UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

October 13, 2015
Andrea Estrada

1,100 Backpacks

Each represents a life.

All 1,100 of them.

Backpacks scattered across the lawn in front of UCSB's Student Resource Building signify the number of college students who take their own lives each year.

A grim but powerful exhibition, "Send Silence Packing," seeks to bring attention to the issue — and stigma — of suicide. It was sponsored by the UCSB chapter of Active Minds, a national nonprofit organization that works to engage the student voice in changing the conversation about mental health.

Suicide, they note, is the second leading cause of death among college students, surpassed only by accidents.

"Being selected as one of only a handful of California schools in 2015 to host this display was no small feat," said Ryan Sims, staff advisor to UCSB's Active Minds chapter and associate director of student mental health coordination services at UCSB. "It is my hope this display will inspire students at UCSB to join Active Minds in record numbers this year and assist the chapter in their education and advocacy efforts to destigmatize mental illness and encourage students to seek help as soon as help is needed."

The one-day exhibit on Oct. 12 was presented in collaboration with the Mental Wellness Center in Santa Barbara.

The donated backpacks shine a spotlight on the issue of suicide among college students and seek to promote a healthy dialogue around mental illness. To give a “face” to the lives lost, personal stories and testimonies written by families and friends accompany the backpacks. Passersby were invited to walk among the backpacks — some belonging to the individuals whose stories they tell — and read about those who have died.

“Send Silence Packing” is a nationally recognized public education exhibition that travels to college campuses and city spaces throughout the Midwest and California. The Oct. 12 event marks its first time in Santa Barbara.

More information about the exhibition is available at https://www.activeminds.org/programs/send-silence-packing/. Active Minds continues to collect backpacks in honor of loved ones, and invites those who have been impacted by suicide to send their stories to https://www.activeminds.org/get-involved/share-your-story/.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.