

Ten years from now, I "am on the successful way of making humans great," said Chengyou Song '26.

# breaking the SILENCE

LEARNER VOICES, RESEARCH AND PEER EFFORTS HIGHLIGHT THE REALITIES AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF TEEN MENTAL HEALTH.



**RELAXING TIME** Inside portable three, Olivia Gane '26 utilizes a sensory pod for quiet reading during the Office Hours. Learners could scheduled time slots for mental health breaks throughout the school week.

## a safe space

COUNSELING DEPARTMENT EXPLAINS THE LAUNCH OF THE ZEN DEN ON CAMPUS.

### DECONSTRUCTING THE STIGMA

"The [Zen Den] was a space dedicated to supporting student's mental health. We [had] a lot of great stations with mental health activities, grounding tools, coping skills and lots of mental health resources in the space too. It [was] a space for [learners] to come in and take a mental break in between classes or at lunch whenever they [were] feeling stressed."

A lot of people [felt they were] alone in their mental health struggles, whether [it was] depression or anxiety [or] struggling in relationships. So [it was] important to talk openly about it so you [could have felt] you [were] not alone." - MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST KATIE HOLMES

### BEYOND THE BREAK

"We had a focus group of [learners] and one of the things they wanted in the well space [was] not to necessarily focus, but a place to get mental health support. They wanted to be able to come in [the Zen Den without having to] feel [the self] stigma [to get support], [and] we [helped them feel more comfortable] by having activities in here."- PROJECT SUCCESS SPECIALIST MEGAN OLSEN

## you are not alone

LEARNERS SHARE THEIR SIDE OF THE STORY OF MENTAL HEALTH AND AWARENESS.

### BEYOND THE CURRICULUM

"Friendships and community helped prevent mental health issues and stress because it was important to have people who understood you and who could help you move past whatever was bothering you, in and outside of school. It was important not just to prevent mental health issues but also to help you stay happy and foster positive moments." - GIA PHATARPHEKAR '27

### THE EMPATHY GAP

"It [was] not like [mental health struggles were not] talked about enough, it [was] that [when] they [were] talked about, [they were] not taken seriously because there [was] a lack of empathy. Lessons regarding mental health struggles became a burden more than a useful tool, [as if they were] another task to complete." - SOPHIA CHANG '28

## taking on the burden

NAMI BOARD MEMBERS LEAD EFFORTS TO DESTIGMATIZE MENTAL HEALTH MOVEMENT.

While many learners reported physical illness as the primary cause for absence, California state policy and district guidelines also recognized mental health as a valid reason for an excused leave. Despite these provisions, gaps in awareness persisted regarding the available resources for emotional well-being.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 50% of all lifetime mental health conditions began by age 14, and 75% emerged by age 24. These statistics highlighted the necessity of early intervention during high school, a period characterized by increased academic pressure, social change and rising expectations from both adults and the students themselves.

"If you [had] a physical injury, there [was] no shame in going to the hospital to receive treatment and resting to restore your health," said NAMI club board member Chloe Shin '26. "Getting [help] for mental health [was] just as important and should [have been] destigmatized in order to receive necessary treatments without shame."

To bridge this gap between policy and practice, student-led organizations worked to normalize conversations regarding psychological health within the campus community. By reframing mental health as a fundamental component of overall wellness, these advocates aimed to foster an environment where peers felt comfortable seeking support.

"Raising awareness reduce[d] stigma around mental health struggles by letting people realize that it [was] normal to struggle, [since] everyone [went] through tough times at one point or another," said NAMI club board member Ethan Vassilev '26. "It enable[d] others to feel less alone and allow[ed] others to open up about their own experiences."

## need help?

A LIST OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND RESOURCES.

*IUSD, the school and the yearbook do not endorse or recommend these organizations. These are listed solely because they provide a community service.*

\*For emergencies or life-threatening situations, call 911 immediately.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1 (800) 273-TALK (8255)

Irvine Family Resource Center: (949) 936-7504

Hoag Community Mental Health: (949) 764-6542

California Youth Crisis Line: 1 (800) 843-5200

National Institute of Mental Health (NAMI): 1 (800) 950-NAMI (Helpline)

Irvine Police Department: (949) 724-7000

UCI Adolescent Mental Health: (714) 456-5902

Community Services Programs (CSP) Victim Services: (949) 250-0488

The Prevention Center: (714) 543-4333

For more resources, check [portolahigh.iusd.org/counseling/mental-healthwellness](http://portolahigh.iusd.org/counseling/mental-healthwellness)