

Awareness Day: One Day Many Voices: How You Can Prepare To Join In

In 2006, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Mental Health Services launched an annual national initiative called "National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day." Awareness Day is designated as a day in May of each year to coincide with May Is Mental Health Month. This day presents an opportunity for children's mental health initiatives within SAMHSA to promote positive youth development, resilience, recovery, and the transformation of mental health services delivery for children and youth with serious mental health needs and their families.

The theme of the second annual celebration of Awareness Day is "Thriving in the Community." Children's mental health initiatives will hold similar events and other activities throughout the country to build awareness that children's mental health needs are real and that progress is being made toward developing effective strategies for achieving the vision of a life in the community for everyone.

Whether you plan to host a news conference, land an op-ed, or organize an activity in recognition of Awareness Day, the first thing you'll have to do is establish your planning committee.

The group that will help your community devise outreach strategies and activities surrounding Awareness Day should include families, youth, and key members of community organizations as they are identified during your planning process.

The planning committee should expect to meet regularly to discuss what kind of event or activity your community will hold to recognize Awareness Day and how the work will get completed.

Below is a sample checklist of items to address at your kick-off meeting.

- Communicate the goals of the planning committee: What do you expect the members to do? Approximately how much time will it take each month for them to meet these expectations?
- Develop Awareness Day goals: What do you want to accomplish?
- Identify your target audiences: Whom do you want to attend and/or pay attention to what you are doing?
- Identify and involve partners.
- Develop messages tailored to your program.
- Choose your outreach strategies and activities.
- Develop a preliminary budget.
- Develop a preliminary timeline.
- Establish evaluation criteria and methods: How will you know when you've reached your goals?

Last year, local communities in at least 30 states, as well as in Guam and Puerto Rico, held events like information fairs, awards receptions, and legislative and gubernatorial proclamations. Each of these activities reflected the values and needs of those who held them, all were united under one common purpose: showing that children and youth can and do make positive and meaningful contributions to society.