people the help they need.

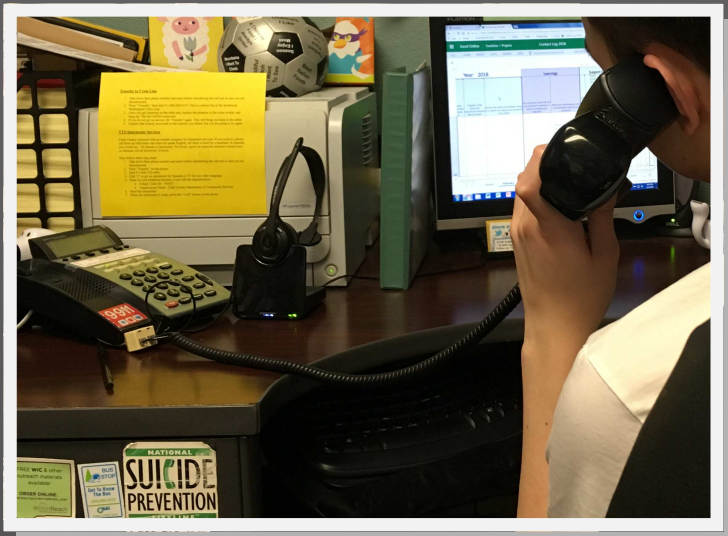
When you feel like no one understands you, call us. Simply telling someone what you're going through can often ease stress.

"We will gladly listen to whatever you have to say and provide whatever support you need." – TeenTalk volunteer

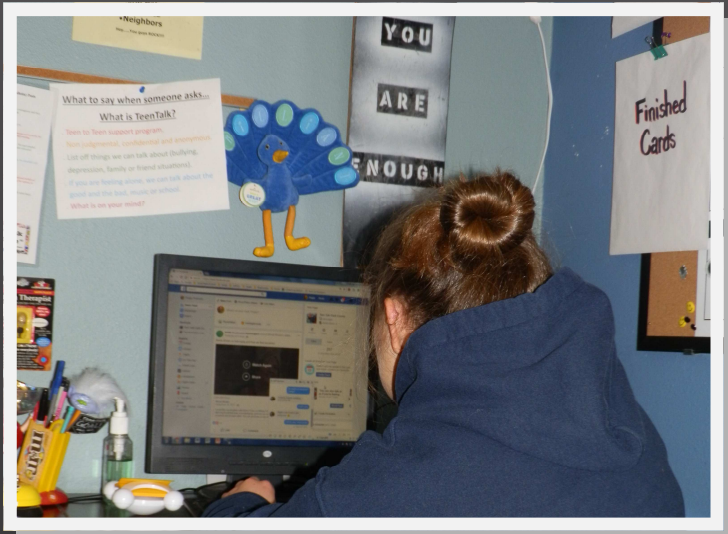
"It's good you're trying to be careful and wanting to find someone safe to talk to."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"I need to talk to you guys. You encourage me and remind me that I am good. You don't judge and I need that." – caller

"Thank you for letting me get that off my chest."
– caller



Our volunteers love talking with youth. In 2017, half of all the conversations we had with youth occurred on the phone, with an average call lasting 24 minutes.



More than one-third of conversations we had with youth in 2017 occurred on social media. Because we value people's right to privacy, we do not look at the profiles of our friends and followers on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (page 6).

What's it like to call?

"Well basically, it's amazing. Though if that's not enough, here's a typical time on the talk line:

"You grab your phone and dial 360.397.2428. Within a few rings, one lucky individual will answer your call. The conversation will start like: 'TeenTalk, this is James,' or whoever is on shift.

