

# EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS

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## Top priorities for Detroit teens: Mental health, open-mindedness and acceptance

How local high school seniors  
are determined to create kinder,  
healthier communities.



### Inside:

Teens' perception of mental health and its stigma

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teens' mental health

The effects of social media on mental health

What teens hope other generations can understand about mental health

ABOUT THIS FORUM



Hello, and thank you for reading this important insert. The Children's Foundation and *Crain's Detroit Business* have an ongoing partnership to promote The Foundation's radio show, *Caring for*

*Kids*, featuring impressive and impactful guests who share what they are doing to help our communities each month.

Along with that partnership, we work with *Crain's* to share important information

about relevant topics through special inserts. As we were anticipating this featured content, it occurred to me that readers need to hear from our youngsters first-hand regarding the mental health stress and issues they are facing on a day-to-day basis.

As a result, we gathered several young adults and collaborated with Dr. Matt LaCasse from Children's Hospital of Michigan. Dr. LaCasse is a pediatric psychiatrist actively engaged with children and adolescents each and every day, with a special emphasis on adolescent substance use disorder.

The Children's Foundation remains committed to helping children, adolescents and young adults stay on a healthy and safe path. Mental health continues to be a major focus area and we are proud to now have more than 140 grant partners around the State of Michigan and beyond.

We hope you find these adolescents' words impactful and inspiring.



Larry Burns, President and CEO, The Children's Foundation

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS



**Jayla**  
Cass Technical High School



**Terrance**  
American International Academy High School



**Aaron**  
Cass Technical High School



**Rayah**  
University High School Academy



**Dr. Matt LaCasse**  
Detroit Medical Center, Children's Hospital of Michigan



**Marcus**  
U of D Jesuit High School



**Madison**  
Farmington High School



**Narenzo**  
Martin Luther King High School



**Ranyah**  
Renaissance High School



**Nicholas**  
Renaissance High School

## By Crain's Content Studio

In early November, The Children's Foundation and Crain's Detroit Business convened a group of students to better understand children's mental health needs. The students are all participants in the Midnight Golf program. Founded by Detroit *Reneé Fluker* in 2001, Midnight Golf brings together 250 high schoolers from across Southeast Michigan to learn life lessons through the game of golf. The twice-weekly program focuses on college preparation; each day ends with a family-style meal. In 2020, 100% of students involved in Midnight Golf graduated high school.

In March of 2020, people's lives changed in the blink of an eye as COVID-19 surged through communities. For teens, the pandemic cut off ties to everything that was once familiar, such as being in a classroom, spending time with friends and extracurricular activities. According to the 2021 C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health at Michigan

**"I think mental health should be looked at even more than physical health. If you think about it, we go to the dentist to get our teeth checked and we go to the doctor to get our body checked. We must be in-check with our mental health because our brain is our strongest muscle if you really think about it."**

- Marcus, U of D Jesuit High School



Dr. Matt LaCasse leads students in a roundtable discussion on mental health at Marygrove College. Credit: Armon Babridge for Crain's Detroit Business

Medicine, 46% of parents nationwide reported their teenager between the ages of 13-18 experienced new or worsening mental health conditions following COVID-19.

Though they recall the initial period of quarantine as isolating and emotionally difficult, reflecting on that time now, some teens acknowledged feelings of appreciation. During that time, they were able to

bond with their families; they also appreciated the opportunity to get to know themselves better. While the isolative nature of the pandemic lead to a natural decline in socialization, some students report that because of that, they now are more eager to connect with new people.

"Since COVID happened, I find that I'm having more intuitive and interesting conversations and having more in common with people I haven't talked to before in school," said Terrance, a senior at American International Academy High School in Inkster.

Terrance and eight other high school seniors from across Southeast Michigan recently came together to talk about the effects of the pandemic on their mental health and what

they need most from the adults in their lives when looking for mental health supports. The 90-minute roundtable conversation was moderated by pediatric psychiatrist Dr. Matt LaCasse.

For Gen Z in particular, the stigma that surrounds mental health is rapidly changing. These teens agreed that mental health is more openly talked about in schools and even at home around the dinner table than in past generations. Several teens shared that it's not uncommon to turn to parents, siblings and close friends for emotional support. They agreed that mental health is just as important as physical health.

What follows is an excerpt of their conversation, in their own words.

**MENTAL HEALTH:**  
Perception and stigma

**Dr. LaCasse:** Especially since the pandemic began, there has been more of a focus on mental health. What does mental health mean to you, and how important is it in your daily lives?

**Ranyah:** I think that mental health is similar to physical health. I think that in past generations it was shunned, especially in the Black community. But now, I think it's become more of a discussion in schools, at home at the dinner table — and it's looked at as the same as physical health.

**Marcus:** I think mental health should be looked at even more than physical health. If you think about it, we go to the dentist to get our teeth checked and we go to the doctor to get our body checked. We must be in-check with our mental health because our brain is our strongest muscle if you really think about it.

