

From Crisis to Hope: *Changing the Mental Health Landscape for Santa Barbara Youth*

Suicide is the **2nd leading cause of death** among adolescents.



Over 70,000 resource cards and posters have been distributed to Santa Barbara County schools with helplines, resources, self care tips, and more.



The Many Ways to Give...

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Los Angeles, CA 90012

***Donation Memo:**

Community Partners for YouthWell
The Giving List

By DAF or Stock Transfer:

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youthwell.org/donate

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YouthWell

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YouthWell's 2024-25 Youth Advocacy Board - 55 students from 16 high schools across Santa Barbara County convene monthly to learn about mental health issues, gain leadership skills, and advocate for change on their campuses and in the community. They also host an annual Student Advocacy Summit.

When Rachael Steidl's daughter started struggling with depression and anxiety in 9th grade, her good grades, sports, charm, and active social life masked the severity of her condition. Teachers overlooked her symptoms, and a therapist assured the parents she was "fine," a typical teenager. Over the next two years, her mental health declined further.

"Our inability to find local services to support her was truly terrifying," Steidl recalls. "I had a pit in my stomach every day and felt that if we didn't get her help, we were going to lose our daughter."

Steidl's experience led her to create YouthWell, a Santa Barbara County nonprofit dedicated to closing gaps and removing barriers to services, and providing tools and education to empower youth and families. In 2016, Steidl began convening a Collaborative of community stakeholders, schools, and providers to focus on early intervention and work together to build stronger systems that connect students to services before they are in crisis.

"We need to listen to youth and parents and learn from their experiences," Steidl says. "YouthWell works with 55 students, from high schools throughout our county, who serve on our Youth Advocacy Board. They share the challenges they see on their

campuses and in the community and advocate for change."

The nonprofit launched the only online Youth and Family Mental Health and Wellness Resource Directory in English and Spanish that centralizes 200 organizations in Santa Barbara County, allowing families to search for a range of services for youth ages 5-25.

In addition, YouthWell provides free support groups so parents, teachers, and teens can learn healthy coping strategies for managing stress. They offer wellness workshops and a Mental Health First Aid certification course that teaches family and friends to recognize and respond to mental health and substance abuse challenges.

YouthWell recently added their Family Care Coordination center and Wellness Navigator Program, which connects families to mental health resources through "warm handoffs" ensuring they access the services they need. Often when a child is struggling, it affects siblings and parents which is why Navigators want to support each family's unique situation.

"The feedback we hear most is, 'Thank you for listening, taking the time to hear our story, and not minimizing our concerns,'" Steidl says.

Steidl knows firsthand what it's like to feel helpless when you can't find sup-

Empower Families: Prioritize Early Intervention by Funding Wellness Navigators

“We want to build a village around the family so they feel supported,” says Rachael Steidl, founder of YouthWell. “Our Navigators recognize the unique challenges of each family and think outside the box to match them accordingly so that they can get the help they need and deserve in a timely manner.”

YouthWell is finding an increasing demand for its Wellness Navigator program that supports families on their mental health journey by addressing their individual needs, removing barriers, connecting them with services, and offering hope. YouthWell aims to raise \$175,000 to expand by hiring more navigators in order to serve more families from all backgrounds with youth through the age of 25 in Santa Barbara County.

Programs & Services

WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS TOWARDS SYSTEMS CHANGE

- Community Collaborative
- Youth Linkages Network
- Neurodivergent Network

RESOURCES & SERVICES

- SB County Resource Directory
- Community Calendar
- Family Care Coordination
- Wellness Navigators
- Resource Cards & Posters for schools

EDUCATION & CONNECTION

- Support Groups
- Wellness Workshops
- Mental Health First Aid training

YOUTH OUTREACH

- Youth Advocacy Board
- Student Wellness Summit

All services and programs are FREE. Most provided in English and Spanish.

“My family is incredibly grateful for the support that we have received from YouthWell which has included guidance and access to resources at a time when we didn’t have the financial means. The groups have been life changing - providing tools, support and encouragement.”

– Santa Barbara Mom

port locally. After two years of watching her daughter’s mental health decline, the family made the difficult decision to send her to a wilderness program and a therapeutic boarding school out of state, neither of which was covered by insurance.

These programs made a difference. Today, at 25, after finishing high school and completing her master’s degree, her daughter is following her passion working for an international human

rights organization.

“It was a painful decision to make but I believe it saved her life,” Steidl says. “I want to change the narrative for other families by connecting them to support early. They should never be told their issue is not ‘bad enough.’ If we were able to get her services early, it would have reduced the emotional and financial toll on our family and we would not have missed out on almost a year of her life.”



“The Towbes Foundation proudly supports YouthWell for their commitment to early intervention, destigmatizing mental health, educating the community on wellness, building a strong support network for families, and fostering a collaborative approach to creating a comprehensive system of care across Santa Barbara County. Their work in breaking down barriers to mental health services is vital to the well-being of our youth, and we’re honored to be part of this important mission.”

– Carrie Towbes

President, The Towbes Foundation



YouthWell convenes the Youth Linkages Network monthly to educate those working with youth so they’re better equipped to support families and connect them to mental health services.