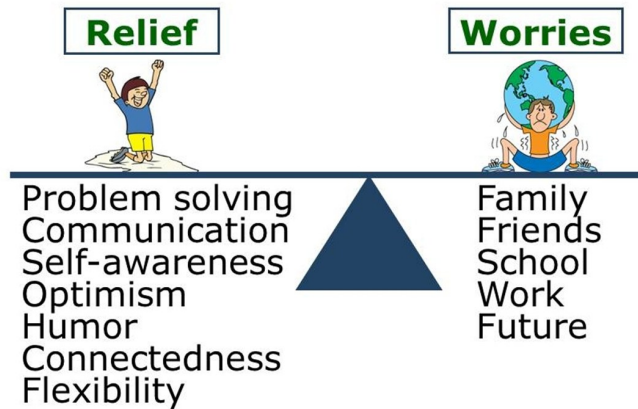


## Life's balancing act

...balancing the weight of life's worries with the relief of skills and knowledge



iGROW

**Interfaith Teens Gathering 'Round Our Wellness**

*An innovative community peer leadership model*

### Contact

Nadja Reilly, PhD  
Director, Swensrud Depression Prevention Initiative  
Children's Hospital Boston  
[www.BreakFreeFromDepression.com](http://www.BreakFreeFromDepression.com)  
[nadja.reilly@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:nadja.reilly@childrens.harvard.edu)  
(617) 919-3203

Bob Anthony  
Executive Director  
Adolescent Wellness, Inc.  
[www.AdolescentWellness.org](http://www.AdolescentWellness.org)  
[bobanthony@adolescentwellness.org](mailto:bobanthony@adolescentwellness.org)



**Children's Hospital Boston**

## iGROW: Program Overview

iGROW is a community based program created to address awareness of depression and other mental illnesses in adolescents as risk factors that may lead to suicide. iGROW follows a universal prevention framework and strongly relies on the participation of youth as educators and change agents.

The program was developed by

- the Swensrud Depression Prevention Initiative from Children's Hospital Boston,
- Adolescent Wellness, Inc. (a non-profit organization),
- an interfaith coalition from Wellesley, MA, and
- a group of peer leaders representing each of the seven congregations from the coalition.

Stemming from the tragic loss of several youths to suicide, members of the community sought an innovative way to increase knowledge about depression and suicide, offer skills around how to address mental illness, and reduce stigma. Youth in particular sought to create a program that would reach beyond a single environment (i.e., school) and offer ongoing support and education. Interfaith leaders sought to find a venue for continued training around mental health issues and skills for helping their congregation members. iGROW was the resulting program.

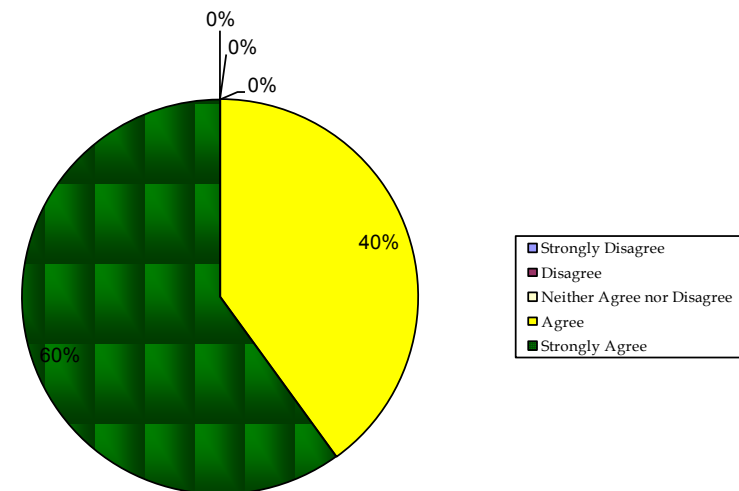
*"I love being part of a community where those around me care about what is happening and that all efforts are genuine. I have a better idea of how to handle certain situations and I feel that I have more resources to help me. Having the opportunity to be a peer leader has shown me ways that I can impact a community, or even just one person – and that's really great because iGROW brought together people who didn't think they would be together."* (Peer leader, 12th grade)

### Clergy, lay leaders and coalition members reported~

*"[The] benefits that have the most effect - building a community of people who trust their ability to engage this material around depression/suicide rather than deny/ignore it."*

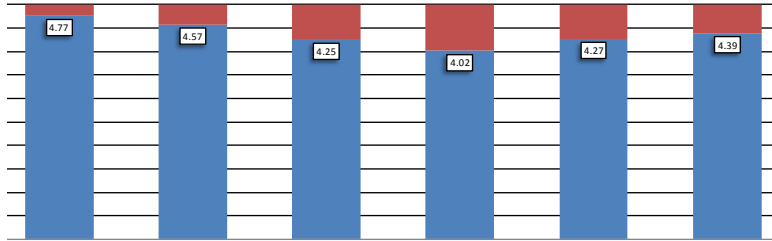
*"To struggle emotionally does not have such a negative stigma anymore in our youth group and this has also reached into the wider church. The adults and parents of youth are aware of the work of iGROW and more are coming to talk about concerns they have with their children – **people are talking!**"*

My knowledge of mental health and wellness has increased as a result to the iGROW program.