**Dr. LaCasse:** It sounds like there's a shift today in talking about mental health. What do you make of this new movement of discussing mental health and having it be a

“I turn to golf — it's really relaxing and you get to be outside in nature. It's good that everyone is in this program because if you're feeling down, you can turn to golf.

- Ranyah, University High School Academy

conversation at the dinner table?

**Madison:** I think that it's very important because it's been shunned a lot and you never know, people could have been depressed. Now that it's getting brought into light more, people feel better about expressing themselves to their families, they feel like they can be more open.

**Dr. LaCasse:** Do you find yourselves talking to your peers about mental health?

**Terrance:** With males our age, it tends to be shunned because sometimes we may feel like it's a sign of weakness. We tend to just not think about it or want to talk about it.

**Ranyah:** I think having that conversation about your mental health or how you're feeling with your peers has to do with comfortability. I consider these three factors: Are they going to be judgmental? Are they going to accept what I'm saying and not judge me for it? Can I be vulnerable with this person? For me, it depends on the connection I have.

**Nicholas:** Because of the coronavirus, I know for



Madison shares positive coping skills she uses during challenging moments. Credit: Armon Babridge for Crain's Detroit Business

some people it's now a little bit harder to be closer to people. I find myself talking to my brothers more than I used to about mental health.

**Dr. LaCasse:** What are some coping skills you use when you're having a tough time?

**Jayla:** When my mental health is off, I take a break. I meditate or have a one-on-one with myself.

**Marcus:** Last year, I started writing notes. When I read them over later, the situation doesn't seem as bad. I have somebody like my brother read my notes and break the situation down for me, and it usually helps. Eventually when the stress or whatever is bothering me is over and I go back and read my notes, it makes me proud to see that I overcame it.



Nicholas shares his views on mental health with the group. Credit: Armon Babridge for Crain's Detroit Business

**Madison:** I like exercising — it takes my mind off things. I also pray.

**Rayah:** I turn to golf — it's really relaxing and you get to be outside in nature. It's good that everyone is in this program because if you're feeling down, you can turn to golf.

**Ranyah:** I sometimes take a day off school. I think school should include a wellness day once a semester, where it's an excused absence with the permission of a parent — and you can make up your work.

“When the coronavirus hit, it gave me a chance to disconnect with people at my school and my associates and connect with the people in my household. I'm thankful that I got to have that isolation because I got to go deeper into myself and family.”

- Ranyah, Renaissance High School

“It starts with us encouraging people and letting them know it's okay to be your own person instead of letting your friends peer pressure you and mold you into something that you're not.”

- Terrance, American International Academy High School

**PANDEMIC IMPACT:  
Not all negative**

I felt like I couldn't talk to anyone besides the people in my household.

**Dr. LaCasse: What did you all notice about how the pandemic impacted you emotionally or socially?**

**Aaron:** During the first quarantine when everybody first got cut off from their friends, that hit everybody emotionally.

**Madison:** It really hit hard for me because I had a lot of people that I called my close friends at school and once COVID hit, they went “ghost.” I did feel alone.

**Ranyah:** I grew up with a lot of siblings. When the coronavirus hit, it gave me a chance to disconnect with people at my school and my associates and connect with the people in my household. I'm thankful that I got to have that isolation because I got to go deeper into myself and family.

**Nicholas:** When the coronavirus started, me and my brothers would go walking and just talk about random stuff — it was really fun.



Ranyah highlights a positive side of social media during the discussion. Credit: Armon Babridge for Crain's Detroit Business

**Madison:** I agree — I did feel alone friend-wise, but my family and I started learning how to cook things together and have movie nights. I never felt alone when I was with them.

**Jayla:** Ever since COVID happened, I'm so eager to talk to new people.

**Ranyah:** As far as my relationship with my peers, I think COVID helped solidify who my real friends are. If we kept in contact and we continued to check on each other during that time, those were my real friends.

**Terrance:** It's always tough to make new friends. We're around so many kids and we end up breaking up into groups and judging kids not knowingly. Since COVID happened, I find that I'm having more intuitive and interesting conversations and having more in common with people I haven't talked to before in school.



Jayla talks about why young people need to make mistakes in order to grow. Credit: Armon Babridge for Crain's Detroit Business

have younger kids that are looking up to us. If we're posting violent images or messages, that's not okay. It starts with us encouraging people and letting them know it's okay to be your own person instead of letting your friends peer pressure you and mold you into something that you're not.

**Aaron:** Our generation is aware of mental health issues, but we have other issues that we put on social media that don't need to be out there.

**TEENAGERS' VIEW OF THE WORLD**

**Dr. LaCasse: How has social media influenced the way you see the world?**

**Terrance:** I feel like with social media comes another set of problems, where we

**“We need to make mistakes because that’s how we better ourselves.”**  
- Jayla, Cass Technical High School

**“If we’re making the same mistakes as our parents, we’re not really progressing. So, I believe it’s important to identify those problems and make a change.”**  
- Narenzo, Martin Luther King High School

**Ranyah:** For instance, there’s a channel on YouTube called “Jubilee” where they have someone who is Muslim sit down with someone who is Christian and they discuss a topic. You can see what their perspectives are. I think social media can have a positive influence on discovering all the people around us.

