

# UCR Hosts Send Silence Packing to Promote Suicide Awareness

On Thursday, October 15, 1,100 backpacks were scattered across the University of California, Riverside's Bell Tower Lawn from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM in honor of college suicide victims.

The event, called "Send Silence Packing", is a program created by Active Minds, the nation's leading organization on young adult mental wellness.

Since its inaugural display on the National Mall grounds in Washington, DC in 2008, Send Silence Packing has traveled to over 98 cities in California and the Midwest, touching the lives of more than 320,000 people.

"Send Silence Packing is one of Active Minds's largest national programs. It's a traveling public education display of 1,100 backpacks representing the 1,100 college students each year that die by suicide", says Lauren Redding, Active Minds's Communications Coordinator.

The backpacks, which were donated by friends and families of the deceased, are often decorated with personal stories or poems. The stories provide an outlet for survivors' grief, and serve as a "powerful" and "sobering" experience for observers, the exhibit's attendees claim.

By providing a tangible manifestation and an accompanying story, passersby are able to put a "face" to suicide, says Redding. Consequently, onlookers are able to imagine the loss of a human life, rather than glancing over a name in the paper or text on a television screen.

Redding explains, "Send Silence Packing brings out strong emotions to those who see it. Some people can be reminded of a loved one who died, or may be struggling themselves, and seeing Send Silence Packing can be very difficult...".

To some, rather than a classmate from a different school or a friend never met, that loved one may be a son or a daughter.

However, despite the organization's best efforts, honoring 1,100 sons and daughters does not paint the full picture. According to a 2012 study published by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 10 to 11.2 percent of the then-14.1 million undergraduate and graduate students had either seriously considered suicide, made a plan, or had actually attempted suicide.

Unfortunately, a relatively small percentage of those approximately 1.5 million people will actively seek or receive proper treatment, says Ammarie Cameron, CEO of the Mental Wellness Center at Santa Barbara.

"Mental health problems are common among college students and the consequences of untreated mental health issues can be devastating", she elaborates. "Stigma is a major reason why students don't seek the help they need, and when it comes to suicide, that help could save lives."

To combat the stigma associated with suicide, Active Minds was founded in 2000 to connect students to resources, raise awareness of mental health, educate about mental disorders, and to spark a positive dialogue that is too often left in the shadows, its website, [www.activeminds.org](http://www.activeminds.org), highlights.

Since its inception, Active Minds has expanded rapidly, establishing a network of over 400 student-led chapters at high schools, colleges, and universities, including a chapter at the University of California, Riverside.

The nonprofit organization, which has been featured on prominent media outlets like *CNN* and the *New York Times*, aims to promote suicide awareness and to connect to students on the UCR campus more intimately. Last Thursday, it accomplished its goal.

As the 1,100 backpacks were lying on the grass, the student body could read and empathize with the tragedies that brought them there, and ponder on the ripples those tragedies created.

"I am sorry I didn't tell you more when you were here", reads a story attached to a dark blue backpack. "That I love you very much, [that] you were and will always be one of the most important persons in my life."

"The pain of his loss is beyond words. Devastating", laments another. "That is why we have chosen to support efforts to prevent suicide and we hope that you will, too. There is help. There is hope."

UCR was the final stop of Send Silence Packing's 2015 Fall Tour. The UCR Active Minds Chapter meets periodically throughout the year at The Hub, Room 248.