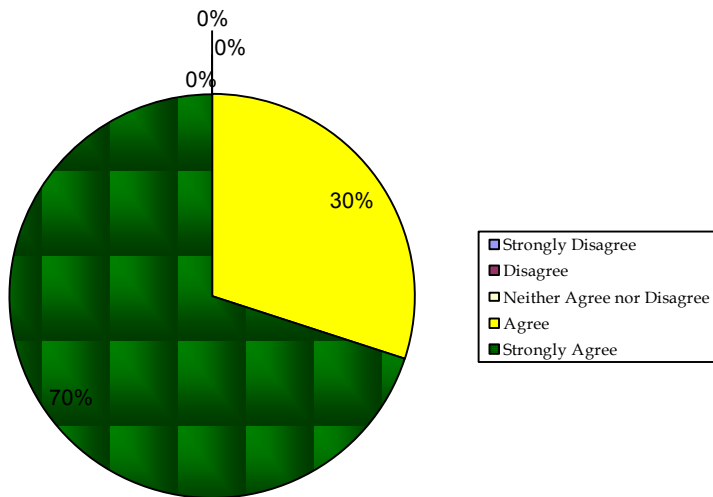
## Evaluation Findings

Overall, youth report enjoying participation in the program, and endorse future use of skills learned.



Peer leaders strongly endorsed having learned information about mental illness and resilience, and they reported feeling more comfortable addressing problems and battling stigma related to mental illness.

Being a peer leader has helped me better learn how to help myself or others.



## Program Goals

- Build community – program offers both adults and adolescents a safe, non-judgmental place to share opinions, ask questions, and interact with others
- Build a common voice – through psychoeducation, activities, and an interfaith framework incorporating spirituality as a protective factor, the program offers language around identification, treatment, and prevention of mental illness as well as promotion of resilience
- Teach skills for taking care of self and others – program teaches adolescents and adults the skills needed to help themselves, friends, families, and community



## Theoretical Framework

iGROW is grounded in Bronfenbrenner’s social ecological model, and is informed by evidence found in the Child Health and Social Ecology (CHASE, Norifumi et. al, 2008) project, where researchers demonstrated youth can successfully impart knowledge to their community, promote open and effective communication and reduce stigma. iGROW also follows the CDC’s strategic direction to “prevent suicidal behavior by building and strengthening connectedness or social bonds within and among persons, families, and communities” (CDC, 2009).

## iGROW Programming Components

### Fundamental Components

- Interfaith coalition that meets on a regular basis for ongoing training, needs assessment, program development, evaluation, and strategic planning around sustainability and capacity building. Currently, six churches and one temple make up the interfaith coalition. Both religious and lay leaders participate in the coalition.
- Clinical expertise offered by a mental health team from Children’s Hospital. Clinicians provide material for programming, as well as ongoing support and referral services for adult leaders within iGROW.
- Emphasis on teaching coping skills for all adolescents, not just those struggling with depression
- Community liaison through Adolescent Wellness, Inc.
- “Safety net” for adolescents and families that includes clinicians, community mental health services, referral services, and crisis intervention services
- Library of resource information available (for adolescents and adults) during TEAGOTS and within individual houses of worship

**Tip Sheet**  
Helping Your Friends Through Tough Times - Do's and Don'ts

**HOW CAN I TELL IF SOMEONE IS STRUGGLING WITH DEPRESSION?**

- ◆ If you are worried about possible depression in yourself, a friend, or a family member, here are some key things to look for:
  - ✓ Change in mood for over two weeks
  - ✓ Isolation from other people and/or changes in relationships
  - ✓ Not doing things typically likes to do
  - ✓ Change in eating, sleeping habits, lack of energy or feeling tired
  - ✓ Seeming sad, withdrawn, angry,
  - ✓ Increasing negative self-talk
  - ✓ Talking about death or suicide
  - ✓ Picking fights; getting into trouble; using drugs
  - ✓ Difficulties in school or decreased school performance
  - ✓ Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
  - ✓ Chronic stomach ache/ headache

**WHAT MIGHT HELPFUL?**

- ◆ It is ok to talk to someone you have been noticing change words. Use open-ended questions going for you? I noticed you said you tell me how you are feeling!
- ◆ Let your friend know the and support, not judge or criticize
- ◆ Realize that first, your ing is wrong or not want to get him/her information anyway a whenever ready.
- ◆ Offer your friend choices help, including websites, phone lines, or numbers for helpful ad community.
- ◆ If you think a friend needs age him/her to get help from a professional. Do not try

**Referral Suggestions**

Concerned? Urgent!

Speak to pediatrician, parent or youth group leader; call for referral assistance on weekdays 617.332.3666 x411 or anonymous, 24/7 TALK line at 800-273-8255.

1) Call 911 or go to hospital emergency room  
2) Call parents

[www.AdolescentWellness.org](http://www.AdolescentWellness.org) or [www.HelpGuide.org](http://www.HelpGuide.org)

### Adolescent Activities

- Peer leader training includes in-depth education about mental illnesses as they present in adolescence, leadership skills, strategies for helping friends, how to seek help from adults, and ways to engage the community around prevention efforts related to mental illness. Leaders continue to enhance their leadership skills through the direct development and implementation of all activities carried out in TEAGOTs.
- Teens Enjoying a Good Ol’ Time (TEAGOTs) are events held every three months during the academic year. All youth group members in grades 9-12 are invited to attend. The location of TEAGOTs rotates amongst the seven houses of worship. All TEAGOTs have a foundation structure:



- 1) food and socializing
- 2) welcome from host
- 3) icebreaker activity
- 4) “concept” introduction
- 5) small group activity
- 6) large group share
- 7) closing

The concepts of the TEAGOTs are different each time, but always focus on education about mental health and skill building. A component of spirituality is also included in all TEAGOTs, typically in the welcome and the closing.

### Summary

These programming components enhance resilience skills and knowledge to balance life’s worries and follow the CDC’s rationale to promote connectedness at levels:

- between individuals
- of individuals and their families to community organizations
- among community organizations and social institutions