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**Local Teen Organizes ‘Normal Is Overrated’ Forum to Address Mental Health Among Students**  
*Healthy Lee, Kids Minds Matter and others join to help teens cope with mental, behavioral health issues*

(Fort Myers, Fla. – Sept. 4, 2019) --- Students today have a lot on their plates, and the social stigma surrounding mental and behavioral health issues can be a significant obstacle for many. To help break barriers and improve communication, Healthy Lee, Kids Minds Matter and community partners invite area teens and their families to its “Normal is Overrated” event Sept. 7. “Normal is Overrated” is an event aimed at shining a light on the struggles of students with behavioral and mental health issues and to help them achieve greater acceptance in our community.

“The effects of shame, alienation and shunning are everywhere for us to see, and we all bear responsibility for doing our share to be inclusive,” said Paul Simeone, Ph.D., Lee Health vice president and medical director of behavioral health. “The more we can do to foster acceptance and compassion, the sooner we can help those struggling with behavioral and mental health issues find the support they need.”

The program features six local students who will share their first-hand experiences with behavioral and mental health issues and will provide expert commentary on the additional toll misunderstanding and fear can have on those already struggling. There will also be a question and answer period featuring Dr. Simeone, Lori Brooks, director school counseling and mental health services for the School District of Lee County and Tesharia Folkes, a medical social worker with Lee Health.

The program is the brainchild of Fort Myers High School student Carly McGovern, 17, who has struggled with behavioral health issues.

“Having dealt with an eating disorder and the associated emotional hardships, I saw ‘Normal is Overrated’ as an opportunity to create a space in our community that would allow for open, supportive conversations to occur that help others who were experiencing similar struggles,” she said.

Children’s Advocacy Center will provide therapy dogs on-site throughout the day from Beesley’s Paw Prints Pet Therapy, which is funded by the United Way. There will also be counselors on-site to address any emotional needs that might arise. Breakfast will be provided. The day will end with BuddhaBlends and Mora food trucks out front if attendees would like to purchase lunch and continue their discussions.

Among those lending their support:

- Andrew’s Anthem
- Cape Coral Police Department
- Children’s Advocacy Center
- Collier County Sheriff’s Office
- Elite DNA
- Florida State University Center for Child Stress and Health

- Golisano Children’s Hospital of Southwest Florida
- Hazelden Betty Ford
- Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida
- Hope Clubhouse
- Lee Health
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Collier
- PACE Center for Girls
- Salvation Army
- The Lee County Coalition for a Drug-Free Southwest Florida
- United Way
- Valerie’s House
- Well Fit Girls
- Women Empowering Women

### **If You Go**

**Where:** Collaboratory, 2031 Jackson St., Fort Myers

**When:** Saturday, Sept. 7 from 8 a.m.-noon

The event is free, but tickets are required. Visit: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/normal-is-overrated-tickets-62118721769> to register.

### **About Lee Health**

*Since the opening of the first hospital in 1916, Lee Health has been a health care leader in Southwest Florida, constantly evolving to meet the needs of the community. A non-profit, integrated health care services organization, Lee Health is committed to the well-being of every individual served, focused on healthy living and maintaining good health. Staffed by caring people, inspiring health, services are conveniently located throughout the community in four acute care hospitals, two specialty hospitals, outpatient centers, walk-in medical centers, primary care and specialty physician practices and other services across the continuum of care. Formerly known as Lee Memorial Health System, the organization began its second century of service with a new name in 2016. Learn more at [www.LeeHealth.org](http://www.LeeHealth.org).*