**MEDIA ADVISORY**

Corrine Folmer, Ed.D., Superintendent

1450 Herndon, Clovis, CA 93611-0599

**Oct. 20, 2023**

**For Immediate Release**

Contact: Chief Communication Officer Kelly Avants, APR   
Phone: 559-327-9092 Email: kellyavants@cusd.com

**STUDENTS HELPING STUDENTS**

*200 CUSD peer counselors come together to share,*

*learn at district conference Oct. 23*

More than 200 intermediate and high school students from Clovis Unified schools will come together Monday, Oct. 23, for the Third Annual Peer Counseling Summit.

The students are each part of their school’s Peer Counseling program and have been trained in intercommunication skills that they use to provide confidential peer support to students on their campus. They provide a supportive environment where students can discuss concerns, feelings and thoughts, and where the peer counselors can help with campus resources and referrals if needed.

“Most teens will talk to a friend or a peer who they can trust. Peer Counselors are not to fix anyone’s problem or to give advice. Peer Counselors listen, support and help guide the counselee to possible options to whatever they are going through in a safe nonjudgmental environment,” said Derrick Davis, Wellness Teacher on Special Assignment.

At the summit, students will be celebrated for their efforts; be inspired and challenged by guest speakers; and be a part of activities that they can use at their schools.

National youth motivational speaker Kevin Szawala – known as Mr. Peace – will be the keynote speaker at the summit. He uses hip-hop, humor and heart as he discusses topics ranging from bullying prevention, character development and student mental health.

Seven seniors will be recognized for serving as a peer counselor for four or more years: Lilliana Garcia, Clovis East High, 6 years; Sukhmann Sidhu, Clovis East, 4 years; Riley Strunk and Solomon Williams, Clovis West High, 4 years; Gianna Hamel, Clovis North High, 4 years; and Sydney Harrison and Juan Garcia, Clovis High, 4 years.

**WHAT: CUSD Peer Counseling Summit**

Attendees are trained student peer counselors from Clovis Unified’s secondary schools (Intermediate Schools: Alta Sierra, Clark, Granite Ridge, Kastner, Reyburn; and High Schools: Buchanan, Clovis, Clovis East, Clovis North and Clovis West.)

**WHEN: Monday, Oct. 23**

9:30 – 11 a.m. Media opportunity to cover

**WHERE**: Clovis Veterans Memorial Building, 804 Fourth St., Clovis

More on Peer Counseling

**What is Peer Counseling?**

Peer Counseling is an A-G requirement, and it is a college preparatory readiness class. The Peer Counseling Program is designed to offer support services to peers. It can be an effective tool for providing prevention, intervention and referral services to individuals experiencing difficulties. Effectively trained Peer Counselors can positively influence the attitudes and behaviors of their peers and the culture of their school. Peer Counselors go through a semester of training before being certified to counsel students. Students learn the session introduction, not passing judgement, compassion and empathy, positive non-verbal’s, paraphrasing for understanding and feelings, open and closed questions, I messages, and guiding the counselee to options without giving advice; everything is confidential unless a student wants to harm self or others. Peer Counseling sessions take place in formalized, pre-arranged sessions. Students can refer themselves or others for a PC session. Teachers, staff and parents can refer students for a PC session. Referrals go directly to the PC Teacher, then the certified PC for a session. The PC teacher keeps records of these sessions. Clovis Unified has Peer Counseling programs in every High School and Intermediate school. Some Elementary Schools have Peer Mediation programs.

**Raising awareness, building community**

In addition to the description above, Peer Counselors create community and school wide events to bring awareness around Mental Health, Suicide Prevention, Healthy Relationships, drug prevention, and many more. Most Peer Counseling events were student created, student organized and student lead. Peer Counselors have run Kids Day events, Anti-Bully events, Toys for Tots, blankets for the hospital, paintings for children with cancer, letters for the active US troops and the Veterans Hospital, New Student luncheons, appreciation luncheons for classified staff, red ribbon week activities, Mental Health activities and passing out green ribbons for every student, and many more.

**Examples of Peer Counseling**

* A student struggling with tension at home and their parents’ relationship, combined with the student feeling pressure to excel academically led to that student feeling overwhelmed and distracted at school. They met with a peer counselor and felt supported and connected. “They would check in with that peer counselor periodically and knew they could tell them anything and they would not judge them but support them,” Davis said. The peer counselor also helped the student connect to additional support on campus.
* A student participating in practice mock peer counseling sessions began to open up with a peer counselor about their own struggle with mental illness. The peer counselor listened, checked in and connected them to campus resources. As part of staying connected, the peer counselor received a concerning message from the student and, following training, let the teacher know. Immediate action and a welfare check diverted what could have been a tragic event, and the student is now getting appropriate help.

**What Peer Counseling Isn’t**

* Peer Counselors **Don’t** give advice.
* Peer Counselors **Don’t** tell other people or teachers about what we talk about unless it is about harm to self or others.
* Peer Counselors **Don’t** judge you or what you’re going through.
* Peer Counselors **Don’t** lie to you or give you false information.
* Peer Counselors **Don’t** run therapy sessions and tell you what to do.
* Peer Counselors **Don’t** portray themselves as being better than everyone else.

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