Resolving the Mental Health Crisis

A tearful teenager stares at the black screens on the Zoom monitor, slumping his shoulders on the keyboards. The soundless room was filled with damp tissues of tears. On the other side of the globe, another thin student trembles in her fluffy seat biting her nails and clutching her stomach before her final exam. She clatters her teeth. A dew of sweat trickled down her blushed cheeks. These are all examples of declining mental health trends in teenagers across the United States. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States and led to school closures, mental health treatment gaps for adolescents had already been a concern across the nation. Therefore, the nation is striving to improve the treatment gap for mental health disorders. The importance of social emotional learning, self-care and consulting a healthcare professional for mental health-related issues is a priority for solving the mental health crisis

Mental health disorders and treatment gaps have been a major problem for teenagers in the United States over the years. When an individual is in their adolescent years, they are undergoing major changes to their minds and body. However, most teenagers are reluctant to share their mental health struggles with their friends and family due to mental health stigma, negative pressures of social media, and school closures in the pandemic. The mental health crisis is an ongoing and serious problem that is rooted early on before the COVID-19 pandemic. First of all, in 2017, an estimated 13% of adolescents in the United States have at least one depressive disorder, which is a mood disorder that leads to emotional pain and loss of interest, but 60% of those patients did not seek professional help (National Survey on Drug Use and Health). That

being said, in the United States, mental health is often considered a stigma, and those with mental health disorders might even get bullied. However, it is important to acknowledge that those with mental health issues are still human-beings, and they have the right to live their normal lives. Second, from 2009 to 2019, depressive disorders and helplessness in high school students have increased by 9% (CDC). Across a decade, mental health disorders have increased significantly. A year later in March 2020, school closures left students learning online, which led to decreased social life for teenagers and the worsening of mental health for high school students. Being trapped at home every day, the school closures led to reduced access to treatment centers or support groups. Cyberbullying has also increased during the pandemic, as teenagers are trapped at home, where their only social connection is through their cell-phones. For instance, cyberbullying and viewing inappropriate content on social media is associated with the worsening of mental health. Ultimately, teenagers are locking all of their negative emotions in their hearts, leading to worsening mental depressive disorders. Therefore, the mental health crisis is an ongoing and urgent problem that requires the effort of every individual.

Participation in the Peace Islands Institute is a key puzzle to solving the mental health crisis. It can help spread awareness on mental health through community service, learn more about mental health treatment for those in need, and help learn more about mental health by writing essays and creating artwork about mental health. The biggest tool in solving the mental health crisis is social-emotional learning. Social-emotional learning involves being aware of one's emotional state, and reducing negative stress through yoga or meditation, and storytelling involves releasing one's inner trauma. For example, the Peace Islands Institute Essay Contest gives its participants the opportunity of telling their own stories and releasing their trauma.

Second, the mental health crisis can be resolved through encouraging youth to volunteer in a local library or hospital. The act of giving joy to others through volunteering also benefits one's mental health. Lastly, through the positive use of social media to target teenagers on the topic of mental health, Peace Islands Institute members can make social media clips or flyers that increase mental health awareness and encourage teenagers to talk to their family members or seek professional help if they have persistent sadness or anxiety. These social media clips on mental health awareness and anti-cyberbullying debunks the myths of mental health disorders, which serves as a vaccine for the mental health crisis. Through learning about the health triangle emblem, teenagers will understand the importance of physical, social, and mental health, which helps them speak out on their own mental health and take on the initiative to debunk mental health stigma across the United States.

Mental health disorders can be debilitating, but it is important to also note that mental health disorders are not due to an individual's fault, so those with mental health disabilities should share mental health problems with close friends and family to see the numerous solutions, like support groups, counseling therapy, and medications available for them. Also, in the current mental health crisis, volunteering with the Peace Islands Institute allows an individual to make deep connections, create positive change, and promote mental health awareness with other high school students across the nation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting from the roots of the current mental health crisis, Peace Island Institute members are debunking the myths of mental health disorders and raising positive mental health awareness, which makes the world one step closer to a place where every emotion is felt, every voice is heard, and every individual with mental health disorders is accepted.

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