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Severna Park High School Students Win Governor's Inaugural Youth Service Award



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Members of Our Minds Matter represented their organization during the Severna Park Fourth of July Parade.

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By Haley Weisgerber

Student members of Our Minds Matter from Severna Park High School were awarded the inaugural Governor's Youth Service Award for their work advocating for mental health awareness and reform in schools.

Ten individuals and three groups from Maryland were acknowledged for their community service efforts. Though the Governor's Office has presented awards for community service in the past, this is the first youth award.

Lauren Carlson, Parker Cross, Sabina Khan, Megan Mouldsdale and Katrina Schultz formed Our Minds Matter as juniors. Now seniors, these students have expanded their efforts outside of Severna Park.

"We started in Severna Park, Broadneck and a little bit in Old Mill," said Schultz, the only high school student on the Anne Arundel County Mental Health Task Force. "The governor's award really helped us kick off our efforts out of the county. We've grown outside the community."

Our Minds Matter was nominated by the Reverend Mathew Hanisian at St. Martin's-in-the-Field Episcopal Church. "We completely forgot about it, and then I got a call saying we won," Schultz said.

"We were pretty incredulous about it," said Khan. "Katrina called us and we all screamed. It was very surreal."

Our Minds Matter began with a march and rally in May 2019 to raise mental health awareness, and it quickly grew to be more than the students had ever imagined. From testifying at the Board of Education to hosting a wellness festival, the students have worked incredibly hard to make their voices heard.

"It proves a point that we are the future," said Schultz. "Getting this award just motivates us to do much more."

Lieutenant Governor Boyd K. Rutherford was impressed with the initiatives of Our Minds Matter.

"The lieutenant governor came up to us after the award ceremony and said he would love for us to sit in on one of his sessions to see what that process is like," said Kahn.

After testifying at the Anne Arundel County Board of Education, the Mental Health Teen Advisory Committee was developed. This group will be spearheaded by Our Minds Matter.

"Now that we're involved in the discussion, we've made a lot of connections," said Khan.

Our Minds Matter is beginning to push its efforts to new boundaries as a result of the Governor's Youth Service Award.

"We have all this momentum right now and we have to use it," said Schultz.

"There have been people contacting me from out of state from California and North Carolina that have wanted to start an Our Minds Matter chapter," Khan said. "We are thinking of outlining procedures on how to do that and how we were started."

With the creation of the Mental Health Teen Advisory Committee, Our Minds Matter is continuing to expand the conversation outside of the county and become more diverse.

Though the members are making an extraordinary difference, they are still high school students.

"In addition to Our Minds Matter, we have college applications, SAT prep and college classes," said Khan. "We have to make sure that while we are focused on helping everyone else, we are not overloading ourselves."

Carlson, Cross, Khan, Mouldsdale and Schultz, all graduating seniors, have appointed nine ambassadors to Our Minds Matter. Ranging from freshmen to juniors, these students are going to take over the Severna Park group after the founding members have gone to college.

"We are rooted in Severna Park, but once we graduate, we will have all this room to grow," said Khan.

With a desire to continue their work in mental health reform after high school, Khan and Schultz are confident Our Minds Matter is not over for them after graduation.

"We want to take Our Minds Matter into our collegiate careers," said Khan.

“This is something we started and we are always going to check up on it,” added Schultz.

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