"From there, most likely that lucky individual will ask how you're doing, or how your day has been. Though by this moment, you are in control of the call. Whatever you wish to talk about, you may talk about: school, people, work, hobbies, life in general. Feeling down and wanting someone to just listen to you? We got you covered. Feeling up? We want to know about that too! Want some coping skills? We got a list. Need some answers to those hard-to-answer questions of life like, 'Oh no! I don't feel safe. What do I do?' or maybe, 'Hey, I'm homeless. Where can I live?' TeenTalk has a whole book of possible answers (literally a whole book) and will even invest time into researching better options and do the very best job to help.

"Don't want to call due to embarrassment? Well, we are judgment free, and you might be surprised to hear some of us have been there before. It can be a rough, rough world to grow up in. Consider calling someone who is growing up too, and talk about anything you wish.

"Hope to hear from you soon!"

– *James, TeenTalk volunteer and former caller*

"You are so brave for calling to talk to us."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"You're not alone."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"I'm so glad I have TeenTalk in my life. You guys always help me through tough times. I'm glad I found you." – caller

"Calling TeenTalk was less scary than I thought." – caller

History

In spring 2002, focus groups joined together to answer one important question: how can we support the mental health of young people in Clark County? The focus groups of youth had one strong and clear recommendation: create a support line where youth can talk to another young person about their struggles. They wanted a focus on support, empathy and sharing of information about local resources.

The facilitator of the focus groups forwarded the recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners (now called the Clark County Council) which agreed to support the recommendation of young people.

In December 2003, volunteers opened for business and got their first call.

In the 14 years since, young people have volunteered thousands of hours to shine a light of kindness out into their community. Our volunteers have had conversations about any topic or struggle you can imagine. While our volunteers couldn't be more different, they share one essential thing: they feel strongly about being respectful and helpful to others.

Before getting on the line, each volunteer learns they likely won't be able to fix the struggles that are shared with them. They learn there is great help in listening without judgment, and giving encouragement in their own unique ways.

In 2004, TeenTalk received national recognition for children's mental health communications and outreach. Program coordinator Kris Henriksen and volunteer Brandi Van Laeken accepted the award at the Winter System of Care Community Meeting in Dallas.

Erin Taylor, one of the original seven volunteers to complete TeenTalk training, thrilled to support and empower her peers.

"You are brave, and I am impressed how comfortable you are compared to a few months ago." – TeenTalk volunteer

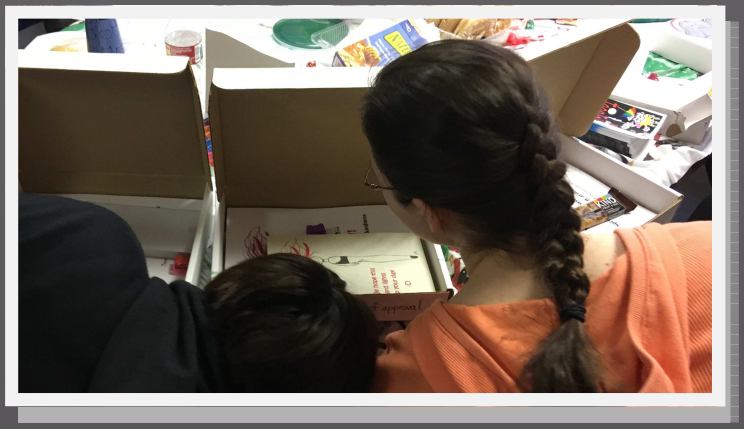
"It's great that you are experiencing new things and having more opportunities." – TeenTalk volunteer

"When I talk to you, you always bring out the best in me."
– caller

"I can tell you anything."
– caller

Volunteering

Value in Volunteering



"To me, TeenTalk is about taking care of others not because we have to, but because we want to.

"I helped teens who had no one else. I've been at a place where I myself have needed someone to talk to and felt so alone, so I grasp the importance of what TeenTalk is. TeenTalk is here to discuss depression, loneliness and self-confidence issues, as well as an abundant number of other topics. Helping teens is the goal. We boost their confidence and self-worth by showing compassion as well as validating who they are by telling them that they are normal, what they are feeling is common, and they are not alone.

