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Testimonial for the Suicide Awareness (Healthy Minds) Presentation  
by

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The three of us teach a semester-long health class to mostly ninth graders at Albuquerque High School. On November 1 and 2, 2016, Erica Davis-Crump from the New Mexico Office of the Attorney General Office (NMOAG) delivered an outstanding presentation on Suicide Awareness six times over two days for 90 minutes each period to all the health classes. In addition, most of students who will be taking health next semester also attended. The NMOAG presentations reached over 500 students, about 90% of all Freshmen at Albuquerque High School. Erica did such an excellent job last year with her presentation about Cyber Safety that we were glad to have her return to also present on Suicide Awareness.

From our personal experience working with students, data from the school's Student Based Health Center, as well as state and national data, there is a strong need to educate students about mental illness. According to the Breaking the Silence website, "One in ten adolescents shows signs of mental illness around age fourteen, but few seek or receive treatment for up to ten years after the first symptoms appear. New Mexico has one of the highest suicide rates among teens in the country." The NMOAG helped address the need to educate students about mental illness, understand some of the stereotypes, learn not to be ashamed about having a mental illness and where to seek help. The impact that the presentations had on the students is best expressed by the students themselves: "I learned that you don't know if someone is mentally ill by what they look like. There are many types of mental illness including depression, which some singers and actors have. The people who have mental illnesses are not 'dumb'." "After listening to the presentation I realized that it was okay to speak my feelings and be honest about the way I feel. Ms. Erica was so much fun and was able to ... make us think about what people with mental illnesses experience in their day to day life." "Ms. Erica spoke out for others who couldn't. She comforted us and made us feel that having a mental illness is not a bad thing. It is okay to not be okay. She let us know that here are many people who are willing to help us." "With her amazing personality she made me feel as if there are many thing I should know about in my life. I should be very positive and have higher self-esteem." "If you have a mental illness then you are not the only one." "Ms. Erica spoke to us like it is. She was real and I liked the way she added jokes to what she was saying. She was funny and chill and I learned a lot." "She was not only entertaining she reached us at a personal level." "We learned not to bully people that have mental diseases or mental disorders because the person with the mental disorder being bullied then that person could be led to suicide." We appreciate Ms. Erica's outstanding presentation as reflected by the sincere comments from the students.