During the international presidential year for Gordon McInally, among other things, he promoted three mental health initiatives. At the Zones 33/34 summit in the Bahamas in 2023 there were two sessions on mental health that focused on generating ideas for how clubs and districts could promote those initiatives. What follows are the ideas they generated:

What can we do as a club and district to erase the stigma associated with caring about emotional well-being?

1. Have true authentic conversations in the club by leadership focusing on the fact that you are not alone and there are resources available.

2. Promote acts of kindness and at the district level have a Rotary action group.

3. Heal before you can help.

4. Speak from a personal perspective

5. Have a buddy and check in and have a connection.

6. know what to look for and have one meeting dedicated to mental health.

7. At the district level provide support for the clubs.

8. Have regular discussions on mental wellness and check in on yourself and take care of yourself.

9. Have education including speakers and workshops.

10. Ask questions and have empathic listening.

11. Have a speaker come into the club to address the issue as some people feel they cannot open up.

12. Let them know that there are people in the group who care and have a “Don’t bottle it up” campaign and let them know that it’s okay to talk about it.

13. Start with something everyone understands such as posttraumatic stress disorder.

14. Have someone in the club that had an experience and they share it with the group.

15. Look in the community for mentors and look for hope.

16. promote a mental health first aid program with veterans, schools, etc.

17. have TED type talk series with various demographic groups targeting psychoeducation and emotional care.

18. normalizing and educating on our emotional and mental health experiences and developing coping skills and wellness.

19. encourage open discussion and acknowledge mental health issues.

20. Make it safe to talk about mental health and addiction needs.

21. emphasize that mental health is health.

22. Have newsletter articles about stories or recovery from mental health issues.

23. talk to interact clubs.

24. share in your church these conversations and break the generational divide.

25. At work talk about work pressures.

26. reach out for resources such as NAMI.

27. Provide opportunities for safe space.

28. Reach out to folks you know who are facing challenges.

29. Provide support with meals and food and offer to spend time with someone.

30. Host a family/community fun day and invite mental health resources and organizations to participate.

31. Have clubs work together for a grant for hiring high risk students for a safe space garden to gather together and meet with teachers to talk about and discuss issues at school.

32. Have buddy benches in elementary school for helping students connect.

33. Develop a grant to work with the community to identify vulnerable groups, work to identify specifics and take action to ensure appropriate support material.

34. ask members how they really feel?

35. encourage parents to talk to their kids about their problems.

36. Partner with NAMI for long-term education programs in Rotary and have NAMI speakers at club and district conferences

37. watch Rotary international president Gordon’s international assembly video.

38. let people know it’s okay to not be okay.

39. have caring committees and phone check ins.

40. Listen without judgment.

41. Have mental health professionals present to organizations about suicide and other mental health issues.

42. have support groups.

43. have online podcast sessions.

44. have a mental health minute and coping skills section as well as phone check ins.

45. create a safe environment to discuss issues.

46. identify a district person to assist such as a mental health advisor.

47. Have an encouragement committee or person.

48. Have a coping skills session at events

49. be careful of labels.

50. be sensitive to where people are especially in regard to trauma.

What can we as a club or district do to raise awareness about mental health needs?

1. Rotarians would develop a resource list of providers including what insurance they take and if they’re taking new patients.

2. Promote the use of the 988 call number for those considering suicide.

3. Partner with United Way.

4. Work together with the community mental health clinic.

5. Have a rack with cards and information about resources as well as a QR code.

6. Compile and share a resource library.

7. Have a website for the district or club as well as a newsletter and utilize social media media including public psychological service announcements in various modalities.

8. Have a mental health summit fair for the public.

9. Have a TED style format on various mental health topics.

10. Have district mental health committees work with clubs on their needs.

11. Have fundraisers like a pickle ball tournament to raise awareness and money.

12. Partner with interact clubs to leverage mental health organizations to solve their needs.

13. Normalize the conversation.

14. Have speakers that can help bring awareness.

15. Have techniques on how to react and not simply try to solve the problem but simply listen.

16. build relationships with club friends.

17. use existing community needs assessment to identify the mental health needs of the community especially around such topics as loneliness.

18. have a seminar open to the public.

19. have partnerships to let people know of organizations that can help.

20. Have a 5K run/walk and talk as well as a mental health fair.

21. Focus on an entire month on mental health such as May.

22. Have a mental health minute on various topics.

23. Have a mentally ill person talk to the club.

24. Advocate for needed changes to our laws in regard to mental health.

25. Have NAMI programs at clubs and district conferences.

26. have a district committee on mental health.

27. Have mental health resources and links on our club and district websites.

28. use social media for public awareness on mental health issues and how to find resources.

29. Talk about self-medicating and the problems that creates and try to reduce the use of prescription medications.

30. Have mental health check ins.

31. incorporate this into our public image campaign.

32. have a table at all community events and Rotary events.

33. have a separate mental health marketing campaign.

34. develop a speakers bureau

35. talk about how to get into the mental health system before it is too late.

36. utilize child abuse and neglect resources.

37. Help people realize that early trauma can have long-term impacts.

38. have a partnership with local organizations that deal with mental health.

What can we as a club and district do to work to improve access to mental health services?

1. Connect with mental health professionals who are Rotarians.

2. learn about religious organizations that provide mental health services.

3. develop a district grant for education regarding available mental health resources.

4. establish a district Rotary action group on mental health.

5. Identify what services may be available and what services are missing.

6. Identify the barriers to accessing mental health services in terms of cost, transportation and availability in the area.

7. Promote NAMI for their free and subsidized services.

8. Communicating what’s available locally to your members.

9. Partner with schools and learn how you can help supplement their needed services.

10. Advocate for mental health legislation.

11. Offer scholarships for mental health.

12. Have a rotary position statement regarding mental health.

13. Promote Rotary training on mental health issues such as suicide prevention or psychological first aid.

14. participate in global grants related to mental health.

15. assess what’s needed within the community in regard to mental health.

16. promote community sponsorships for mental health programs.

17. promote scholarships to students pursuing careers in mental health.

18. Ask the mental health community what they need and help pursue solutions.

19. make people aware of what’s available and promote online access and how to use it.

20. Identify target groups in the message that will be most effective in addressing them such as human trafficking signs on bathroom stall doors.

21. recognize the need for no-cost services and see how you might best be able to promote those.

22. Identify hotlines and explain how they work and how best to utilize them.

23. recognize that we are each other’s business.

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