"When you give service through TeenTalk, it's out of humbleness and the desire to help others. I want to make a difference: I want to change the lives of other teens because I understand their pain, and all of the energy these callers give in order to try to better themselves. I want to serve the community that served me because at one point I was a caller.

"Having the ability to change someone's entire day just by listening has been an extremely high moment because it shows to me what people need in their core: We need to have people there for us. We need people who genuinely care.

"That's why I do what I do. People need to know they aren't alone and even the thought of being able to provide that for at least one person is a high moment.

"I've shown myself my own personal strength by being able to help others, and I've also shown myself how much I can make a difference by turning someone else's day around. I've grown exponentially as a person: from someone who was not confident in their future to someone who has a plan.

"At TeenTalk, I've learned everyone has a story. People might not always see things the same way others do, and that's because everyone has their own perspective.

"I think the biggest thing I'm taking away from TeenTalk is an even bigger drive to help people. I'm a different person because I honestly didn't think I was important enough to make a difference in other people's lives, but I've grown to see how many lives one person touches."

– Ivan, TeenTalk volunteer and former caller

"Kindness should always be a universal thing."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"The best conversations are the ones you don't expect."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"I have really liked talking to you the past couple weeks."
– caller

"You're like the sister I never had."
– caller

What's it like to volunteer?

"When you go into the TeenTalk room, you're welcomed by friendly faces and offered a chilled drink and an array of snacks. You get to deal with difficult and casual calls, knowing that at the end there will be someone there to give you feedback and debrief what happened. Whether you're having a good or bad day there is always a listening ear. The mentoring isn't one sided—your group at TeenTalk for the day is there for you. When you leave TeenTalk, you can go home and know that you were there for someone who might have had no one else, but you got to be that somebody."

– *Bri, TeenTalk volunteer*

"As a TeenTalker, there is a lot of fun to be had. During my time volunteering, I have met a lot of very nice people. Everyone who works/volunteers here is great, as a person and at what they do. I really feel connected to my community here, getting to talk to all sorts of youth throughout the county. The people who I talk to are not always in crisis, but all of them want someone to talk to, whether it's talking to us because they have no one else to talk to or because they need advice for tough situations. I really feel like I'm making a difference volunteering here!"

– *Zach, TeenTalk volunteer*

How do I become a volunteer?

At TeenTalk, we welcome youth from all walks of life; there is no stereotypical TeenTalker. By seeking out diverse perspectives, we gain more insight and experience in issues facing the teens who contact us for support.

- Are you 15-19 years old?
- Do you live in Clark County?
- Are you available for a three-hour shift once a week?

Great! Email us at ccteentalk1@hotmail.com and let us know you want to be a TeenTalker!

"I won't push anything you don't want to talk about."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"It is OK to set boundaries."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"It's nice to have someone to talk to about this."
– emailer

"You made me feel so much better."
– caller

Peppy Penerson

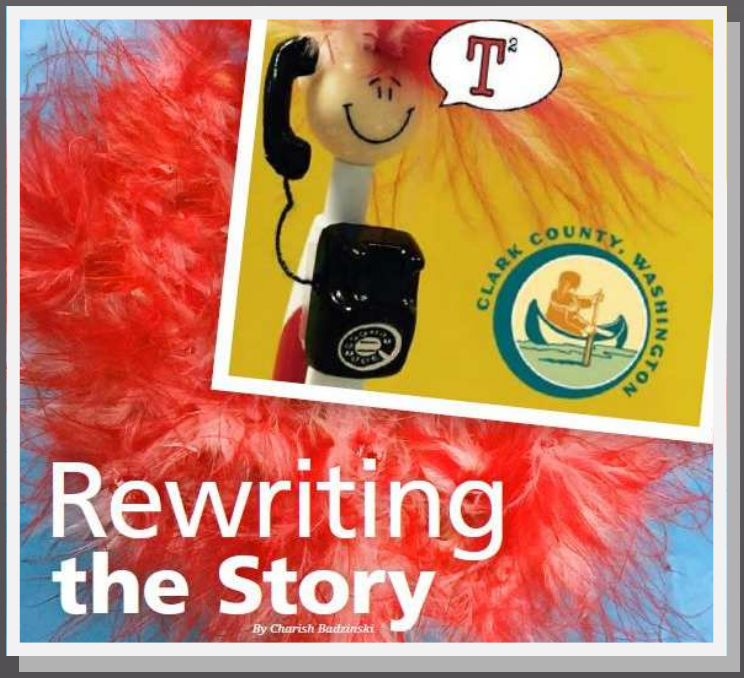
Since launching, all our outreach materials have been chosen and created by youth volunteers.

