



DHS News

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Five questions with Danyelle Borish

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1. What was your path to Alleghey County/DHS?

After working in various inpatient and outpatient settings for individuals with behavioral health conditions and/or intellectual disabilities of all ages, I found my niche in this role. I had worked with adolescents on and off during my professional career, but it wasn't until this position that I could (and was willing to) combine my own lived experience with mental health conditions to connect with and educate youth and the community in a whole new way.

2. Tell us a bit about the work you do.

As a training & recovery specialist, I work within OBH and out in the community to promote recovery and wellness principles and practices and address the holistic needs of individuals with behavioral health conditions. The majority of my work is focused on the Stand Together program, a peer-to-peer anti-stigma initiative in 26 middle and high schools across Alleghey County. Along with three other staff members, I provide behavioral health education, share my wellness journey, and empower youth to design and implement anti-stigma projects in their schools for their peers. In addition, in my role as project coordinator, I design and maintain our training curriculum, organize and manage our school and community partnerships, and operate our website and social media accounts. In the past year, we have also expanded Stand Together outside of Alleghey County and provided training for cohorts in Venango and Greene counties as well as the state of Delaware. We are meeting with several other surrounding counties to start additional Stand Together chapters.

3. How does your work help to support DHS's mission and goals?

When people think about the 'most vulnerable populations,' they often think about children, individuals in poverty, or people with disabilities, but this group also includes our adolescents and young adults. At a pivotal point in their lives, not only are they experiencing mental, physical, and emotional changes, but youth are also developing mental health conditions and using substances to self-medicate. Today's young adults have greater pressure put on them than ever before, and anxiety and depression have

sky-rocketed. The sad truth is that six out of 10 of these youth don't get the treatment they need, mainly due to the effects of stigma. The Stand Together program not only meets the needs of providing information and resources for prevention/early intervention, but also meets the youth where they are, giving them the power to make a difference with their own peers in ways that work for them. The youth identify their own strengths, talents, and ability to enact change, assess, and address the mental health needs of themselves and their peers, and create a system and supports to change lives. Stand Together provides youth with a place to be heard, valued and validated while working to end stigma. Youth are our future and they are one of our greatest assets.

4. What most excites you about your work?

When I was in middle/high school and even college, we weren't really given any general knowledge or awareness about mental health, let alone access to resources for individuals that may be struggling. This work provides me with a platform to share my own story to inspire and empower others and, more importantly, to work with our youth to make a difference in their schools and communities. Most mental health and substance use disorders emerge in adolescence, and the Stand Together program equips youth so that the one in four of them who experience these disorders are able to get the help they need. It's an incredible privilege to work with such passionate youth that are willing to share their own experiences to educate their peers and promote social inclusion. These students aren't afraid to tackle what can still be a taboo topic. We've seen more youth reaching out to adults they trust for help with their own or a peer's mental health, and whole school environments have seen a decrease in the stigma associated with mental and substance use disorders.

5. What is most important thing DHS staff should know about your role?

A lot of people don't know about our unit (Community Wellness Team), but we play an important role in providing quality treatment in the county by sharing our voices from a lived-experience perspective, especially in regards to peer services and training behavioral health professionals to focus on holistic wellness. Although I'm sure there are other people in the County who have mental and/or substance use disorders, our work is unique in that we are able – and expected – to self-disclose and share our stories for the benefit of others. We can't speak for everyone, but we can provide a voice. This voice is incredibly important to our work with today's youth, that are bombarded with stigma every day. Youth who are struggling need to know that their feelings are valid, they matter, and it can get better – and we're living proof. I get to be a part of a movement to better the behavioral health environments in our schools, communities, and even the world by addressing stigma head-on, and I can't be more honored to do the work that I do.