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12th Grade

Hug High School

Nevada

As my carpool buddy and I walked to the car in my freshman year, she asked if I knew anything about a close friend and his death from suicide. I froze, and the words following dissolved into a haze. This moment struck me, as I reflected on my own struggles with mental health, especially anxiety. I realized that I was not alone in my mental health struggles. I also began to understand the severity of mental illness.

Working with a therapist helped me reduce the impact of my condition and deepen my self-understanding. This showed me the importance of early intervention, access to support, and open conversations around mental health. However, I recognized my experience was an exception. In the broader Reno teen community, mental health is rarely discussed. Many lack access to quality care or supportive adults, and others suffer from social stigma.

To challenge this stigma and lack of awareness, I founded Louder Than Silence Reno. By designing interactive workshops on depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, I aim to teach teens how to support their peers and adults how to understand adolescents. To bring credibility and professional insight to my events, I partnered with the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I collaborated with school counselors and organizations in the greater Northern Nevada area to promote my workshop and gain broader perspectives on community mental health needs.

I designed a card game to encourage participants to think through real-life situations and discuss possible solutions in a welcoming, low-pressure environment. The original intent of the game was to reinforce learning while developing a sense of community. However, the card game became more than a discussion of solutions. Many individuals began sharing their personal experiences and how they related to the situation. Seeing teens open up showed me the power of creating spaces where people feel heard.

Driven by my desire to help others navigate their mental health struggles, I plan to double-major in neuroscience and public health. Studying neuroscience will help me understand the root mechanisms behind cognition and mental health. I plan to use this knowledge to expand and deepen my understanding of mental health processes and how to help others, thereby enhancing my ability to support them. Public health will allow me to examine mental health across communities, helping me learn how to design preventative programs and increase access to resources. Understanding how social environments and access to care can shape mental health outcomes will enable me to support individuals and communities.

Receiving the Jiffy Lube Teen Driver Scholarship will allow me to continue pursuing an education that integrates my academic inquiry with my desire to serve and advocate for others. I plan to apply what I learn to expand mental health initiatives that promote accessible support systems and build a sense of community. Ultimately, this scholarship will help me achieve my goal of building a future where conversations about mental health are not met with fear or judgment, but compassion, understanding, and action.