In February 2016, the pen our volunteers were drawn to was one with a smiling face and intense feather hair. Staff then took these pens to resource fairs, school events, and other youth-friendly locations in Clark County. Young people really liked the pen, the small cheerful source of our contact information.

Later in 2016, volunteers brainstormed creative ways to reach out to teens using social media. Due to the anonymity of our volunteers, we decided our smiling pen would serve as our collective face. Our face needed a name—many were submitted, the voting was intense, and ultimately Peppy Penerson became the name and face of kindness and support we provide.

In 2017, a national online magazine featured Peppy for being a creative way to promote a program and spread positive messages about mental health to youth.

In March 2016, we invested in promoting our firm value on diversity in strong intentional ways by asking the distributor of the Peppy pens to make them available in multicultural colors. In December 2017, we received the very first shipment of multicultural Peppys. We are thrilled Peppy can share multiple faces—all of which share kindness and support.



Read "Rewriting the Story," an article featuring Peppy and TeenTalk, at https://info.4imprint.com/success-stories/amplify-rewriting-the-story/.

Follow Peppy on Social Media

Follow Peppy on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @PeppyPenerson.

Peppy's favorite things are adventures, dressing up and selfies. Take a picture of Peppy, upload it on social media, and #PeppyPenerson.

Because we value people's right to privacy, we do not look at the profiles of our friends and followers on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

"Tell me what you're passionate about."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"I believe in you."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"You made me feel so comfortable. I'm glad I called." – caller

"I am leaning away from my sad thoughts, but I wouldn't be able to do it without all of you at TeenTalk." – caller

2017 Statistics

How Teens Engage

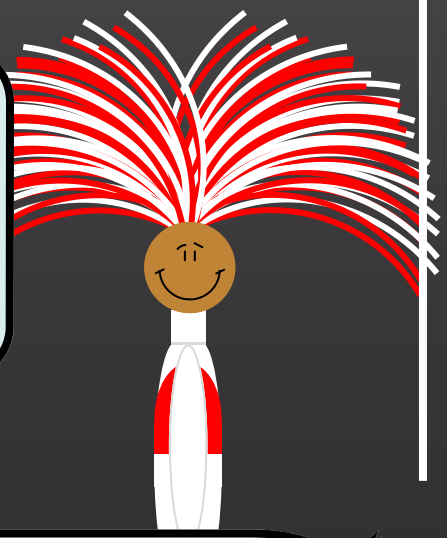
798 conversations

Our average call is 24 minutes

52% call us

34% message us on social media

14% email us



Top 5 Topics*

45% connection/feeling alone

25% family

22% friends/social life

18% school

17% LGBTQ+

Top 5 Needs*

70% positive peer support

45% a chance to vent/share

37% encouragement/empowerment

31% explore their identity

24% problem solving

*These numbers will not add up to 100 percent because each call may involve multiple topics and/or needs.

