



## Young Man with a Plan Newsletter

October 24, 2022

**“What keeps me coming back is the bond I built with the people there and the break I get during the week that keeps me level-headed.”**

### Centering Mental Wellness

#### The Covid impact

**During the Covid pandemic our students suffered trauma and loss. In 2021 we asked them, “How are you doing?”**

We heard things like: “My mental health is not doing well with this type of remote learning, I’m stressed, my parents want me to pass when I’m not mentally able to focus. I lose sleep thinking about school. I hate online learning with a passion. Keep checking in on me and making sure I’m on the right track in school. Try to help me so I can move forward and be where I need to be.”

**In 2022 we asked, “How has Covid impacted your time at school?”** Changed me in general - Made me have a lack of motivation for school - Made me appreciate my friends more – Confusing - Damn near missed all 11th grade - Lost motivation and didn’t try my hardest to fix myself - It really didn’t impact much - Took away the experiences - Lost my motivation for school - affected how I felt towards school mentally – I had to step it up after covid and get back into the student mentality - Made it less memorable - Made me unmotivated to do any work - Made me a better person but I still got bad traits – Made my freshman year very difficult - Last year was a disaster – GPA went down.

#### How we responded

We noticed a lack of stamina in our young men, reduced focus, and a questioning of everything, including the meaning of school and college. One of the ways we responded was by centering **mental wellness**:

- 1) We employed more of what we called “intrusive advising/coaching” and checked in with more frequency outside of weekly groups – How was their home life? School life? Relationships? Health in general?
- 2) Check-ins during weekly group, always important, took on more significance as an opportunity for every young man to share how he was feeling with us and his brothers
- 3) We normalized talk of mental health, serotonin levels, depression and anxiety, and therapy. We discussed activities and choices that can help--like working out, eating well, talking to someone
- 4) We connected with school guidance counselors and social workers, made referrals to outside therapists
- 5) We made sure our weekly groups provided young men with opportunities to relax, laugh, be kids, and have fun. This week’s 9<sup>th</sup> grade meeting had 30 kids singing along (very loudly) to R&B music for nearly 2 hours
- 6) All YMWAP staff created Mental Wellness Plans in which they identified ways achieve life/work balance

We’re proud of kids’ 2022 survey responses collected through Boston After School & Beyond (highest = 4):

**3.8/4** "Adults care about what I think"

**3.8/4** "If I have a problem an adult here can help me"

**3.8/4** "Other students listen to me here"

**3.7/4** "Coming here has helped me feel good about myself"

**“It’s like a weekly family reunion so when I get there, I’m always excited to see everyone and catch up.”**

9<sup>th</sup> grade recruiting is going extremely well, and our 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders are making their plans for this academic year and beyond. Our NH Brotherhood Weekend is December 2-4.

Please reach out with any questions. Respectfully, Jaykyri Simpson, Ed.D., Executive Director