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Dept. of Health Services: First Lady Kathy Evers and Office of Children's Mental Health issue youth action recommendations

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Youth need trustworthy, supportive adults and mental health education. These are two Recommendations for Action from the Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH). They are among the recommendations Wisconsin youth identified to address the concerning and increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and lack of belonging they were experiencing even before the pandemic led many organizations to declare a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health. The OCMH Resiliency Impact Team of mental health professionals, people with lived experience, advocates, and young people developed the guidance after a series of OCMH listening sessions, during which youth voiced their ideas to strengthen mental health supports in our state.

"Young people want to share their thoughts on youth mental health and have important things to say," said First Lady Kathy Evers. "I am pleased to work with OCMH to raise youth voices on how to improve mental health."

The report offers six insights and 11 recommendations for action. The recommendations fall into three categories: 1) organizational/culture, 2) youth voice, and 3) mental health education. By releasing the Recommendations for Action, OCMH hopes to challenge organizations and individuals to consider how best to incorporate them into policy, practice, and culture.

Highlights include:

- Insights
  - Youth need trustworthy, reliable adults. They want a number of adults from diverse backgrounds who can talk with them about mental health, so they can find someone who shares their identity in one or more ways.
  - Mental health education is needed from early childhood through young adulthood and it needs to be included in all parts of the educational curriculum.
- Recommendations for Action
  - Create youth leadership opportunities in school as well as community organizations.
  - Expand how mental health is defined to include the whole person (eating, feeling, learning, etc.). Connect mental health to other activities and curriculum.

“These action recommendations offer concrete practice and policy steps that communities can take to improve the mental health of young people,” said OCMH Director Linda Hall.

Annie Leffel participated in the youth listening sessions and helped develop the action recommendations, and said, “This report gives our youth voices the credibility that they deserve. We all know the importance of speaking up for ourselves and others, and this report is a great step in furthering that conversation.”

For information about Wisconsin children’s mental health, visit the OCMH website. You can also follow @OCMHWI on Facebook and @WIKidsMH on Twitter.