"There is nothing wrong with you." – TeenTalk volunteer

"It's not up to other people to choose your identity. It's up to you." – TeenTalk volunteer

"Thank you for the resource you recommended. I have an appointment now."
– caller

"I can talk to you for hours."
– caller

Outreach to Youth

4,700
Peppy pens shared with the community
(page 6)

30
teens in crisis got a compassion box
(page 10)

291
students participated in Challenge Day
(pages 11 and 12)

more than 350
students learned about mental health
(page 13)

Social Media

1,370
Facebook friends
@PeppyPenerson

256
Facebook likes
@TeenTalkClarkCounty

262
Twitter followers
@PeppyPenerson

252
Instagram followers
@PeppyPenerson

Outreach to Adults

46
adults certified in Youth Mental Health First Aid
(page 14)

65
administrators learned about mental health
(page 9)

Volunteers

Volunteers donated
2,339 hours
of their time

Volunteers contributed time to Clark County worth
$70,263.56
(Independentsector.org)

"It's cool to hear you change and develop. […] I look forward to hear your update."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"I know there are opportunities out there for you to reach your goal. I believe in you."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"I enjoy coming to TeenTalk when I need people to talk to."
– caller

"Thank you for talking to me. It was helpful."
– caller

Outreach

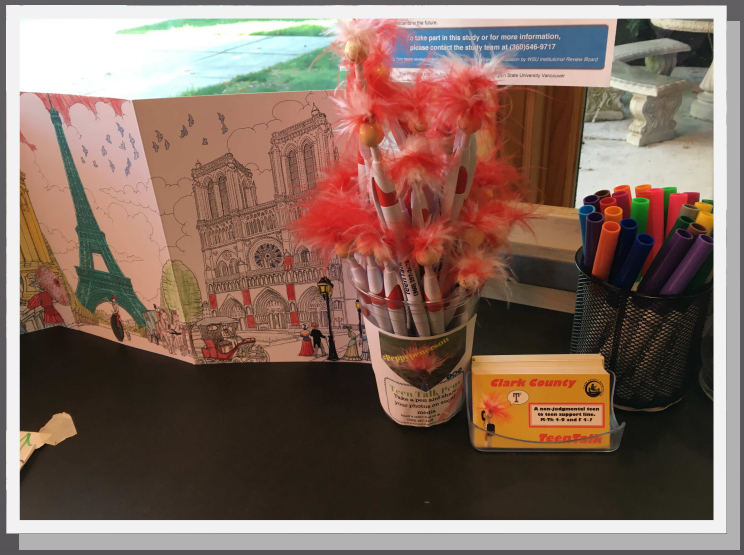
We value partnering with others in the community to bolster mental illness awareness, work toward suicide prevention, and increase the well-being and self-esteem of young people.

Toward these goals, we worked with two youth mentor programs on an ongoing basis in 2017:

- **Renegades Have Big Hearts for Little Bears Mentor Program:**
  Our program coordinator and the school counselor at Hayes Freedom High School created a program where high school students have lunch with elementary school students, and work on activities focused on self-worth, confidence and dealing with struggles.
- **Trappers for Trappers:**
  Our staff worked with staff at Fort Vancouver High School to develop a program where juniors and seniors come together with freshmen and sophomores in small groups. Together, with adults from the school and the community, Trappers for Trappers focuses on inclusion, building trust, and trying to help students feel safe, valued and celebrated.

Additionally, TeenTalk

- tabled six health and wellness fairs, and four school volunteer/resource fairs
- spoke at two Career Days for middle school students
- mentored senior project students
- spent a day with youth at the YWCA Prevention Advisory Retreat
- presented to three groups of youth with the Police Activities League
- spoke to the Teen and Young Parent Community Collaborative, and brought surprises for its graduates
- presented to local community groups
- served on the Basic Needs Committee for the Vancouver School District Foundation
- facilitated workshops for staff at Fir Grove/ VISTA School
- facilitated a workshop at the Washington State Behavioral Health Conference
- facilitated workshops at the School Administrators Emergency Training Summit
- facilitated workshops to teachers and school faculty at the Creating a Welcoming School Environment Conference.



In August 2017, we partnered with the Fort Vancouver Regional Library District to feature Peppy's happy face in all of its teen zones, countywide.

