

Greek Life and Mental Health Initiatives

By Mitchell Chen

On October 26th, hundreds of students gathered outside Chapman University's Memorial Hall to hear an important message: it's okay to openly talk about mental health. Earlier during the week, students participated in fun challenges and activities on the same subject. This is all part of a sorority's effort to destigmatize mental health.

Fleurish, Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority's philanthropy event, aims to raise awareness of mental health. Throughout the week, the sorority had been tabling outside the university's Attallah Piazza to fundraise for their cause. They also had fun activities to help promote mental wellness, which included writing down bad thoughts and tossing them away, as well as writing positive words and putting them on walls.

The keynote speaker, Ross Szabo, is an award-winning mental health advocate and a public speaker and author who wrote the book *Behind Happy Faces: Taking Charge of Your Mental Health - A Guide for Young Adults*. Within the book, he talked about his personal struggles, being diagnosed with bipolar disorder with anger control problems and psychotic features. He was the Director of Outreach for the National Mental Health Awareness Campaign and he also served in the Peace Corps for two years. Having visited his brother in the psychiatric ward and being diagnosed with a disorder himself, he is very passionate about the subject and strives to "reduce stigma [around mental health], empower others to seek help and educate people about mental health."

Grace Zoerner, Kappa Kappa Gamma's philanthropy chair, commented that Mr. Szabo gave the audience the opportunity to openly talk about mental health issues and create support systems for those who need help.

This is the third year the Chapman sorority has held its philanthropy event. This year, they managed to raise around \$20,000. All of the funds raised will be donated to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a 501©3 non-profit organization that Mr. Szabo was involved with which also work with local organizations and volunteers to raise awareness on mental illness and "provide essential and free education, advocacy and support group programs", as the website states.

Mental health is a subject that only recently has been receiving attention. The CDC reported that one in two adults in the US will develop some sort of mental illness during their

lifetime¹, whether that be depression, anxiety, or whatever else. Mental illness is also associated with a variety of other health issues, such as obesity, cancer, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes². Therefore, it is important that we monitor and stay in touch with our mental health to as to remain connected with other aspects of our health. With mental health being more and more in the spotlight, there is a lot that can be accomplished if everyone works together to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and devise strategies to combat mental illnesses.

¹ Kessler RC, Angermeyer M, Anthony JC, et al. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of mental disorders in the World Health Organization's World Mental Health Survey Initiative. *World Psychiatry*. 2007;6(3):168-176.

² Chronic Illness & Mental HealthExternal. Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health. 2015.