**Dr. LaCasse: What do you want your parents and grandparents’ generations to better understand about you and your mental health?**

**Terrance:** A lot of times we feel we can’t express our sexuality or opinion on things because it will be shamed upon. I want our parents and next generations to be more open and understand that everyone’s opinion matters.

**Narenzo:** I believe communication plays a huge part in our mental health. In some households in my community, the only form of communication is yelling. That can shut me down to where I am not comfortable expressing how I feel. We just need to learn how to

**“This generation is going to be the generation that starts to say, we’ve been through these things. We’ve seen the pattern — now, let’s make a change.”**

- Aaron, Cass Technical High School

communicate, and I believe that, once we do, we’ll start understanding each other.

**Ranyah:** The older I became, I realized that my parents may not have the skills to cope or teach me how to deal with these types of things. I put less blame on them because maybe they weren’t taught to do those things. I also think maybe what we’re experiencing now with our parents is what they experienced with their parents.

**Marcus:** My parents tell me, “You have it so much easier — we didn’t have phones.” But because of my phone, I’m introduced to so many things that my parents were introduced to later in life. I kind of had to grow up faster than they did, because with this phone comes responsibility.

**Nicholas:** Although they may believe we have it easier, the expectations for us are higher. Sometimes, I need more guidance.

**“Although they may believe we have it easier, the expectations for us are higher. Sometimes, I need more guidance.”**

- Nicholas, Renaissance High School

**Jayla:** I know our parents, uncles and aunties made mistakes. I think our parents want us to be perfect so badly that they don’t allow us to make mistakes. We need to make mistakes because that’s how we better ourselves.

**Madison:** I feel like sometimes parents tend to want us to be exactly like them and don’t understand that times have changed, and the way our generation does things could be completely different from them. I feel like some people just haven’t accepted that.

**Aaron:** They need to know that their kids are going to grow up and they’re going to be their own person. You have to let kids explore and find themselves.

**Dr. LaCasse: How are you setting an example for your peers and younger generations?**

**Narenzo:** If we’re making the same mistakes as our parents, we’re not really

progressing. So, I believe it’s important to identify those problems and make a change — and I believe that’s happening.

**Nicholas:** I think a change has already been happening. My sister is six and she just started school. She recently came home and said, “Somebody is messing with me.” And I said, “What did you say back?” She told me how she stood up for herself — I feel so proud.

**Terrance:** I feel like we need to come together as a generation. We need to encourage each other and know that it’s okay for us to be different — and be leaders.

**Ranyah:** I think having an open mindset and being willing to have a conversation about what others’ views and perspectives are, and why they think the way they think

and do the things they do is the bottom line.

**Aaron:** This generation is going to be the generation that starts to say, we’ve been through these things. We’ve seen the pattern — now, let’s make a change. This generation uses social media, and mental health has become so widespread. Even if it hasn’t reached the older generations, it’s with us. The next generations are going to be more taken care of and be more aware of their mental health and their peers’ mental health and take care of one another. I think we’re coming up on a better age in society.

*For information about how The Children’s Foundation is supporting children’s mental and physical health, visit [www.YourChildrensFoundation.org](http://www.YourChildrensFoundation.org)*

## Gen Z and Mental Health By the Numbers

- Gen Z (individuals born between 1995-2010) is 27% more likely than other generations, including millennials (15%) and Gen Xers (13%), to report their mental health as fair or poor (American Psychological Association’s “Stress in America Survey”)
- About 37% — a higher rate than any previous generation — have seen a mental health professional (“Generation Z and Mental Health,” Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- 40% created social media content related to an environmental, human rights, political or social issue (“The Deloitte 2021 Millennial and Gen Z Survey”)
- Gen Z’s top 5 concerns are climate change, unemployment, healthcare/disease, education/ training and sexual harassment in 2021. (“The Deloitte 2021 Millennial and Gen Z Survey”)



## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Dr. Caelan Soma, PsyD, LMSW  
Chief Clinical Officer, Starr Commonwealth



Johnny Crowder,  
Founder & CEO, Cope Notes



Jan Cairnes, CEO,  
The Hanley Foundation

**Tickets: \$100  
Per Individual**

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# CHILD & ADOLESCENT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUMMIT

A Children's Foundation Initiative

**Tuesday, April 12**  
**8:00 AM - 4:00 PM**

## Investing in the mental wellness of our youth.

Join us for the 2022 Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Summit featuring a variety of topics on mental health and wellness by experts in the field.

This event is intended for:

- Service Providers
- Educators
- Parents
- Anyone who works with youth

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT**  
**[YourChildrensFoundation.org/summit](https://YourChildrensFoundation.org/summit)**