"Sounds like you are very strong to go through something like that."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"Wow. I'd applaud, but one of my hands is holding a phone."
– TeenTalk volunteer

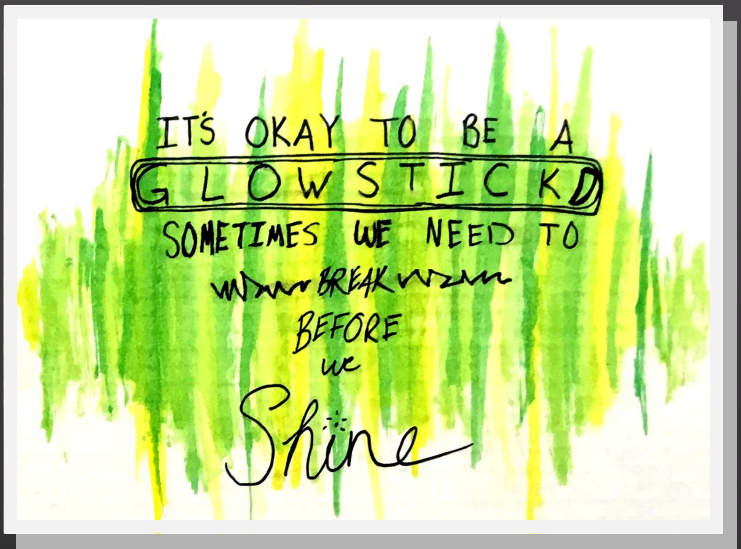
"I really liked talking to you. You've made me feel normal."
– caller

"You always listen in my low points."
– caller

Compassion Boxes

A few years ago, a local small business had some small boxes it couldn't use and asked if we could do something with them. We came up with the idea of compassion boxes: small boxes with a personalized card and something fun inside, such as a stress-reducing squeeze ball, coloring sheets, snacks, jokes, etc.

In 2017, we delivered 30 of these boxes to the new Youth Mobile Crisis Intervention Services team in Clark County. As the staff from this team meet with youth experiencing a mental health crisis, they share some anonymous kindness and support from us. Our volunteers put in a great deal of time decorating these boxes and writing a card of hope and kindness to tuck inside each one, with no two boxes or cards being alike.



TeenTalk Journal

Since we began, our volunteers have created journals for youth in Clark County. They knew what recent scientific research has verified: there are multiple benefits to consistently writing your thoughts in a journal. Journaling can even boost your immune system (Murray 2002).

In 2017, our volunteers created the latest version of the TeenTalk journal. With inspiring quotes or hopeful challenges on each page, it is a teen-friendly place for young people to put their thoughts to paper. In 2017, we distributed 275 journals into the community. They are one of the most popular supports we share.

Murray, B. (June 2002). Writing to heal. *Monitor, 33.* Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/monitor/jun02/writing.aspx

"I'm glad you are no longer feeling like that, and I'm sorry you had to deal with all of that pressure." – TeenTalk volunteer

"I'm glad you're safe."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"I was very happy to talk to someone and actually have support."
– caller

"Thank you for asking me how my day was."
– caller

Challenge Day

Since March 2010, we have been thrilled to coordinate Challenge Day events at two Clark County high schools each year. Selected schools come together for these eclectic, life-changing events to challenge youth and adults to step out of their comfort zones and share their truth.

Challenge Day is a global program that gives participants tools to explore how people separate from each other—and how to change the culture to one of acceptance and inclusion.

Participating high schools from 2010-2017:

- Battle Ground High School
- Camas High School
- Columbia River High School
- Fort Vancouver High School
- Hayes Freedom High School
- Heritage High School
- Hockinson High School
- Hudson's Bay High School
- Ridgefield High School
- Washougal High School.

In 2017, we hosted Challenge Day at Camas and Battle Ground high schools.

Since 2010, **2,301 students** and **607 adults** in Clark County participated in a Challenge Day we've sponsored.

