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## The City of Perris and the YAC held a Teen Wellness Workshop March on 17th



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Malcolm Corona with members of the anti-bullying group Love for Life during a Mental Health Awareness Symposium March 17 at the Bob Glass Gym.

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The pressure to succeed. The allure of being popular. The significance of getting lots of likes and acquiring legions of followers on social media. Cyber bullying and humiliation from sometimes anonymous peers.

Those challenges, coupled with expectations of success in the classroom and peer pressure common in middle and high-school, can make academic life almost unbearable.

Withdrawing from friends and school-related activities can result.

So can much worse consequence—including attempted suicide.

The City of Perris hosted a Teen Wellness Workshop March 17 to provide tips to teen-agers about how to cope with the pressures of school and social life in 2018.



Perris Mayor Michael Vargas listens to concerned teens during the Mental Health Awareness program March 17 in the City.

Featuring guest speakers, role playing and advice from young adults who've lived through painful experiences, the wellness workshop attracted about 75 teen-agers from Perris and nearby communities.

The City's Youth Advisory Committee took the lead in planning the third annual Teen Wellness Workshop, which focused on a holistic approach to well-being: mind, body and soul.

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas led the contingent of locally elected officials attending the wellness program, which also attracted Mayor Pro-Tem Malcolm Corona and City Councilmembers Tonya Burke and David Starr Rabb.

"Talk about community engagement, this is a great example," Vargas said. "We are attracting youth from all over. Our YAC is taking a leadership role in this event."

### Reality stories



Perris City Councilwoman Tonya Burke (center) shares a laugh with teen-agers at the March 17 Mental Health Awareness program.

Vargas, a retired police officer and former school board trustee, said mental-health stresses in middle and high-school are real and the wellness workshop "allows reality stories to be shared with each other."

"They won't talk about it in front of adults, they're in the shadows," Vargas said. "Programs like this can help prevent problems and get teen-agers some help."

Corona, a high-school teacher, called the wellness workshop "a great event" that is timely and important for teen-agers. Issues like bullying, depression and low self-esteem have confronted youngster for many years "but nobody ever talked about them."

"They are now in the forefront," Corona said. "They have long-lasting consequences. Events like the wellness workshop help us work toward solutions. The City can do what it can but it's better when youth is taking charge."

Burke, a career counselor who works with at-risk youth, said the wellness program helps shatter stereotypes associated with bullying, depression and other disturbing topics.



Perris City Councilman David Starr Rabb captures the participants in the Mental Health Awareness Symposium as they conduct a "Happiness Sprinkling" outside Perris City Hall.

"There's a code of silence," Burke said. "Events like this give youth the chance to get the facts and learn there isn't a stigma about bullying or depression. They are sharing information that could save someone's life. I am so proud of our YAC. They are very mature to touch upon issues that need to be touched upon and reach a population that we adults cannot reach."

Rabb, an assistant district attorney and Navy veteran, said the symposium was helpful for youngsters "who have so much going on in their lives, including school and social media."

"We as a City are always interested in the health and well-being of our youth—they are our future," Rabb said. "We are committed to offering them a safe and healthy environment to grow up in."

### Battling self-doubt, insecurity

YAC members Jaylyn Burke, Ashley Lopez, Aaliyah Upson, Brianna Espinoza, Naomi Acosta and Gabriel Vallin organized the wellness program.

Vallin, 17, who attends Rancho Verde High School, said many factors cause stress in teen-agers—family crises, financial worries, acceptance to a preferred university—besides bullying, loneliness, breakups and depression.



Love for Life founder Wendy Romero launched the anti-bullying group when a friend of hers attempted suicide in high school.

"They're facing a lot of issues," he said.

Upson, 16, said technology can enable bullying and create uncertainty among victims, a sense that they are alone and no one cares.

"Self-doubt and insecurities can creep in," said Upson, 16, who attends Orange Vista High School.

Acosta, 15, who attends NuView Bridge High School, said the wellness workshop provides a conduit to the resources teens need to cope with challenges—including peer support, stories from survivors, speakers accustomed to counseling teen-agers and vendors providing materials and other resources to cope with the challenges.

"Everything is right here," Acosta said.

Wendy Romero, 20, started the group Love 4 Life while attending Rancho Verde. One of her friends attempted suicide, stunning Romero who had no clue of the difficulties her schoolmate was experiencing.



Members of the Perris Youth Advisory Committee who helped plan the Mental Health Awareness Symposium: Jaylyn Burke, Ashley Lopez, Aaliyah Upson, Brianna Espinoza, Naomi Acosta and Gabriel Vallin.

Love 4 Life focuses on anti-bullying and suicide prevention. Romero now attends UC Riverside where she is studying psychology.

Her advice to teens struggling with challenges—you are not alone. Solution to your problems; becoming informed.

For peers facing challenges: Don't judge. Spread love. Be supportive.

"I am very grateful to the City of Perris for supporting this program and the teens living in this community," Romero said. "It makes me feel I live in a safe and supportive community. I love Perris."

### Sprinkling happiness

At the conclusion of the event, teen-agers grabbed signs and headed to Perris Boulevard and San Jacinto Avenue to participate in a "Happiness Sprinkling." They waved the signs which carried uplifting messages like "Your Life is Precious," "You Can Do It," "Celebrate Every Victory" and "Just Breathe." Dozens of drivers passing the corner honked their horns in a show of solidarity.



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