For more information about Challenge Day, visit https://www.challengeday.org/.

Photo courtesy of Challenge Day

Challenge Day provides youth and communities with experiential workshops and programs demonstrating the possibility of love and connection through the celebration of diversity, truth and full expression.

Photo courtesy of Challenge Day

Each Challenge Day has up to 100 youth and 25 adult participants who spend a school day together, breaking down barriers, and making their school a place where everyone is included and thrives.

"That does seem very stressful. I am sorry you have to go through that."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"I want you to know I'm rooting for you."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"It's nice to have someone to talk to about this."
– emailer

"You're so easy to talk to."
– caller

In 2017 ...

291
students participated in Challenge Day

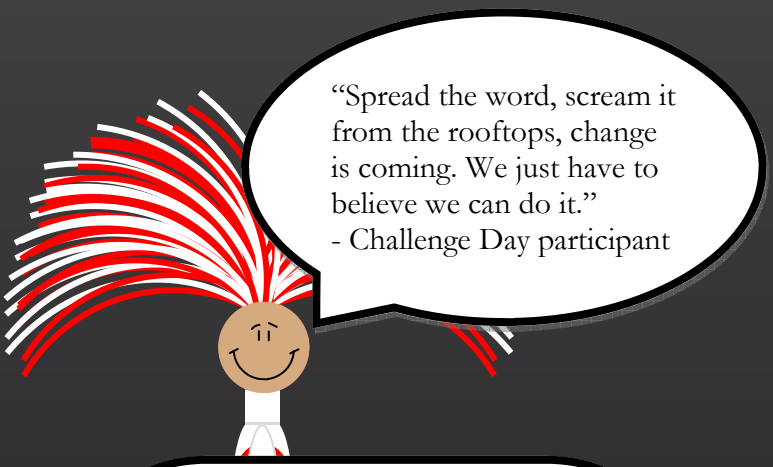
79
adults participated in Challenge Day

When past participants were surveyed about Challenge Day

99% thought it was successful in taking down some of the walls between students

99% felt safe in sharing personal experiences with others

99% of participants would recommend Challenge Day to their family or friends



Quotes from Students

- "I loved Challenge Day. Thank you for showing me I'm not alone."
- "You really got to know people that you would have never talked to before. It changed my life forever."
- "It somehow got me to say things that even I didn't know was troubling."
- "Watching others close to me and realizing the things they're going through. It's truly eye opening and helped me realize how blessed I am."
- "It was the best day I have had at school in a while."
- "I feel safer here — THANK YOU!"

Lessons Learned

- "If I can share a smile, a wave, [and] listen to those who are talking to me, then I can continue the compassion."
- "I want to maintain friendships with people I've met today, and strive to let everyone know their worth."
- "Always say hi to that one kid that's alone."
- "Give kindness to our community."
- "Introduce yourself to someone you don't know."
- "Include everyone."
- "Be a friend. Not a stranger."
- "Support and help others."

"You have every right to be upset."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"Those rude people in life are just speed bumps in the way of your success."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"I am really grateful to have you guys to chat with because I have been feeling so alone."
– caller

"I'm glad you understand."
– caller

School Presentations

Since 2007, our program coordinator has been going to local schools to teach students about mental health. While we adjust topics to teacher/school preferences, in 2017, we talked with more than 350 students about

- the facts about mental health and mental illness—how common mental illness is in general, as well as the most common mental illnesses in young people
- the signs and symptoms of common mental illnesses
- the impacts of having a parent or a family member with a mental illness
- the stigma around mental illness and history of treatment of mental illness
- how to be helpful to those with mental illnesses
- incorporating the characters of the movie "Inside Out" as a way to understand the emotional perspective of mental illness.

I Work With Teens

In early 2014, our program coordinator met with another local social service worker who served teens and discussed how difficult it was to connect with others who served youth, outside of trainings in the community. They decided to plan a lunch and learn meeting, and invite others who live to serve young people. What evolved was "I Work With Teens"—a monthly meeting that has taken place since June 2014.

I Work With Teens serves multiple goals:

- Bring in guest speakers and experts to inform the group about relevant topics.
- Create an organic opportunity for social service providers to meet and exchange information about their programs, events, resource information and more.
- Celebrate and acknowledge the tremendous work local adults put forth to improve the lives of young people. Often, these adults work in very small programs/efforts and they really find value in being recognized and appreciated.

Some of the featured topics in 2017 include

- community prevention effort mapping
- presentation from Council for the Homeless
- featured speakers on school discipline and legal issues for youth
- featured speaker on understanding the teenage brain
- presentation by the new Youth Mobile Crisis Intervention Services team.

"I'm sorry you are going through that."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"You've got this in the bag."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"Thank you so much for guidance and help. The links will surely give me grounding."
– emailer

"Thank you for being so nice to me."
– caller

Youth Mental Health First Aid

Youth Mental Health First Aid is a global program focusing on assisting young people who experience distress due to mental illness. Instructors are certified to present an 8-hour interactive curriculum focusing on symptoms associated with the most common mental illnesses in young people—and how to put into action a 5-part strategy to offer support to a young person who is struggling.

Youth Mental Health First Aid came to Clark County in 2013 after Kris Henriksen, our program coordinator, was one of 60 people selected across the country to receive a scholarship and be certified as an instructor through a partnership between the American Institute for Research and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. She certified 46 adults in Youth Mental Health First Aid in 2017, and 229 overall.

"Thank you, Kris, for a great class on Youth Mental Health First Aid. You were passionate about your subject, knowledgeable, and the content was solid. […] You are an amazing resource for mental health in our community. I'm grateful I was invited to attend your class." - participant

Thank You

It is impossible to come up with words adequate enough to express all the gratitude TeenTalk needs to share.

When the program began years ago, we only knew we wanted to give young people the opportunity to share support and kindness with their peers. While we cannot fix the countless struggles young people face, we are empowered by how much listening without judgment can help.

First and foremost, we must thank our past and current youth and adult volunteers. We asked for so much – all the training, all the shifts on the line, all the guest speakers, all the adult helpers – and like a flash mob of awesome, you said yes. You listened to difficult things with compassion, and you let kindness bubble out of you like fountains.

We extend a huge thank you to the Clark County Council and Clark County Community Services. You believe, as we do, young people can be a tsunami of volunteering brilliance if they are given the opportunity.

Thank you also to our community. Your willingness to help us do important work for young people is extraordinary.

For 14 years of letting young people shine a light of kindness–thank you.

"There is nothing wrong with taking a step back and being yourself."
– TeenTalk volunteer

"I'm proud of you."
– TeenTalk volunteer

Want to support us?

Share us with any and all teens you know. There may be someone fighting a battle you know nothing about. Some youth are good at hiding their struggles, and could benefit from talking with us.

Contact our program coordinator, Kris Henriksen, at kris.henriksen@clark.wa.gov or 360.397.2130 ext. 5199 to

- order our materials for your school or other youth-serving organization (like Peppy Penerson, brochures and more)
- invite us to speak to your school or other youth-serving organization
- register for Youth Mental Health First Aid
- attend an I Work With Teens meeting
- donate supplies for our compassion boxes
- find out about opportunities for adults to volunteer in supporting our program.

Contact Us

TeenTalk offers anonymous, confidential and nonjudgmental support
for teens by teens

Monday through Thursday, 4-9 pm
Friday, 4-7 pm

360.397.2428
ccteentalk1@hotmail.com
www.ccteentalk.clark.wa.gov
Peppy Penerson
Teen Talk Clark County
@PeppyPenerson
@PeppyPenerson

For other formats, contact the Clark County ADA Office
Voice 360.397.2322 **Relay** 711 or 800.833.6388
Fax 360.397.6165
Email ADA@clark.wa.gov